

APRIL - BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Will Keith Kellogg

Will Keith Kellogg was born on April 7, 1860, in Battle Creek, Michigan. He never received a formal education beyond the sixth grade, but through hard work and determination built a hugely successful cereal empire. He founded the Kellogg Company at the age of 46. Kellogg started his working life as a stock boy in the hospital where his older brother, John Harvey Kellogg, was physician-in-chief. Gradually, Will was given more responsibility at the hospital. Together, he and his brother conducted extensive research aimed at improving the vegetarian diet of the hospital's patients. The wheat flake was discovered by accident but soon became a favorite of the patients, and many requested it be sent to them even after they were released from care. Thus, the Kellogg cereal company got its start. Though Will Kellogg amassed much wealth, he lived a modest life and gave much of his money to charitable organizations. He is best known for his invention of Kellogg's Cornflakes.

2. National Garden Month

National Garden Month is the creation of the National Gardening Association (NGA) and is celebrated in April each year. For over 35 years, the NGA has sought to sustain and promote the essential connection between people, plants, and the environment. The organization is a non-profit leader in plant-based education and endeavors to make free materials available to schools and communities. Research has shown that nurturing plants is good for people, improving attitudes toward health and nutrition, helping kids perform better in school, and even fostering an increase in community spirit. The many and varied activities planned for National Garden Month each April offer schools the perfect opportunity to educate students about the value of plants and the beauty, fun, and health benefits of gardening.

3. Wilbur Wright

Wilbur Wright was born on April 16, 1867, in Millville, Indiana. He and his brother Orville were fascinated with the idea of a flying machine. Their interest first started when they received the gift of a toy helicopter-like top from their father. Wilbur began to read everything he could about aviation. After much trial and error, the Wright brothers created their "flying machine" and made history with the first-ever, heavier-than-air, manned, powered flight in 1903. Their initial achievement was doubted and undermined. The brothers persisted and persevered, in spite of opposition. Eventually, they won over both the public and the bureaucrats. In 1908 and 1909, Wilbur became quite a celebrity, thrilling audiences abroad and at home with his fantastic flights. Wilbur Wright died of typhoid fever in 1912 at the age of 45. His life was filled with achievements in flight as well as many other things. In 1965, he was selected for the Hall of Fame for Great Americans.

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4. Noah Webster's First American Dictionary

Noah Webster published his landmark American Dictionary of the English Language on April 21, 1828. He was born on October 16, 1758, in West Hartford, Connecticut. After attending Yale University, Webster studied law and became a lexicographer and prolific writer. Webster did not care much for the American schools of his day. The classrooms were so crowded with children of multiple grade levels that sometimes there were not enough desks. In his opinion, the books were inferior, and teachers inadequately trained. While serving as a teacher in New York, he began his life-long quest to advance a distinctively American style of education. He believed Americans should learn from American books. To that end, in 1783, he wrote his own textbook, A Grammatical Institute of the English Language. Also, he created the American Spelling Book, which most people called the "Blue-Backed Speller" because of its blue cover. Years later, Webster developed his famed dictionary, which taught children how to read, spell, and pronounce words. It was perhaps the most popular American book of its time. The guiding principle of Webster's lexicography was that spelling, grammar, and usage should be based on the living, spoken language. He wanted to establish the dignity and vitality of American English. In 1821, Webster co-founded Amherst College. George and Charles Merriam purchased the rights to Webster's dictionary from his estate, and their firm developed the Merriam Webster dictionary series.

5. Earth Day

Earth Day is observed on April 22 every year. A United States Senator and environmental activist Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin started this push in 1970 to increase awareness and appreciation of Earth's natural environment. Dennis Hayes, a Harvard graduate, was the coordinator of the first Earth Day in 1970, and the focus was the United States. However, an organization founded by Mr. Hayes expanded the observance to an international level in 1990. That year they sponsored events in 141 nations. Today, Earth Day is coordinated globally by the non-profit Earth Day Network in over 175 countries. Thanks to the push of the environmental grassroots movement, Earth Day became successful. Individuals alarmed by pollution, deforestation, destruction of wildlife, and similar concerns rallied around the effort. Earth Day grew in popularity, which has not waned but grown every year since the celebration's inception. Various events promoting the idea that we must accept personal responsibility for preserving and protecting our natural resources and environment occur on April 22.

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6. Mathematics Awareness Month

Mathematics Awareness Month is observed in April each year and is sponsored by the Joint Policy Board for Mathematics. The purpose of the observance is to emphasize the vital role mathematics plays in all areas of our daily lives and to highlight new developments and applications. The Joint Policy Board for Mathematics is an organization comprised of members from the American Mathematical Society (AMS), the American Statistical Association (ASA), the Mathematical Association of America (MAA), and the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics (SIAM). Mathematics Awareness Month gives math departments an annual forum to promote awareness of the fun of mathematics. Through lectures, contests, and special events, mathematics gets highlighted.

7. National Poetry Month

The success of Black History Month in February and Women's History Month in March inspired the Academy of American Poets to create a month-long celebration of poetry. A group of publishers, booksellers, librarians, literary organizations, poets, and teachers met to discuss the proposal. After deciding that the idea had enough merit, the Academy held its first National Poetry Month in 1996. Each year publishers, booksellers, teachers, and librarians promote poetry by releasing new publications, teaching poetry units, hosting poetry readings, and other events. On April 1, 1996, President Bill Clinton proclaimed, "National Poetry Month offers us a welcome opportunity to celebrate not only the unsurpassed body of literature produced by our poets in the past but also the vitality and diversity of voices reflected in the works of today's American poetry. Their creativity and wealth of language enrich our culture and inspire a new generation of Americans to learn the power of reading and writing at its best".

8. World Penguin Day

World Penguin Day is on April 25th each year. The Adelie Penguins in the Antarctic begin their annual migration around this time. They start migrating in the Antarctic fall season and don't return to their colonies until spring. In synchronized fashion, the Adelies dive into the freezing waters and swim north for only a few hundred miles. Penguins are unique in that they are the only migratory birds who swim rather than fly. They stay among icebergs that are floating about the area and feast on krill and other penguin delights. The days in Antarctica get darker during this time of year. Because Adelie penguins cannot see well in the dark, they go north to hunt for food to prevent starvation. During migration, they appear to have a grand time and not take life too seriously, according to penguin watchers. The birds bob playfully on the ocean and rest on the icebergs until they return to their homes in Antarctica. World Penguin Day allows people to learn more about these interesting and entertaining creatures.

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9. Dr. Charles Richter

Dr. Charles Richter was born on April 26, 1900. In 1935, with Beno Gutenberg assisting, Dr. Richter developed the Richter Scale. The Richter Scale is a system of measurement used to quantify the magnitude of earthquakes on seismographs. The scale, intended for use in California, is now used to measure earthquakes globally. Richter's created the scale to group the vast number of small earthquakes from the less frequent large earthquakes that were happening in the area at that time. The Richter Scale measures the total amount of energy released by an earthquake. Its values range from zero to nine, and each increase of one represents a ten-fold increase in intensity. Tracking the occurrences of earthquakes allows for the observance of patterns. Through studying the earthquake patterns, scientists hope to predict the location and intensity of future earthquakes.

10. Arbor Day

Arbor Day is celebrated on the last Friday of April each year. In Latin arbor means tree. So, Arbor Day is a perfect time to recognize the beauty, usefulness, and importance of trees in our global ecology. The holiday was founded by J. Sterling Morton. He was a pioneer who moved from Detroit, Michigan, to the Nebraska Territory in 1854. He and his wife loved nature and quickly planted trees, shrubs, and flowers around their new home. Morton was also a journalist and used his position at the newspaper to communicate his love of nature. He shared educational information about trees and encouraged others to plant them. In January of 1872, he proposed to the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture the idea of a tree-planting holiday to be called Arbor Day. They were supportive of the idea, and the very first Arbor Day was celebrated on April 10, 1872, in Nebraska City, Nebraska. Prizes were offered to communities and/or individuals who properly planted the largest number of trees. It is estimated that one million trees were planted on that first Arbor Day. The tradition continues in the United States today and has even spread to other countries. Annually, many special tree planting events are scheduled, and school children learn about the wonder and value of trees.