

JANUARY - BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. New Year's Day

January 1 is the first day of the new year. It is also called New Year and is one of the most celebrated public holidays in the world. People gather to watch the fireworks start going off at midnight to welcome the start of the new year in each time zone around the world. Other New Year's Day traditions include things such as making New Year's resolutions and calling friends and family.

2. Paul Revere's Birthday

Paul Revere was born in Boston on January 1, 1735. When he grew up, he worked with his father as a gold and silversmith. After his father died in 1754, he took over the family business. Mr. Revere helped organize the famous Boston Tea Party, which was a major catalyst for the American Revolutionary War. While serving as a courier for the Massachusetts Committee of Correspondence, he gained fame for his midnight ride to Concord on April 18, 1775. His mission was to warn the colonists that the British were planning an attack. During the war, he served as a Lieutenant Colonel of the American militia. After the war, Mr. Revere was a successful businessman until he died of natural causes on May 10, 1818, at the age of eighty-three.

3. Betsy Ross

Elizabeth Griscom - nicknamed Betsy - was born on January 1, 1752. She attended a Quaker public school, where she learned reading, writing, and sewing. When she finished school, she began working as an apprentice for a furniture upholsterer. In November of 1773, Betsy married John Ross, who also worked in the upholstery business. Betsy often told the story of how three members of a secret committee from the Continental Congress came to call upon her, George Washington, Robert Morris, and George Ross. They asked her to sew the first American flag. She finished the flag in late spring of 1776. On June 14, 1777, the Continental Congress adopted Betsy's flag as the official flag of our new nation. After the American Revolutionary War, Betsy Ross continued to sew and owned her own upholstery business for many years.

4. National Crime Stoppers Month

The Crime Stoppers program was originated in September of 1976 by concerned citizens in Albuquerque, New Mexico. They wanted to find a way to assist local law enforcement in solving crimes in their neighborhoods. The Crime Stoppers idea has spread throughout the United States, and today there are over 1000 active programs. The typical Crime Stoppers program finds out which felony crimes in the area are unsolved and need citizen assistance. The Crime Stoppers organization, a charitable, non-profit group, then raises funds and offers cash rewards to persons who make anonymous telephone calls and provide helpful information to the police. These efforts have been instrumental in solving many crimes and making our neighborhoods safer. In 2005, President George W. Bush praised the work of the Crime Stoppers volunteers and declared January as National Crime Stoppers Month.

5. Snowflakes

Snowflakes are single ice crystals that grew large enough size, combined with other ice crystals, and fell through the atmosphere as snow. Snowflakes differ in size and even design from one another.

6. Icicles

Icicles are spikes of ice that form when water drips from an object and freezes. They can form during bright, sunny, below-freezing weather, or when ice or snow melted by sunlight, refreeze while it drips. Over time, the continual dripping causes the icicle to grow.

7. Louis Braille

Louis Braille was born in France on January 4, 1809. At the age of three, he was blinded by a tragic accident in his father's leather shop when he was playing with a sharp awl and accidentally pierced one of his eyes. Louis was a very creative and intelligent young man and proved to be an excellent student, in spite of his disability. As he grew older, he realized that the small school he attended did not have the resources he needed. He heard of a school in Paris that was specifically for blind students. Louis didn't have to think twice about going. While there, he learned about a system of raised symbols being used by the French army to communicate secret messages. This gave him an idea for developing an alphabet for the blind. He used an awl from his father's leather shop to punch raised dots into paper and arranged six dots in varying patterns to represent the letters of the alphabet. The very tool which caused him to go blind inspired the creation of a system that would enable him to satisfy his passion for reading. The alphabet Louis Braille created when he was only fifteen years old is still widely used today by blind people all over the world.

8. Jacob Grimm

Jacob Grimm was born in Germany on January 4, 1785. He and his brother Wilhelm worked and traveled together all their lives. They were fascinated by poetry and old legends. During their travels throughout Germany, they collected traditional tales that were told by families around the hearths of their village cottages. The Grimm brothers compiled their collected stories into books that were published and became very popular in Germany and around the world. They were also great scholars, researching the origin and development of the German language. Both were professors at Berlin University.

9. National Bird Day

National Bird Day is observed on January 5th each year. Bird activists started this observation because of their love for birds and their desire to protect birds of all kinds. This celebration produces greater awareness of the beauty and value of birds in our world. It draws attention to some of the ways birds are mistreated in our society, especially in the pet sales industry. On National Bird Day, people are encouraged to care for and appreciate all birds but especially those that are in captivity.

10. International Thank You Day

The exact origin of International Thank You Day is unclear, but it is observed annually on January 11th. The day provides an opportunity for individuals of all ages to show appreciation to the people in their lives. Thankfulness needs to be expressed if it is to have any real meaning or value. International Thank You Day can easily be celebrated in the classroom by doing something as simple as allowing students to design and create thank you cards for family members, teachers, friends, neighbors, or anyone else they choose.

11. National Pharmacist Day

Pharmacists are an integral part of medical care because they know the chemical composition of medicines and can explain their proper use, side effects, and interactions with other drugs. When someone is under a doctor's care and needs prescribed medication, the pharmacist ensures that the prescription is filled accurately. National Pharmacist Day is celebrated on January 12th each year, but the exact origin of this observance is uncertain. Most believe it was created by a pharmacist group, but the search continues to discover which group, when, and where. Regardless of its roots, National Pharmacist Day is a good idea and allows people to appreciate these specially educated and trained men and women who provide a vital medical service.

12. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was born on January 15, 1929, at his family's home in Atlanta, Georgia. He became an exemplary student and was able to skip the ninth and twelfth grades of high school. Because of his high score on the college entrance exams during his junior year, he was admitted to Morehouse College at the age of fifteen without formally graduating from Booker T. Washington High School. In February of 1948, at the age of nineteen, Martin entered the Christian ministry and was ordained at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. Following his ordination, he became Assistant Pastor of Ebenezer. Martin chose to pursue a doctoral degree in Systematic Theology at Boston University and was awarded his Ph.D. in June of 1955. He also received honorary degrees from many other prestigious colleges and universities. In addition, Dr. King received numerous awards for his community service and strong leadership in the Civil Rights Movement. Perhaps his most notable award being the Nobel Peace Prize he received in 1964 at the young age of 35. Throughout his life, Dr. King held leadership roles in many organizations. His speeches, lectures, and writings inspired multitudes, ignited the conscience of his generation, and brought much-needed attention to the highly controversial subject of equal rights in the United States and throughout the world. His philosophy of nonviolent social change had a significant impact on this country's Civil Rights Movement, but it came with a price. His ideas met with much opposition, and an unfortunate result was his assassination on April 4, 1968. Dr. King's passionate yet peaceful quest for equal rights played a significant and pivotal role in American History. For this reason, his birthday is celebrated annually, giving us an opportunity to reflect on how we should regard our fellow human beings.

13. Snowball

A snowball is a round ball of snow made by pressing or rolling snow together. This ball of snow is usually made in your hand and then thrown for fun in a snowball fight. Sometimes, a large ball of snow is made by rolling a snowball around in the snow until it grows large enough to build a snowman.

14. Benjamin Franklin

Benjamin Franklin was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on January 17, 1706. He is quoted as once saying, "If you would not be forgotten, as soon as you are dead and rotten, either write things worth reading or do things worth the writing." Mr. Franklin did both and is considered one of our nation's founding fathers. He lived out his own words of wisdom by writing as much as he could and by doing even more. He is remembered for being a scientist, an inventor, a statesman, a printer, a philosopher, a musician, an economist, and much more. Mr. Franklin was born in Boston, but Philadelphia is considered more as his home. In Philadelphia, you can visit Mr. Franklin's gravesite, The Benjamin Franklin National Museum, and The Franklin Institute of Science Museum.

15. National Popcorn Day

Each popcorn kernel contains a tiny drop of water. When heated, the water expands, causing the kernel to explode and flip inside out. A popping kernel can fly as far as three feet. Popcorn consumption dropped significantly during the 1950s with the invention of television since Americans began going to the movies less and thus buying less movie popcorn. The development of microwave popcorn brought back the snack's popularity, however. America consumes approximately 4.3 billion gallons of popcorn annually. National Popcorn Day is celebrated on January 19th each year. How and where this practice originated is uncertain, but some believe it has a connection with the Super Bowl. While watching the biggest football game of the year, many fans are munching on hot, buttery popcorn.

16. National Figure Skating Month

National Figure Skating Month provides an opportunity for skating programs across the nation to highlight the wonderful world of skating and attract new participants. Throughout the month, ice skating facilities plan special events and host family activities. Most skating rinks host open houses where families get a chance to enjoy ice skating, receive complimentary skating lessons and skate rental, take part in on-ice games, and receive prizes. Some ice rinks are even fortunate enough to have visits from ice skating celebrities. The primary goal of National Figure Skating Month is to increase awareness of the many and varied programs of U.S. Figure Skating.

17. Snow

Snow is precipitation in the form of ice crystals. It begins in clouds when temperatures are below the freezing point of 32 degrees Fahrenheit, 0 degrees Celsius, and the water vapor in the atmosphere condenses directly into ice without going becoming liquid first. Once an ice crystal has formed, it absorbs and freezes more water vapor from the surrounding air, grows into a snow crystal or snow pellet, and then falls to Earth. Snow falls in different forms, such as snow flakes or sleet. Sleet is drops of rain or drizzle that freeze into ice as they fall.

18. National Hobby Month

January is a great time to celebrate National Hobby Month because many people are already thinking about kicking off the new year on a positive note by trying something new or reviving an old interest. Hobbies can provide a good outlet for their zeal and motivation. The dictionary describes a hobby as an activity or interest pursued outside one's regular occupation, primarily for pleasure. Hobbies can be educational, charitable, relaxing, good for your health, and more. Some hobbies are physically challenging, such as biking, swimming, hiking, and bowling. Others are more sedentary, like reading, writing, painting, and cooking.

19. National Kazoo Day

The Kazoo was invented in the 1840s by the collaborative efforts of an African-American man named Alabama Vest and a German-American clockmaker named Thaddeus Von Clegg. It was first presented to the world at the Georgia State Fair in 1852, but the musical instrument did not go into commercial production until many years later in 1912. Much is known about the invention and history of the kazoo, but little is known about the origins of National Kazoo Day, other than it is traditionally celebrated on January 28th each year.

20. National Puzzle Day

National Puzzle Day is observed on January 29th, but its origin is still a puzzling mystery. The holiday draws attention to the fun and educational benefits of all types of puzzles. Crossword puzzles and jigsaw puzzles are by far the most common. Working puzzles can improve problem-solving skills, build vocabulary, and help keep the mind sharp. There are puzzles available to fit the needs of every person and every skill level.