

DECEMBER – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Hans Christian Andersen

Hans Christian Anderson (1805-1875) was a Danish author and poet. He wrote numerous poems, plays, stories, and travel essays. He is best known for writing over 150 fairy tales. These were published in many collections during his lifetime and most are still in print today. His very first book of fairy tales, *Fairy Tales, Told for Children*, was published on December 1, 1835. His writings use irony and humor to teach moral lessons. His memorable characters were inspired by the primitive folk tales he heard as a child. Not all of his fairy tales end happily, but they capture the authenticity and sincerity of a man who could truly see life through the eyes of a child. Some of his better known titles include: *The Princess and the Pea*, *Thumbelina*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *The Ugly Duckling*. These and many other favorites are still widely read and enjoyed today.

2. National Cookie Day

December 4th is National Cookie Day. The English word “cookie” comes from the Dutch word “koekje” which means “little cake.” To test oven temperatures and prevent the waste of an entire cake mix, Dutch bakers used to place small amounts of batter in the oven. These “little cakes” were discovered to be quite tasty. Soon, in addition to the full size cakes, bakers started intentionally making the miniature cakes, and the cookie was born.

3. Hand Washing Awareness Week

Hand Washing Awareness Week is observed during the first week of December. Its primary purpose is to bring attention to the health and safety benefits of good hand hygiene. Washing hands properly cleanses them of pathogens (bacteria and viruses) and chemicals that can cause disease or personal harm and greatly aids in reducing the spread of infectious diseases. According to The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there is a large body of well-documented research supporting the claim that the most important measure for preventing the spread of pathogens is effective hand washing.

4. International Volunteer Day

International Volunteer Day takes place on December 6th. Each year the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) program highlights this observance and supports government efforts to develop volunteer organizations at the local, state, national, and international levels. Over the years, there have been rallies, parades, community volunteering projects, environmental awareness endeavors, free medical care, and other advocacy campaigns conducted in honor of International Volunteer Day. The idea is to encourage individuals and groups to freely give something of themselves for the benefit of others.