

Fun with Leap Year and Leap Day

What do Pope Paul III and rapper Ja Rule have in common? They were both born on Leap Day! This makes them part of an exclusive club: Leap Day babies. After all, February 29 occurs only once in every 1,461 days.

Some people joke that folks born on Leap Day only celebrate their birthday every four years. This creates a funny problem in the famous opera *The Pirates of Penzance*. The hero, Frederic, is bound by contract to serve as an apprentice until his 21st birthday. Because Frederic was born on Leap Day, he won't reach his 21st birthday until he is in his eighties!

Of course, Leap Day babies age at the same rate as everyone else. They do get a special privilege: "choosing" their birthday for non-Leap Years. Do they want to celebrate on February 28 or March 1?

Women in Ireland have a special privilege on Leap Day: they can propose marriage to a man. This custom dates back to the 5th century, when Saint Bridget complained to Saint Patrick that women had to wait for a man to propose. Over the centuries, rules were created for Leap Day proposals. A man who refused a woman's offer of marriage had to give her a small present. A woman was supposed to wear red if she intended to propose on Leap Day—fair warning to her intended.

Not everyone thinks Leap Year is fun. In Greece, it is considered bad luck to get married in a leap year. In India, it is bad luck for a happy occasion to occur in a leap year or month. In China, superstitious people believe that more accidents and mishaps occur during leap month, and that children born then tend to be "difficult."

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1. If you were born on Leap Day, would you choose to celebrate your birthday on February 28 or March 1 during non-leap years? _____

2. If you were Frederic in *The Pirates of Penzance*, what argument could you make to get out of your apprenticeship *before* your eighties? _____

3. What is your opinion about the Irish custom for women to propose on Leap Day? _____

4. Do you believe that Leap Year and Leap Day are lucky, unlucky, or neither? Why? _____