

Leap Year

The word "year" brings a few images to mind: birthdays, annual holidays, the school year, and the calendar year. It's not very often that we think about the earth revolving around the sun, but that's what a year is: the unit of time the earth's trip takes. In school, we learn that a year is 365 days, but it actually takes 365.242 days to revolve around the sun. That's 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, and 46 seconds.

We can't really add that extra quarter day to each year without messing up school schedules, alarm clocks, flight times, and just about everything else. Instead, we lump those extra quarter-days together into one extra day every four years to make Leap Year with 366 days. We add Leap Day to the end of February, so every four years, February has 29 days instead of 28.

Leap Year falls every four years, on years that are divisible by four. That means you can divide the number of the year by four and get a whole number for your answer. There is one exception: century years like 1900 and 2000. Since a year isn't quite 365.25 days (or 365 days and 6 hours), we would get ahead of ourselves if we had leap year every century year. To adjust for this, only century years that are divisible by four hundred are Leap Years. That means that 1900 wasn't a leap year, but 2000 was.

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1. Why do we have Leap Year? _____

2. Why was 2000 a Leap Year, but 1900 was not? _____

3. EXACTLY how long does it take the earth to revolve around the sun? _____

4. In writing this piece, do you think the author intended to inform, entertain, or persuade? _____

5. What is another name for February 29? _____