

April Fools Day

Have you ever dressed up for Backwards Day at school—on the wrong day? Remember how foolish you felt when you realized you were the only one wearing backwards clothes?

That's nothing compared to how people felt when they realized they had been celebrating New Year's Day on the wrong day—for years! These people got a whole day named after them: April Fools Day.

April Fools Day began as a calendar change. In 1852, King Charles IX (the 9th) of France decided that the New Year should begin on January 1st. Before, people celebrated the New Year during the week of March 25-April 1st, with the biggest parties happening on April 1st.

Word of the *new* New Year's Day spread slowly through the countryside. In remote areas, it took people years to learn that New Year's Day had been moved from springtime to the middle of winter. Those people ended up feeling like Fools with a capital F.

Some people refused to celebrate New Year's Day on January 1st and continued partying on April 1st even after they learned of the change. In France, these folks were known as April Fish (poisson d'avril) because a young fish is a fool, easily caught. Each year, people played jokes on those who still celebrated New Year on April 1st. One common prank was to hook a paper fish on the back of the person to show he was an April Fish.

What a difference a hundred and sixty years makes. Now, everyone is fair game on April Fools Day—even people who celebrate the New Year on January 1st.

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1. If you had a choice, would you celebrate the New Year on April 1st or January 1st? Why?

2. Why do you think it took longer for people in the countryside to hear of the change in New Year's Day? _____
3. Why were people who celebrated New Year's on April 1st called April Fish? _____
4. Why do you think people who insisted on celebrating New Year on April 1st were seen as fools? _____
5. One joke played on April Fools was to invite them to a fake New Year's party. When the fool arrived, there was no party. How would you feel if this happened to you? _____
6. Why do you think the author started this piece on April Fools Day with a question about dressing up backwards on the wrong day? _____
7. In the space below, draw an April Fish.