

CALENDAR

All-Year Activities

1. Nearly every day of the year is special for some reason. For example, February 11 is **Don't Cry Over Spilt Milk Day**. September 6 is **Fight Procrastination Day** (perhaps celebrated on September 7?). Plan a party for your favorite special day, complete with costumes, decorations, and theme-related food. You'll find many more ideas in *Kids Celebrate! Activities for Special Days Throughout the Year* by Maria Bonfanti Esche and Clare Bonfanti Braham (Chicago Review Press, 1998).



January

1. January 1 is the **feast day of St. Basil**. On this day, families in Greece and Bulgaria break open a pomegranate on the doorstep. If they find many seeds inside, they believe that their year will be happy and prosperous. Do a scientific investigation of seed numbers in a fruit or vegetable. (If you don't have any pomegranates handy, try peas in the pod, oranges, pears, or acorn squash.) Make a graph to show the mean, median, and mode of seed numbers in at least ten pieces of the food you investigate.

St. Basil Day celebrants also bake a bean, pea, or silver coin into bread or cake. To make some fun on a cold January evening, create your own version of this tradition. Cut prerolled (from the freezer case) pie dough into squares. Fold the squares in half, slipping a well-washed quarter inside one. Beat an egg, brush it on the edges, and crimp the edges to seal them. Bake according to package directions. When the squares are cool, dust them with powdered sugar and serve them to your friends and family. (Tell them not to bite down *too* hard.) The person who gets the quarter may expect a lucky year.

2. The second week in January is **Universal Letter-Writing Week**. Write a letter to a leader in your community, politely and persuasively suggesting a needed safety improvement in your area. You might suggest a stoplight or crosswalk at a particular corner or a lower speed limit on a busy street. You can also write letters to friends and family. Tell them what you are up to this month.

February

1. February is **National Bird Feeding Month**. Make an easy bird feeder to attract birds to your yard or school grounds. Tie a string around a pinecone so that you can hang it. Cover the pinecone with creamy peanut butter, then roll it in birdseed. Hang the cone outside and watch for birds. Describe those that visit your feeder. Use a bird identification manual to learn their names.



2. February is **Sweet Potato Month**. You can grow a sweet potato plant on your kitchen windowsill. Find a sweet potato that has already started to sprout. (One that hasn't may have been treated with a chemical to prevent sprouting.) Stick three toothpicks into the sweet potato. Use the toothpicks to support the sweet potato on the rim of a jar of water, with its bottom (the pointy end) in the water. Keep the jar full of water in a sunny window. Your sweet potato plant should start to sprout in a week or two.

3. The first full week in February is **Children's Authors and Illustrators Week**. Ask your librarian to help you find a book written by an author whom you've never read before. Or choose an illustrator whose art you've never admired before. Study your book selection. Decide what you like best about the writing or the pictures. Write a book review telling your friends why you think they will (or won't) like the book.

March

1. The first full week in March is **Celebrate Your Name Week**. Go to <http://babynamesworld.parentsconnect.com> and try to find the meaning and origin of your name. Have your friends do the same. Make a scrapbook with pictures of you and your friends, along with information about everyone's name.

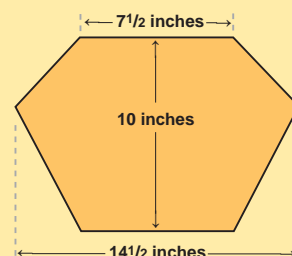


2. March 2 is **Dr. Seuss's birthday**. (He was born in 1904.) Read a Dr. Seuss book aloud, together with friends or family. Or do some research on Dr. Seuss and write a Seuss-style biography for him, complete with rhythm, rhyme, and whimsical illustrations.

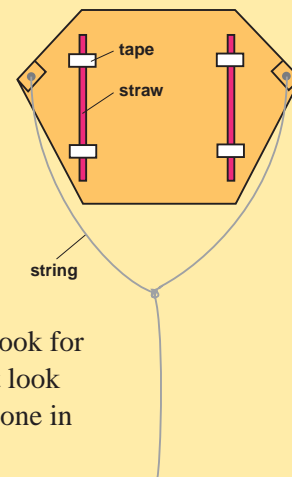
3. In many places, March is notorious for its rapid and extreme **weather changes**. Go to Almanac.com/weather, enter your zip or postal code, and find the 7-day forecast. How accurate is it? Keep a weather diary for one month. Each day, record the prediction. Then record what you see when you look out your window. Calculate a percentage to express how accurate the forecasts were.

April

1. April is **National Kite Month**. Here's how to build a simple kite: Cut the shape shown here from a plastic bag. Tape milkshake straws as shown. Tape the corners and punch holes. Tie pieces of string through the holes. Bring the two ends of string together at an even length in the middle and tie a knot. Your kite should fly great, but if it is hard to control, try taping on a strip of newspaper as a tail.



2. They say that **April showers bring May flowers**. See how much rain your flowers get by building and using a simple rain gauge. Get a tall, empty jar. Tape a ruler vertically to its outside. Set the jar in an open space (not under trees or near buildings). Push it into the ground so that it won't fall over. Every time it rains, read the amount of water in the jar, using the ruler (and then, of course, empty the water out to get ready for next time). Keep a record of daily rainfall for the entire month.



3. April is **National Youth Sports Safety Month**. Devise a checklist and use it to look for safety hazards on your school or community playgrounds or athletic fields. You might look for trash and litter, broken glass, potholes, unstable goalposts, and more. Talk to someone in charge about how such hazards can be removed now and avoided in the future.

May

1. May 1 is **School Principals' Day**. The Tuesday of the first full week in May is **National Teacher Day**. Design and make greeting cards to give to your principal and teachers to celebrate their professions. Present them with their special cards on their special days.
2. May is **National Egg Month**. It's also **National Vinegar Month**. In honor of both, try this experiment. Place an uncooked egg that is still in its shell into a cup or jar of vinegar. Watch what happens. Wait a day or two and remove the egg from the vinegar. How does it feel? Place the egg in water and watch for another day or two. What happens? Do some research in your library or on the Internet to find out why. *Do not eat the egg!*
3. May is **National Asparagus Month**. Cook some for dinner. Snip the tough bottoms off about a dozen spears. Place the tops in a shallow glass pan with a little water and microwave for 45 seconds. Drain. Place a pat of butter on top and let it melt. Sprinkle on a little lemon juice if you like. Enjoy!

June

1. June is **Great Outdoors Month**. Get out and play one of these three tag games:

Trout Farm: Put some flour in a squeeze bottle (for example, a dry, empty, ketchup bottle). Squeeze the flour onto the grass to mark three or four large circles; inside the flour circles are the “fish nurseries.” One player acts as the Big Trout, while all of the other players are baby trout, who take their place in one of the nurseries. When the Big Trout shouts, “Trout, trout, swim about,” all the baby trout must swim to a different nursery. If tagged by the Big Trout, a player becomes a Big Trout, too. The winner is the last baby trout to be tagged.

Ponytails: Cut colorful ribbons about 12 inches long. Tuck one into the back of each player's shoe. At the whistle, the players step on one another's ponytails until all the ribbons come off. Tuck the ribbons in waistbands or under belts and play again, pulling out the ribbons by hand (not stepping on them).

Happy Hands: Choose one player to be “Happy.” Whenever Happy tags someone, the pair join hands and try to tag other players. As more players are tagged and join the chain, the two players with a free hand (the ends of the chain) are the “Happies.” The game ends when everyone is happily holding hands.

2. June is **National Rivers Month**. Get a map of your area and locate the rivers near you. Visit www.americanrivers.org to find out what you can do to help protect and preserve clean rivers in your region.

3. The first full week in June is **National Sun Safety Week**. Find out why people who play outdoors need to protect their skin against the Sun's harmful rays. Find out what SPF means and make a poster that explains how everyone can and should stay safe in the sun.



July

- 1.** If you go to the beach, bring home some fine sand and **make your own sand-clay sculpture.**

Mix $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of cornstarch with 1 cup of sand. Ask an adult to boil $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of water in an old pot. Add the sand and cornstarch mixture to the water and continue cooking on low heat until the clay thickens. Stir in a few drops of food coloring if you want colored clay. When your sand-clay is cool, mold it into whatever shape you like. Let your sculpture dry in the sun.



- 2. Make a sand picture.** On heavy card stock, draw a picture with glue. For example, draw a circle for a face with dabs of glue for eyes, a nose, and a mouth. Sprinkle sand all over the drawing and let the glue dry. Then shake off the excess. Only your drawing will remain.

- 3.** July 22 is **Spoonerism Day**, named for Reverend Archibald Spooner, born on this day in 1844. A spoonerism is a switch of letters or sounds in words so that they come out differently than they should. This happened often to Reverend Spooner. Examples are “blushing crow” (crushing blow), “Please sew me to another sheet” (please show me to another seat), and “a well-boiled icicle” (a well-oiled bicycle). Sometimes spoonerisms happen by accident, but sometimes they are done intentionally, for fun. Collect spoonerisms and compile a humorous dictionary titled *Tips of the Slongue*.

August

- 1.** August 1 through 7 is **National Clown Week.** Make yourself a clown costume from large paper grocery bags and do some clowning around of your own.

- 2.** Build paper airplanes in honor of **National Aviation Week**, held annually during the week of Orville Wright’s birthday, August 19.

Go to www.paperairplanes.co.uk/planes.php or www.paperplane.org/patterns/patterns.html to find a design you like or create one of your own. Make changes as you engineer your paper airplane to fly farther, faster, higher, or longer.



- 3.** August 24 is **National Waffle Day.** On a long strip of adding machine paper, make a timeline to scale (1 inch = 20 years) of milestones in the history of the waffle. Use your completed timeline as a table decoration at a waffle breakfast. These dates from www.mrbreakfast.com will help you get started:

1200s B.C. Ancient Greeks cooked flat cakes between two metal plates. These early waffles were called *obleios*. They were served with cheeses and herbs.

1620 The pilgrims brought Dutch *waffles* to America.

1735 The word *waffle* (with two f’s) appeared in English print for the first time.

Late 1800s Thomas Jefferson returned to the United States from France with a long-handled, patterned waffle iron.

1869 Cornelius Swarthout patented the first U.S. waffle iron.

1953 Eggo frozen waffles were sold in supermarkets for the first time.

1964–65 Brussels restaurateur Maurice Vermersch brought his wife’s fluffy Belgian waffle recipe to the World’s Fair in New York. It became a big hit in the United States.

September

1. September is **Library Card Sign-Up Month**. If you don't have a library card, go get one. If you have one you haven't used in a while, check out a print book, audio book, music CD, or DVD. Find out what other fun things are available at your library.
2. September is **Mold Awareness Month**. To heighten your own awareness, put a slice of white bread in each of three ziptop plastic sandwich bags. Seal tightly. Put one bag in the refrigerator, one in a warm place, and one in a dark place. Look at the bread daily, but *do not open the bags*. Which bread molds first? What does the mold look like? Throw the unopened bags away when the mold gets so disgusting that you can't stand to expand your awareness any further.
3. The third full week in September is **National Clean Hands Week**. Keep a small notepad with you and write down the time and place whenever you wash your hands. Ask ten friends to do the same. Make a bar graph showing how often (or how seldom) you and your friends wash your hands. Is improvement needed?

October

1. October is **National Stamp Collecting Month**. Ask your family and friends to save for you all of the stamps that come on their letters and cards. Make a collage of stamps that you can frame and hang in your room.
2. The second Monday in October is **Native Americans' Day** in South Dakota. Find out about the Native Americans who once made their home in your area. Maybe they still do. Write facts about them on strips of paper 1 inch wide and 5 inches long. Glue or tape the strips together to form a chain. Use it as a decoration for a Native Americans' Day party.
3. **National Mole Day** is celebrated every year on October 23 from 6:02 A.M. to 6:02 P.M. No, the celebration does not honor a burrowing animal. Mole Day commemorates Avogadro's Number (6.02×10^{23}), which is a basic measuring unit in chemistry. The day is celebrated in schools to promote interest in chemistry. Talk with your science teacher about planning events for your school on National Mole Day. For more information, go to www.moleday.org.



November

1. November is **Peanut Butter Lovers Month**. Try this easy recipe for an after-school snack: Spread some peanut butter inside a celery stalk. Top with bacon bits, raisins, or chocolate sprinkles. Crunch and enjoy.
2. Many Americans celebrate **Thanksgiving Day** on the fourth Thursday in November. (And many Canadians celebrate it on the second Monday of October!) Make a list of all the things you are thankful for. Post your list on your refrigerator and ask others in your family to add to it throughout the month of November.

3. November 20 is **Absurdity Day**. No one knows why. Isn't that absurd? Absurd means illogical and senseless. Look through old newspapers and magazines. Find things that you think are absurd. Make an absurdities scrapbook that you can update regularly.

December

1. December is **National Tie Month**. Using permanent markers, draw a funny tie on the front of an old T-shirt. Or cut up and decorate an old sock to make a truly hilarious tie.

2. December 10 is **Nobel Prize Day**. Check newspapers, magazines, and Internet news sites for information about this year's winners. Pick a winner in one of the categories and write a letter of congratulations.

3. **Nights grow long and days grow short** in December. In fact, the shortest day of the year—the winter solstice—occurs (in the Northern Hemisphere) around December 21 each year. From your local newspaper or on Almanac.com, obtain the times of sunrise and sunset for December 15 through 25 in your area. Do the math to figure out the length of the days. Which day is the solstice?



ASTRONOMY

1. A *mnemonic* is a series of words or letters that aid memory. You can recall the order of the eight planets, for example, using this silly sentence: “**M**y **V**ery **E**ager **M**other **J**ust **S**erved **U**s Noodles.” (**M** = Mercury, **V** = Venus, **E** = Earth . . . you get the idea.) On index cards, **make a file of mnemonics** to help you and your friends remember important pieces of information about our solar system, galaxy, and universe. Find and copy mnemonics other people have invented or invent your own.

2. Today, our Sun is a yellow dwarf star. Five billion years from now, it will grow to become a red giant. As it dies, it will cast off its outer layers. Its core will be a white dwarf. Slowly, its light will fade until it becomes a black dwarf. **Make a poster** to describe and illustrate the events that will occur as our Sun dies.

3. **Make and play an astronomy game** that works like bingo. Make STAR cards that look like the example below. Use the names of planets, constellations, and celestial bodies, and other astronomical words. Use as many words as you want and make as many cards as you like. (The more terms and the more players, the harder the game.) Write the words on slips of paper and have the “caller” draw and say the names. Let players use pennies to mark their STAR cards. The person who yells “Star!” after completing a row diagonally, vertically, or horizontally is the winner.

**Sample
STAR Card**

S	T	A	R
Mercury	Quasar	Wormhole	Mars
Ursa Major	Supernova	Cosmos	Comet
Black Hole	Universe	Uranus	Sun
Jupiter	Moon	Asteroid	Perseus