

## Britain's Great "Bulldog"

On April 9, 1963, Winston Churchill was made an honorary citizen of the United States, which is why that day has ever since been celebrated as Winston Churchill Day.



Winston Churchill has been hailed as one of the greatest statesmen of the 20th century. He was born into an aristocratic family to a father descended of British politicians and a mother who was heiress to an American

fortune. Winston, though, did not want to live an easy life of luxury. After military school, he traveled throughout the British Empire as a soldier and journalist, finally returning to England to begin his career in politics in 1900. He started as a conservative but suddenly shifted to the liberals, championing progressive causes such as the eight-hour workday, a government-mandated minimum wage, and a system of public health insurance. Years later, however, in the face of the rise of German nationalism and the Nazis, Churchill returned to the conservatives. In May of 1940 after Hitler invaded Poland, Winston Churchill was elected prime minister of England and vowed to guide Britain through the war.

Victory in World War II was not easy. As the Nazis bombed London, Churchill convinced the Americans to support the Allied war effort. Churchill's efforts were not in vain, and Germany finally surrendered in 1945. Churchill had earned the nickname the "British Bulldog" for epitomizing the unrelenting courage and tenacity of Britain's favorite pet. After the war, Churchill still had work to finish. He was elected prime minister again in 1951, won a Nobel Prize in Literature in 1953, and was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 1963. While Winston Churchill was far from perfect—he suffered political and military defeats, struggled with mental illness, and made controversial remarks regarding race and class—he dedicated his life to his country, and for that he received the honor of a state funeral in 1965, despite not being a member of the royal family.

## April Birthdays

In astrology, those born between April 1–19 are the Rams of Aries. As the first sign of the zodiac, Aries like to be number one. Bold, courageous, passionate, and somewhat impulsive, Rams dive headfirst into the most challenging situations. Those born between April 20–30 are the Bulls of Taurus. Bulls not only work hard with a determined and tireless manner but they also enjoy the payoff, rewarding themselves for a job well done. These stable and reliable types won't finish the job until they are completely satisfied.

- Washington Irving (writer) – April 3, 1783
- Maya Angelou (writer) – April 4, 1928
- Booker T. Washington (leader) – April 5, 1856
- Billie Holiday (singer) – April 7, 1915
- Joseph Pulitzer (journalist) – April 10, 1847
- Charlie Chaplin (actor) – April 16, 1889
- Charlotte Brontë (writer) – April 21, 1816
- John Muir (naturalist) – April 21, 1838
- Ella Fitzgerald (singer) – April 25, 1917
- Harper Lee (writer) – April 28, 1926
- Duke Ellington (composer) – April 29, 1899

## Selfies Around the World



Even NASA is getting in on the selfie photo craze, declaring April 22 Global Selfie Earth Day. April 22 is well known as Earth Day, a day to demonstrate support for the conservation of the planet. Global Selfie Earth Day proposes an interesting twist. Everyone is invited to step outside, snap a selfie, and share it with the world on social media. By the end of Global Selfie Earth Day, NASA hopes to create a photo tapestry of our planet, aggregating tens of thousands of images and sculpting them into a unique image of the globe. During years past, over 50,000 images have been submitted from over 100 different countries. It's your planet, so snap a picture of yourself wherever you are on the globe and post it. You just might be included in NASA's next photo tapestry.

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## Out of the Mouths of Babes

Oodles of evidence exists demonstrating that laughter is a powerful medicine. A good laugh stimulates the heart and lungs, releases feel-good endorphins from the brain, decreases stress, strengthens the immune system, lifts the mood, and just plain makes us happier people overall. The only problem is that many adults don't laugh enough. Scientists have run the numbers, and most adults, on average, laugh 20 times per day. This may seem like a lot, but children laugh up to 300 times a day! Humor Month, which begins with the foolishness of April Fools' Day, seems the perfect time to get to the root cause of this laughter deficit.

Psychologist and laughter expert Robert Provine began collecting laughter samples in the 1980s. He wanted to understand why people laughed. Interestingly, laughter did not occur most often when people heard a funny joke. Instead, people laughed most at everyday remarks made by friends. Laughter, Provine discovered, was an incredibly important type of social glue and a healthy way to engage the world. And this may be why kids laugh so much more than adults.

Children are filled with the sense of wonder that comes with constantly learning new things. Not only is laughter a normal response to a delightful and unexpected outcome but a sense of humor is critical to developing self-esteem, practicing social skills, and learning to solve problems. Kids who laugh at themselves demonstrate the ability to accept their own imperfections. This lightheartedness attracts other friends, which in turn makes them feel better about themselves, resulting in higher self-esteem. The funny thing is that all of these social benefits continue into adulthood. As we grow, we should never stop delighting in the unexpected and laughing at ourselves, for these traits will keep our friends close and keep the laughs coming—and the more we laugh, the happier and healthier we will be.

## Celebrating April

**Arab American Heritage Month**

**Poetry Month**

**Jazz Appreciation Month**

**Passover Begins**

*April 8*

**Easter**

*April 12*

**Gardening Day**

*April 14*

**Bulldogs Are Beautiful Day**

*April 21*

**Earth Day**

*April 22*

**Arbor Day**

*April 24*

**International Dance Day**

*April 29*

## The “Unsinkable” *Titanic*



On March 31, 1911, nearly 100,000 people gathered on a dock in Belfast, Ireland, to watch the launch of the RMS *Titanic*, the largest and

most luxurious ocean liner ever built, a feat of engineering and a ship that many boasted was “unsinkable.” A little over a year later, on April 14, 1912, the unthinkable happened: On its maiden voyage, the mighty *Titanic* struck an iceberg and sank to the bottom of the Atlantic.

The *Titanic* was the most technologically advanced ship ever built. She had a double-plated bottom and 16 watertight compartments in the hull with doors that could close in case any were breached by water. For many, these innovations were a guarantee that the ship would stay afloat in any conditions. It also had a state-of-the-art electrical control panel and a wireless communications system that could transmit Morse code in the event of an emergency. None of these safeguards, however, could save the *Titanic* from her fate.

A mild winter had resulted in the north Atlantic being full of icebergs in April of 1912. There were many reports of floating bergs, but the crew of the *Titanic* paid them no mind. The 46,000-ton ship could reach a speed of 30 knots, making it not only the largest but also the fastest ship in the world. Captain E.J. Smith was speeding along at 22 knots when the iceberg was spotted, and while he was able to avoid a head-on collision, the iceberg struck the starboard side, ripping a gash in the hull that opened six of the 16 watertight compartments. Unfortunately, the ship’s design could withstand the flooding of only four compartments. An SOS signal was sent from the innovative new communications system, but another ship did not arrive for over three hours. By then, the *Titanic* had broken in half and sunk. Due to a shortage of lifeboats, many passengers perished in the frigid waters. Just 705 of the 2,206 on board survived, and the sinking of the *Titanic* became one of the worst lessons in overconfidence ever suffered by mankind.

## Sybil Ludington’s Ride

Patriot and hero of the American Revolution, Paul Revere gets all the credit for his famous midnight ride, in which he warned that “the British are coming!” How quickly history has forgotten about Sybil Ludington, the 16-year-old daughter of Colonel Henry Ludington. On April 25, 1777, British troops landed at Compo Beach in Connecticut with the aim of storming a military depot in nearby Danbury. Word of the soldiers marching through the night reached American ears, and Colonel Ludington asked his daughter to spread the alarm. Sybil Ludington hopped on her horse and rode 40 miles (several times the distance of Revere) through Connecticut and New York, rallying the Americans to arms. By the next morning, the American regiment was on the march to meet the British at Danbury. Statues of Sybil Ludington are erected in both New York and Connecticut, yet her daring ride has largely been lost in history. Some question whether her ride even took place. It took a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow to immortalize Paul Revere, so perhaps all Ludington needs is a poem to solidify her place in American history.

## Before Gatsby Was Great



On April 10, 1925, F. Scott Fitzgerald published *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald’s tale of love and lavishness during the Roaring Twenties is today hailed as perhaps the greatest American novel, but when it was published, it was deemed mediocre at best. By 1925, F. Scott Fitzgerald was a fading literary star. Even he believed that his best books, *This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and Damned*, were behind him. The initial reviews of *The Great Gatsby* weren’t flattering. It was called “unimportant” and “painfully forced,” and sold just 21,000 copies. When Fitzgerald died in 1940, he believed the book to be a failure. A year after his death, though, the book took off, and by 1945 it was considered one of Fitzgerald’s most successful works.

## The “Surgeon’s Photograph”



On April 21, 1934, *The Daily Mail* newspaper published the “Surgeon’s Photograph,” a black-and-white photo snapped by London surgeon Kenneth Wilson that shows

the enormous neck and head of the Loch Ness monster plying the waters of the Scottish lake. Thanks to Wilson’s photo, the world became gripped with “Nessie” fever.

Although it was the most popular and exciting “evidence” of the Loch Ness monster, the Surgeon’s Photo was not the first historical mention of such a beast. A seventh-century biography of Saint Columba, an Irish missionary who brought Christianity to Scotland, tells of how St. Columba faced off with a monster at the Ness River that flows into Loch Ness. Columba, seeing the monster’s attempts to eat a man in the river, invoked the name of God, and the creature fled, never to be seen again. That is, until April of 1933 when a couple was traveling on a new road that had been paved alongside Loch Ness. From the roadway, the couple witnessed “an enormous animal plunging and rolling on the surface” of the loch. Their story hit the newspapers, and news of the monster spread. The Surgeon’s Photograph was published a year later, heightening the rumors of a magnificent creature lurking the depths of the lake.

In 1994, after 60 years and countless expeditions to Loch Ness, the photo was revealed to be a hoax. The Surgeon’s Photograph was not a picture of a fantastic beast but of a toy submarine affixed with a plastic sea serpent’s head. Of course, revelations that the Surgeon’s Photograph was a fake have not dimmed the enthusiasm of Nessie’s believers. Indeed, as recently as September of 2019, scientists were still searching for evidence of Nessie. DNA was collected from Loch Ness, and although 3,000 different types of species were identified—including fish, pigs, deer, birds, humans, and bacteria—no DNA matching a giant reptile or aquatic dinosaur was found.

## On All Fours

April 4, or 4/4, is the perfect day to commemorate the famous Jeep 4x4, a car beloved by so many. The history of the Jeep began in 1941, when Willys-Overland Motors of Toledo, Ohio, was contracted by the U.S. military to build nimble and tough off-road vehicles for wartime. Known as the Willys MB, the first jeeps were light enough to be pulled from the mud yet strong enough to haul military weaponry. The cars could ford rivers and climb hills. The jeeps were even used as battlefield ambulances. No one knows for certain the origin of the name “jeep.” Some think it was shorthand for “general purpose,” or GP, vehicles. Others say it came from the popular Eugene the Jeep character from the *Popeye* comic strip. By the end of World War II, Jeeps would endure a rocky transition to civilian life. Over the decades, the Jeep brand moved from bankrupt auto company to bankrupt auto company, giving rise to the infamous “Jeep curse.” Yet Jeeps have always retained their fanbase, and sales remain strong. The Jeep proves as resilient in the suburbs as it once did on the battlefield.

## The Flying Debutante



Ruth Rowland Nichols was a pioneer of aviation during the 1920s and ’30s, setting world records for speed, altitude, and distance. She received her pilot’s license in 1924 after graduating from Wellesley College, becoming the first woman to receive such a license

in the state of New York. It was on April 13, 1931, that Nichols established perhaps her most daring record of all. Flying a state-of-the-art 1928 Lockheed Model 5 Vega Special at a three-kilometer course in Carlton, Minnesota, she recorded a speed of 210.64 mph, a new world record. For her prowess in the cockpit, Nichols was dubbed “The Flying Debutante.” Her Lockheed Vega is on display today at the Smithsonian’s Air and Space Museum.