

What’s Up, Doc?

On April 30, 1938, Warner Bros. released a new Looney Tunes cartoon featuring Porky Pig as a hapless hunter trying to unsuccessfully bag a humorously hyperactive rabbit named Happy. How could audiences know that this rabbit would evolve into Bugs Bunny, one of the most recognizable cartoon characters of all time?



The rabbit in *Porky’s Hare Hunt* bore little resemblance to the Bugs Bunny we all know and love today. This white rabbit wore no gloves, lacked Bugs’ recognizable voice, and did not eat a single carrot! Nevertheless, the rabbit was voiced by Mel Blanc, the future voice of Bugs Bunny, and the short was directed by Ben “Bugs” Hardaway, for whom Bugs Bunny was later named. It would be two years before Bugs made his official debut in *A Wild Hare*. When a redesigned rabbit was requested for the short, Bob Givens went to work and sketched a rabbit based on a Bugs Hardaway design labeled “Bugs’s Bunny.” The name stuck. When audiences got their first glimpse at the new and improved rabbit, the character stuck, too.

The Bugs Bunny featured in *A Wild Hare* already displayed many of the Bugs Bunny trademarks we have come to love. When staring down the barrel of Elmer Fudd’s shotgun, Bugs first utters his catchphrase “What’s up, Doc?” in a Brooklyn-esque accent. The phrase was added by the cartoon’s director, Tex Avery, who had heard the expression a thousand times in his native Texas. Avery figured it a throwaway line and was more surprised than anybody when it left audiences rolling with laughter. As for Bugs’ obsession with munching carrots, this was a habit “borrowed” from Clark Gable’s character in the 1934 movie *It Happened One Night*. In one scene, Gable stands by a fence spouting advice to Claudette Colbert while chewing a carrot and talking with his mouth full. The scene was so famous at the time that audiences immediately got Bugs’ imitation, and it earned the bunny instant panache. His popularity would endure for over 70 years and he would remain Warner Bros.’ most popular and recognizable mascot.

April Birthdays

In astrology, those born from April 1–19 are Rams of Aries, the first sign of the zodiac. Rams are unafraid to forge ahead with passion, zeal, and confidence. Full of optimism and hope, they are both eager to get the job done and unafraid to confront problems head-on. Those born from April 20–30 are Bulls of Taurus. While Taureans enjoy the comforts of luxury, they are unafraid of hard work and dedicate themselves to the tasks at hand. Their steadfast nature makes them reliable.

Resident Birthday

- Billie D. – April 4, 1932
- Dora D. – April 29, 1940
- Estella G – April 6, 1946
- Lois P. – April 14, 1931

The Almighty Dollar



The U.S. dollar is one of the strongest and most traded currencies on the planet, and its symbol \$ is instantly recognizable. It was invented by accident by Oliver Pollack on April 1, 1778. Pollack was an Irish merchant living in New Orleans when the Revolutionary War began. War was expensive. As a British colony in revolt, America could not use British currency, so the Spanish peso became the preferred method of payment. Luckily for Pollack, he had built his fortune in Spanish pesos through illegal trading in the Spanish Caribbean. Pollock lent the Americans 300,000 Spanish pesos, equivalent to one billion of today’s dollars, and kept detailed records of his transactions. In a ledger dated April 1, 1778, Pollack scribbled “ps,” short for Spanish *peso*, in a way that looked like the dollar sign \$. In 1797, founding father Robert Morris adopted the strange symbol for America’s new currency.

Villa South

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Celebrating April

Habitat Awareness Month

Jazz Appreciation Month

Card and Letter Writing Month

April Fools’ Day
April 1

Easter
April 4

Draw a Bird Day
April 8

Ramadan Begins
April 12

Scrabble Day
April 13

World Amateur Radio Day
April 18

Earth Day
April 22

Kiss of Hope Day
April 24

International Dance Day
April 29

Renaissance Man

Leonardo da Vinci was born just outside Florence, Italy, on April 15, 1452. It is most fitting that Da Vinci was born in the springtime, during the season of rebirth. The Renaissance was a period of cultural reawakening after the darkness of the Middle Ages, with Europeans making significant advancements in science, art, philosophy, and politics. Perhaps no one epitomized the era more than Da Vinci. As an artist, scientist, and inventor, he was the ultimate “Renaissance Man.”

Surprisingly, it was not Da Vinci who developed the idea of the Renaissance Man. It was the philosopher, writer, artist, and architect Leon Battista Alberti, a predecessor of Da Vinci who wrote that “a man can do all things if he will.” Alberti called this the *uomo universal*, or “universal man,” a persona that he himself embodied. But if Alberti laid the foundations of the Renaissance Man, Da Vinci built himself up as its masterpiece.

Da Vinci received no formal schooling beyond the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic. He showed so much artistic promise that his father apprenticed him to the master painter Andrea del Verrocchio. It was in Verrocchio’s workshop that Da Vinci’s genius began to shine. Verrocchio found his own work so inferior to his young apprentice’s that he vowed never to paint again. Yet Da Vinci was restless. He was interested in so much more than painting. His passion for science led him to study mechanics, architecture, and human anatomy. Da Vinci began keeping meticulous records of his studies in illustrated notebooks. While the vast majority of what we know of Da Vinci comes from the 6,000 pages of notes and drawings that he left behind, he is best remembered for two paintings: *The Last Supper* and *Mona Lisa*. But perhaps the most important contribution Da Vinci made to humanity was his belief that science and art were complementary disciplines. To truly see the beauty of the world around us, and to fully appreciate Da Vinci’s genius, we must use science to elevate art and employ artistic principles in the pursuit of scientific inquiry.



An Olympian Task

On April 6, 1896, the first modern Olympic Games opened in Athens, Greece, nearly 1,500 years after they had been banned by the Roman



Emperor Theodosius I. The ancient games were a tribute to the Greek god Zeus. Theodosius, a Christian ruler, abolished the games as part of his campaign against paganism. It wasn't until 1894 that the Frenchman Pierre de Coubertin suggested reviving the competition. The 79 delegates in attendance unanimously approved the proposal, and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) was formed.

What drove De Coubertin to revive the lost tradition of the Olympic Games? In 1890, he paid a visit to the Wenlock Olympian Society, organizers of the annual Wenlock Olympian Games, held in Shropshire, England. These games were spearheaded by local doctor William Penny Brookes, a man who believed that sports and physical competition were as necessary for one's self-improvement as morality and education. Brookes organized the first Wenlock Olympian Games in 1850 as a mixture of athletics (such as running, hurdles, quoits, football, and bicycle racing on penny farthings) and traditional country games like blindfolded wheelbarrow races and even an "Old Women's Race" where the senior participants could win a pound of tea. Perhaps the most important aspect of the games was their egalitarianism. Aristocrats and working classes alike were invited to participate, for Brookes keenly felt that athletics and friendly competition could improve the entire town and community.

De Coubertin was deeply inspired by what Brookes had accomplished in Shropshire, and he modeled the IOC after Brookes' Wenlock Olympian Society. Although those very first Olympic Games in Athens featured 280 athletes from 13 nations, the games lacked popular support. Not until 1924 were the first truly successful Summer Olympics held in Paris. After the first Winter Olympics were held later that year, De Coubertin felt his work was finally done, and he retired as IOC president in 1925.

Unnatural History

If ever there was a day to believe in magic and hope for the impossible, it is April 9, Unicorn Day. Unicorns have not entered our collective imagination from myth or legend but from natural history. Various ancient Greek historians recorded the existence of unicorns. The Indus Valley Civilization emblazoned the unicorn on official seals, and a unique animal known as a *re'em*, which many believe to be a unicorn, is even mentioned in the Bible. Even Leonardo da Vinci mentioned them in his famed notebooks. Modern-day scientists may have something in common with these scientists of centuries past. Researchers have discovered evidence of a giant hairy rhino that roamed the grasslands of Eurasia as recently as 39,000 years ago. This Ice Age relic survived long enough to live alongside humans. Scientists speculate that this "Siberian unicorn" might very well have been the origin of many unicorn myths that pervaded so many ancient cultures.

Every Day Is Earth Day



On April 22, 1970, Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin was so concerned about the deteriorating natural landscape of the United States that he organized the first Earth Day, a day of teach-ins on college campuses to raise awareness of air and water pollution. America's passionate response to Earth Day surprised Nelson. Millions of Americans, regardless of political affiliation, race, or creed, banded together to support protecting the environment. By the end of 1970, President Nixon had created the Environmental Protection Agency, and shortly thereafter Congress passed the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act. It's been over 50 years since that first Earth Day, and environmental action has never seemed more urgent. While it is up to major corporations to reduce their carbon footprints, individuals can still do their part by eating more plant-based foods, buying less, composting, and supporting local businesses.

Fountain of Fiction

On April 2, 1513, explorer Juan Ponce de León landed on a peninsula he called "La Florida" and claimed it for the Spanish crown. But why had he come? Some say he was searching for the fabled Fountain of Youth, a spring that granted eternal youth to whoever bathed in its waters.



It is said that the indigenous Taino people of the Caribbean passed on stories of a magical fountain and river of rejuvenation to the Spaniards. Rumors reached De León that this was located somewhere north of Cuba. So with permission of King Ferdinand of Spain, De León set out from Puerto Rico to find it. He set sail with three ships and landed in Florida, yet he never found the Fountain of Youth. But then again, historians argue that was never his intention. Not only was the Fountain of Youth a legend but so was De León's search for it. The truth is that stories of De León's search for the Fountain of Youth were invented by his rivals as a means of ruining his reputation after his death.

In 1508, Ponce de León colonized Puerto Rico and became its governor, but a political rift forced him to give up Puerto Rico to Diego Columbus, the son of Christopher Columbus. As a consolation, King Ferdinand of Spain granted De León permission to colonize and become the governor of the island of Bimini, the modern-day Bahamas, but only if De León could find it and finance the expedition himself. Amongst all the correspondence between De León and the crown, there is not one mention of a Fountain of Youth or search for magical waters. So how was De León's name ever tied to this fable?

After De León's death, Gonzalo Fernandez de Oviedo, a Spanish court historian and ally of Diego Columbus, wrote an account of a bumbling and foolish De León searching for a magical fountain of youth in Florida. While many at the time knew the writings to be a satirical smear campaign against De León, over the centuries Oviedo's fantastical fictions have morphed into fact for those searching for eternal youth.

A Poem Like a Secret

April is Poetry Month, which gives us 30 days to appreciate poems and the creative minds that give them to us. For some, poetry is as necessary to life as breathing. Poems are unique expressions of thoughts and feelings that inspire epiphanies large and small. For others, poetry remains inaccessible and difficult to understand. You can almost hear the desperate cries of "30 days?!" Thirty days' worth of the stuff is torture for some, so for those in need of a smaller dose, April 29 is Poem in Your Pocket Day. On this day, choose any poem you like—long or short, modern or old-timey, humorous or serious, simple or complicated—and carry it in your pocket. Read it to yourself throughout the day or whenever the feeling strikes. Contemplate it. Puzzle over it. Question it. Share it with others, if you like. Or keep it to yourself, like a secret. No one has to know that you have a poem stashed away in your pocket. Above all else, enjoy it. If you need help getting started, consider these lines by Archibald MacLeish:

*A poem should be palpable and mute
As a globed fruit*

Snack Cake Super Stardom



James Dewar started working at Illinois' Continental Baking Company in the 1920s as a delivery boy, hawking pastries from a horse-drawn cart. By 1930, he had risen to plant manager, and on April 6 of that year, he created the most famous snack cake the world has ever known, the Twinkie. Before the cakes were called Twinkies, they were Little Shortcake Fingers, pre-packaged strawberry-filled shortcakes that were available only during the short strawberry-harvest season. The idle factory equipment drove Dewar to invent a new, still nameless, yellow sponge cake filled with banana crème. While on his way to a marketing meeting, Dewar passed a billboard advertising Twinkle Toe Shoes. He had found the Twinkies name, and the rest is snack cake history.