

APRIL – BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Will Keith Kellogg

Will Keith Kellogg was born on April 7, 1860, in Battle Creek, Michigan. He never received a formal education beyond the sixth grade but through hard work and determination built a hugely successful cereal empire. He founded the Kellogg Company at the age of 46. Kellogg started his work life as a stock boy in the hospital where his older brother, John Harvey Kellogg, was physician-in-chief. Gradually, Will was given more responsibility at the hospital. Together, he and his brother conducted extensive research aimed at improving the vegetarian diet of the hospital's patients. The wheat flake was actually discovered by accident but soon became a favorite of the patients, and many requested it be sent to them even after they were released from care. Thus, the Kellogg cereal company got its start. Though Will Kellogg amassed much wealth, he lived a modest life and gave much of his money to charitable organizations. He is probably best known for his invention of Kellogg's Cornflakes.

2. National Garden Month

National Garden Month is the creation of the National Gardening Association (NGA) and is celebrated in April each year. For over 35 years, the NGA has sought to sustain and promote the essential connection between people, plants, and the environment. The organization is a non-profit leader in plant-based education and endeavors to make free materials available to schools and communities. Research has shown that nurturing plants is good for people, improving attitudes toward health and nutrition, helping kids perform better in school, and even fostering an increase in community spirit. The many and varied activities planned for National Garden Month each April offer schools the perfect opportunity to educate students about the value of plants and the beauty, fun, and health benefits of gardening.

3. Wilbur Wright

Wilbur Wright was born on April 16, 1867, in Millville, Indiana. He and his brother Orville were fascinated with the idea of flight. Their interest was first sparked when they received the gift of a toy helicopter-like top from their father. Wilbur began to voraciously read everything he could about aviation. After much trial and error, the Wright brothers created their "flying machine" and made history with the first ever, heavier than air, manned, powered flight in 1903. Their initial achievement was doubted and undermined, however. The brothers persisted and persevered, in spite of opposition, and eventually were able to win over both the public and the bureaucrats. In 1908 and 1909, Wilbur became quite a celebrity, thrilling audiences abroad and at home with his fantastic flights. Wilbur Wright died of typhoid fever in 1912 at the age of 45. His life may have been relatively short, but it was filled with achievements in flight and many other things, as well. In 1965, he was selected for the *Hall of Fame for Great Americans* .

4. Noah Webster's First American Dictionary

Noah Webster published his landmark *American Dictionary of the English Language* on April 21, 1828. He was born on October 16, 1758, in West Hartford, Connecticut. After attending Yale University, Webster studied law and became a lexicographer and prolific writer. Webster did not care much for the American schools of his day. The classrooms were overcrowded with children of multiple grade levels, and sometimes there were no desks. In his opinion, the books were inferior, and the teachers were inadequately trained. While serving as a teacher in New York, he began his life-long quest to advance a distinctively American style of education. He believed Americans should learn from American books. To that end, in 1783, he wrote his own textbook, *A Grammatical Institute of the English Language*. In addition, he created the *American Spelling Book*, which most people called the "Blue-Backed Speller" because of its blue cover. Years later, Webster developed his famed dictionary which taught children how to read, spell, and pronounce words. It was perhaps the most popular American book of its time. The guiding principle of Webster's lexicography was that spelling, grammar, and usage should be based on the living, spoken language. He sought to establish the dignity and vitality of American English. In 1821, Webster co-founded Amherst College. George and Charles Merriam purchased the rights to Webster's dictionary from his estate, and their firm developed the Merriam-Webster dictionary series.

5. Earth Day

Earth Day is observed on April 22nd of each year. It was founded by United States Senator and environmental activist Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin in 1970 for the purpose inspiring awareness and appreciation of Earth's natural environment. Dennis Hayes, a Harvard graduate, was the coordinator of the first Earth Day in 1970, and the focus was the United States. However, an organization founded by Mr. Hayes expanded the observance to an international level in 1990. That year they sponsored events in 141 nations. Today, Earth Day is coordinated globally by the non-profit Earth Day Network and is celebrated in over 175 countries. Early success of Earth Day is largely attributed to an environmental grass-roots movement. Individuals alarmed by pollution, deforestation, destruction of wildlife, and similar concerns rallied around the effort, and it grew in popularity...a popularity that has not waned but grown with each passing year since the celebration's inception. Annually, schools, communities, businesses, and organizations around the world host events promoting the idea that each of us must accept personal responsibility for our role in the preservation and protection of our natural resources and our environment.

6. Mathematics Awareness Month

Mathematics Awareness Month is observed in April each year and is sponsored by the Joint Policy Board for Mathematics. The purpose of the observance is to emphasize the vital role mathematics plays in all areas of our daily lives and to highlight new developments and applications. The Joint Policy Board for Mathematics is an organization comprised of members from the American Mathematical Society (AMS), the American Statistical Association (ASA), the Mathematical Association of America (MAA), and the Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics (SIAM). Mathematics Awareness Month provides math departments and institutions an annual forum for promoting awareness of the fun and beauty of mathematics. Lectures, contests, and special events are planned each year.

7. National Poetry Month

Inspired by the success of Black History Month in February and Women's History Month in March, The Academy of American Poets took action in 1995. They convened a group of publishers, booksellers, librarians, literary organizations, poets, and teachers to discuss the possibility of creating a similar month-long celebration of poetry. After deciding that the idea had more than enough merit, the Academy held its first National Poetry Month in 1996. Each year publishers, booksellers, teachers, librarians, etc. promote poetry by releasing new publications, teaching poetry units, hosting poetry readings, and other such events. In a proclamation issued on April 1, 1996, President Bill Clinton declared: "*National Poetry Month offers us a welcome opportunity to celebrate not only the unsurpassed body of literature produced by our poets in the past, but also the vitality and diversity of voices reflected in the works of today's American poetry....Their creativity and wealth of language enrich our culture and inspire a new generation of Americans to learn the power of reading and writing at its best.*"

8. World Penguin Day

World Penguin Day is celebrated on April 25th each year. This is the time of year when the Adelie Penguins in the Antarctic begin their annual migration. They start migrating in the Antarctic fall season and don't return to their colonies until spring. In synchronized fashion, the Adelies dive into the freezing cold waters and swim north for only a few hundred miles. Penguins are unique in that they are the only migratory birds who swim rather than fly. They stay among icebergs that are floating about the area and feast on krill and other penguin delights. While the Adelies don't really travel very far, it is imperative that they go because the days in Antarctica get darker during this time of year. Since these penguins don't see well in the dark, they need to go north to hunt for food, or they would starve. During their time of migration, they appear to have a grand time and not take life too seriously, according to penguin watchers. The birds mostly just bob playfully around in the ocean and rest on the icebergs until time to return to their homes in Antarctica. World Penguin Day gives people an opportunity to learn more about these interesting and entertaining creatures.

9. Dr. Charles Richter

Dr. Charles Richter was born on April 26, 1900. In 1935, he developed the Richter Scale, which is a system of measurement used to quantify the magnitude of earthquakes on seismographs. He was assisted by Beno Gutenberg. Both gentlemen were affiliated with the California Institute of Technology. The scale was originally intended for use in a particular area of California, but is now used to measure earthquakes globally. Richter's purpose for creating the scale was to separate the vast number of small earthquakes from the less frequent large earthquakes that were happening in the area at that time. The scale measures the total amount of energy released by an earthquake. Its values range from zero to nine, and each increase of one represents a ten-fold increase in energy. Tracking the occurrences of earthquakes allows for the observance of patterns, and it is hoped that these patterns will make it possible to predict the location and intensity of future quakes, thereby enabling area residents to be better prepared.

10. Arbor Day

Arbor Day is celebrated on the last Friday of April each year. In Latin *arbor* means tree. So, Arbor Day is a perfect time to recognize the beauty, usefulness, and importance of trees in our global ecology. The holiday was founded by J. Sterling Morton. He was a pioneer who moved from Detroit, Michigan, to the Nebraska Territory in 1854. He and his wife loved

nature and quickly planted trees, shrubs, and flowers around their new home. Morton was also a journalist and used his position at the newspaper to communicate his love of nature. He shared educational information about trees and encouraged others to plant them. In January of 1872, he proposed to the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture the idea of a tree-planting holiday to be called Arbor Day. They were supportive of the idea, and the very first Arbor Day was celebrated on April 10, 1872, in Nebraska City, Nebraska. Prizes were offered to communities and/or individuals who properly planted the largest number of trees. It is estimated that one million trees were planted on that first Arbor Day. The tradition continues in the United States today and has even spread to other countries. Annually, many special tree planting events are scheduled, and school children learn about the wonder and value of trees.