

MARCH - BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Dr. Seuss

Theodore Seuss Geisel (also known as Dr. Seuss) was born on March 2, 1904, in Springfield, Massachusetts. Dr. Seuss was a writer, illustrator, and cartoonist, who was known best for his children's books. He published 44 of them. They featured imaginative characters, rhyme, and frequent use of tri-syllabic meter. Some of his most beloved stories are *Green Eggs and Ham*, *The Cat in the Hat*, *One Fish Two Fish Red Fish Blue Fish*, *Horton Hatches the Egg*, *Horton Hears a Who!*, and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. Dr. Seuss's birthday has been adopted as the annual date for National Read Across America Day, a reading initiative created by the National Education Association.

2. Music in Our Schools Month

Music in Our Schools Month is celebrated each year in March. There is a yearly theme selected that schools can use to develop various activities that promote the importance of quality music education. These activities showcase the talents of students along with their music teachers and choral and band directors. They also involve parents, community members, and organizations, enlisting them as advocates for music education. This annual celebration began in 1973 and was developed by MENC, which is the National Association for Music Education (formerly known as the Music Educators National Conference). MENC continues to sponsor and coordinate this event each year.

3. Alexander Graham Bell

Alexander Graham Bell was born on March 3, 1847, in Edinburgh, Scotland. He came to the United States in 1871, where he began teaching deaf-mutes. In 1872, he founded a school for deaf-mutes in Boston, Massachusetts. Bell is probably most famous for his invention of the telephone. He started working on his idea of transmitting speech at the age of eighteen. On March 10, 1876, his experiments with the help of assistant Thomas Watson proved successful. Mr. Bell spoke the first full sentence over the wire - "Watson, come here; I want you." Bell introduced the telephone to the world at the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In 1877, he and his investors formed the first Bell Telephone Company.

4. National Anthem Day

National Anthem Day is celebrated on March 3 each year. It commemorates the day in 1931 that the United States Congress officially declared *The Star-Spangled Banner* as our national anthem. Even though many people think Francis Scott Key wrote *The Star-Spangled Banner* during the Revolutionary War, he wrote it during the War of 1812, the second major military conflict between America and Great Britain. While being detained on an enemy ship in the harbor at Baltimore, Maryland, one night during the war, Mr. Key watched the British bombardment of Fort McHenry. The next morning, September 14, 1814, Mr. Key was thrilled to see the American flag still waving over the fort, which inspired him to write his historical song, *The Star-Spangled Banner*.

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5. National Peanut Month

March is National Peanut Month. This tradition had its beginning as National Peanut Week in 1941. In 1974, it became a month-long observance. March is also National Nutrition Month and a great time to highlight the nutritional value of peanuts. Each serving provides a good source of protein, vitamin E, niacin, folate, phosphorus, and magnesium. People are sometimes surprised to learn that peanuts are actually not nuts at all. They belong to the legume family, like beans, peas, and lentils. Dr. George Washington Carver researched and developed more than 300 uses for peanuts in the early 1900s and is considered “The Father of the Peanut Industry” because of his extensive research and promotion of peanut production. Two peanut farmers have been elected President of the United States: Thomas Jefferson and Jimmy Carter.

6. Eli Whitney and the Cotton Gin

Eli Whitney was born on December 8, 1765, in Westboro, Massachusetts. He was a gifted engineer, inventor, manufacturer, and businessman. On March 14, 1794, Whitney received a U.S. patent for his cotton gin. The cotton gin was a machine designed to remove the seeds from the cotton boll. Before that, the seeds had to be hand-picked, which was a tedious and time-consuming process. Whitney's invention sped up and increased the production of cotton grown in much of the South, which made the region prosperous. After the cotton gin, Whitney went into the firearms business, using his mechanical skills to design a system for manufacturing identical and interchangeable parts for rifles. He operated a successful firearms factory near New Haven, Connecticut, until he retired around 1820.

7. St. Patrick's Day

St. Patrick was a Christian missionary born in the 5th century and is credited with bringing Christianity to Ireland. He is known as the Patron Saint of Ireland. St. Patrick's Day, celebrated on March 17th each year, commemorates the anniversary of his death. This religious holiday has been observed by the Irish for over a thousand years. It is marked by special church services, parades, festivals, and the like. The shamrock is Ireland's national emblem, and Ireland is known as the “Emerald Isle” because its plentiful rain and mist create magnificent green landscapes year-round. For this reason, displaying shamrocks and wearing green have become St. Patrick's Day traditions, as well.

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8. Swallows Return to Capistrano

Each year on March 19th, large numbers of cliff swallows (species: *Petrochelidon Pyrrhonota*) return to the San Juan Capistrano Mission in California. They stay until it is time to migrate back to their winter haven in Argentina on October 23rd. Scouts arrive a few days before the rest of the flock, but the majority of the small, energetic birds usually reach their destination on the 19th. They quickly begin rebuilding their mud nests, which cling under the eaves and on the ruins of the old stone church and other buildings throughout the Capistrano Valley. The padres at the mission first noticed the birds' migration pattern centuries ago. The mission has remained an ideal summer home for the swallows because the area offers a great abundance of insects for them to eat. Today, the village of San Juan Capistrano throws a fiesta to celebrate the annual event. Visitors come from all over the world to watch the return of the swallows.

9. Youth Art Month

March is Youth Art Month and was founded by the Crayon, Water Color & Craft Institute in 1961, in cooperation with the National Art Education Association. Originally called Children's Art Month, it was developed to highlight the importance of art participation for all children. In 1969, the observance was renamed Youth Art Month and expanded to include secondary school students. The Crayon, Water Color & Craft Institute later became the Art & Creative Materials Institute (ACMI). In 1984, ACMI created the Council for Art Education and assigned its members the task of overseeing the annual observation of Youth Art Month. Each year activities are planned on a national, state, and local level to promote interest in art among children of all ages.

10. American Red Cross Month

Clara Barton founded the American Red Cross in 1881. Its purpose remains to assist people around the world during times of crisis, such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, fires, and other natural disasters. The Red Cross also prepares and equips ordinary individuals to help when there is a health emergency by providing training in CPR and First Aid. Also, it plays a vital role in maintaining our nation's blood supply by coordinating and receiving donations. The organization is dependent upon volunteers and contributions. Initially, they conducted several major annual fundraisers. During World War II, Red Cross representatives and then honorary chairman President Franklin Roosevelt decided to hold only one annual fundraising campaign. The whole month of March was declared "Red Cross Month" for the first time in 1943. This tradition continues today and highlights the hard work, dedication, and sacrificial giving of all Red Cross workers, donors, and volunteers.