

# Holidays and Celebrations

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# Groundhog Day

By ReadWorks



Dunkirk Dave. Buckeye Chuck. Queen Charlotte.

What do these three odd names have in common? They all belong to furry animals that can maybe see the future. And what are those furry animals? They're groundhogs!

Every year on February 2, all across America, a variety of groundhogs wake up. They go outside, and they check the weather. They check if they can see their shadows.

According to tradition, if it is a sunny day, the groundhog "sees its shadow." If it is a cloudy day, it does not.

February is part of the winter season, and in a lot of the country, it is cold! If the groundhog sees its shadow, legend has it that winter will last at least six more weeks.

But if it does not see its shadow, maybe, just maybe, spring will come early!

There is no evidence from science that groundhogs have special skills to know the weather. But since 1887, it has been a fun game to pretend they do. So each February 2, people hope that the groundhogs won't see their shadows!

# Flag Day



On June 14th, 1777, the leaders of the United States got together. They decided what their new country's flag should look like. They decided that it would have 13 stripes. The stripes would be red and white. The flag would also have a blue corner with 13 white stars. Each star and stripe stood for one of the 13 states.

Over the years, more and more states became part of the country. And so the flag changed. The 13 stripes stayed the same. But the number of stars grew until 1959. That year, the last two states joined the country. That brought the total number of states to 50.

In 1916, President Wilson announced that June 14th would become Flag Day. Flag Day celebrates the decision made by the country's leaders in 1777 about what the flag would look like. All across the country, cities and towns hold parades on Flag Day. People wave the flag proudly. June 14th may not be as famous as the 4th of July, but it is another great day for celebrating the United States.

# Valentine's Day and Chocolate: A Love Story



*Cacao pod cut in half.*

When you think of Valentine's Day, you might also think of chocolate. Many people today share chocolate with loved ones on Valentine's Day. But this was not always the case. In fact, it took thousands of years for chocolate and Valentine's Day to get together.

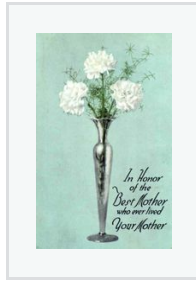
People have enjoyed chocolate for as long as 4,000 years. Chocolate was very important to ancient civilizations like the Mayans and the Aztecs. They made chocolate drinks from cacao beans. Cacao beans were so important in those civilizations that some say they were as valuable as gold.

Spanish explorers brought chocolate back to Spain in the 1500s. Slowly, word of chocolate drinks spread across Europe. Royalty in countries like France and Great Britain thought that chocolate was a magical drink.

By this time, people in Europe were already celebrating Valentine's Day. They would write letters to each other to celebrate. They would share poems, songs, and roses. In all of these Valentines there was one thing missing: chocolate.

Finally, in the 1800s in Great Britain, Richard Cadbury had an idea. His family already made chocolates. He put the chocolates in boxes. He covered the boxes with hearts and cupids. Ever since, people have been sharing chocolate on Valentine's Day. You could say that chocolate and Valentine's Day are the perfect match!

# Hooray for Mom and Dad



*Mother's Day Postcard, 1916*

## Let's Hear it for the Moms!

People have had special days to celebrate mothers for thousands of years. This ancient tradition has made it all the way to our time. In the United States, people celebrate Mother's Day on the second Sunday of May.

Mother's Day has been a holiday in the United States since 1914. That year, President Woodrow Wilson made it a nationwide holiday. But he was not the first person to want Mother's Day to be a holiday. A woman named Anna Jarvis had been working for years to make that happen. She wanted to honor her mother. Her mother and other women had wanted to create a holiday like this as far back as the 1860s.

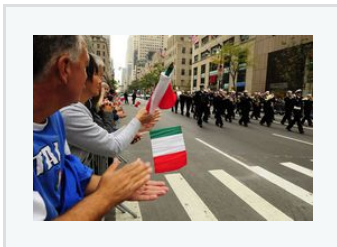
Anna held a Mother's Day celebration in 1907 to honor her mother. She gave away white carnation flowers. These had been her mother's favorite flower. White carnations have been a symbol of Mother's Day ever since then.

## What about the Dads?

At around the same time Anna Jarvis was working to make Mother's Day into a holiday, people were working to set up a Father's Day. The first known celebration of Father's Day in the United States was in 1910. This was only three years after Anna Jarvis held her celebration.

But the leaders in Washington D.C. took much longer to catch on! Some presidents took some steps to make it a holiday. But it wasn't until 1972 that Father's Day became the law of the land. President Richard Nixon at long last made the third Sunday of June Father's Day. Dads finally had their day!

# Columbus Day



*Columbus Day Parade, 2008*

*In fourteen hundred ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.*

It is hard to say for sure who first wrote those famous words. But we do know that in 1492, Christopher Columbus and his crew left Spain. They sailed across the ocean on ships. And in October of that year, they saw land.

The land they saw is now called the Bahamas. When they landed there, the course of history changed forever. There were already Native Americans living in the Bahamas, North America, and South America. But to Columbus, who was from Italy, the land was new. To him, it was a huge discovery. He had found a land that nobody in Europe knew about! He and his crew called it "the new world."

All over North and South America, countries celebrate this discovery in October. In the United States, people have been celebrating Columbus Day for hundreds of years. It became a national holiday in 1937.

Because Columbus was Italian, in many places Columbus Day is a day for Italian Americans to celebrate their history. However, not everyone likes to celebrate the day.

For Native Americans, the arrival of Columbus ended up causing big problems. Many of them were killed. Many lost their land. So to some people, Columbus Day does not seem like such a great day to celebrate.

But no matter how you feel about this day, Columbus Day is a reminder of an event that changed history.