

April Fools' Day: Just Joking [B1]

Anche le tradizioni più semplici e divertenti hanno un'origine storica affascinante. In quali circostanze e per quali motivi il 1° aprile è stato considerato il "Pesce d'aprile" in diverse culture?

April **Fools'** Day, which occurs on 1 April in many countries around the world, is a day for jokes and **pranks**, but nobody knows for sure how it started. However, there are several theories of its origins. One theory connects the day to the **joyful** ancient Roman festival Hilaria, celebrated on 25 March in honour of Cybele, the Mother of Gods, with games, masquerades, and **mockery** to welcome the arrival of spring. Other festivals, such as the two-day Hindu Holi, the Persian Sizdah Bedar, and the Jewish Purim, also focus on joy and fun during spring. However, there is no solid evidence **linking** April **Fools'** Day to these so-called 'renewal festivals'. A common **trait** of these festivals is that during these events, the social order is suspended: servants or children temporarily challenge the authority of masters, parents and teachers. Afterwards, order is reaffirmed and the stability of society is **restored**.

MEDIEVAL OR RENAISSANCE

Hypotheses about April **Fools'** Day also include links to medieval literature, as some see a **glimpse** of April **Fools'** Day in Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales (1392): in one of the stories, a **vain cock** is **tricked** by a **fox**, and the event seemingly occurs on 1 April. A very popular theory connects April **Fools'** Day to the 16th century, when the Christian world adopted the Gregorian calendar. Before this change, the new year was celebrated around 1 April. When the calendar shifted to make 1 January the start of the year, people who continued to observe it in April were mocked as April fools. The first definite mention of April **Fools'** Day comes from a 1561 **Flemish** poem that describes a nobleman tricking his servant on 1 April, sending him on **meaningless** tasks. By the 17th century, the tradition was so widely **spread** that on 1 April serious events were sometimes dated differently to prevent

any possible confusion. It seems that the Treaty of Warsaw (1683) had to be backdated to 31 March!

DIFFERENT TRADITIONS

Different countries developed unique traditions for April Fools' Day. For instance, in Italy and France people pin paper fish on others' backs while shouting "Pesce d'aprile!", or "Poisson d'avril!". The expression is probably linked to fish being plentiful and hungry in the spring, making them easy to catch: the April fish is more gullible than at other times of the year. In Scotland, the day was known as Taily Day, with reference to a pig's tail, and a "Kick me" sign placed on someone's back became a common prank. In Ireland, people played practical jokes by sending someone to deliver a note that read "Send the fool further."

WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

Not everyone loves April Fools' Day, though. Pranks can feel annoying or even mean, especially if they embarrass someone or go too far. Besides, in the age of the internet, April Fools' jokes sometimes add to the flood of fake news, leaving people disorientated or misinformed. April Fools' Day has, in fact, swiftly evolved in recent times, with the rise of social media and mass communication amplifying its reach. What was once a tradition of personal pranks has now expanded to large-scale jokes, often shared by media outlets and online platforms, making it a global event where pranks can go viral.

Glossary

- **pranks** = scherzi
- **shouting** = gridare
- **further** = più lontano
- **flood** = inondazione
- **glimpse** = barlume, assaggio
- **vain** = vanitoso
- **cock** = gallo
- **tail** = coda
- **media outlets** = mezzi di comunicazione
- **restored** = ristabilire
- **meaningless** = insensato
- **spread** = diffondersi
- **misinformed** = disinformata
- **swiftly** = rapidamente
- **linking** = collegare
- **trait** = caratteristica
- **Fools'** = sciocchi, stupidi
- **joyful** = allegro
- **mockery** = burle
- **tricked** = ingannare
- **to catch** = catturare
- **gullible** = credulone, boccalone
- **reach** = portata
- **fox** = volpe
- **Flemish** = fiammingo
- **to be backdated** = retrodatare
- **pin** = attaccare