

# Caltech student traditions and pranks

## A brief overview

Mischief<sup>1</sup>      Managed<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Student Traditions  
California Institute of Technology

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- A claim was once made that the shattering of a pumpkin frozen in liquid nitrogen and dropped from a sufficient height would produce a triboluminescent spark.
- This yearly event involves a crowd of observers, who try to spot the elusive spark.
- The title of the event is an oblique reference to the famous Millikan oil-drop experiment which measured  $e$ , the elemental unit of electrical charge.

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This is a brief introduction of **Caltech pranks**.

## Definition

Prank: a practical joke or mischievous act

## Axiom

Caltech pranks are a key part of the institute's history and identity.

## Examples

See the next slide for a prank example.





**Figure:** “Hollywood is still mad about that,” says Autumn Looijen, author of *Legends of Caltech III: Techer In the Dark*. (Photo downloaded from: <http://brennen.caltech.edu/autobiography/automaster2.htm>)

In May 1987, undergraduates from Page and Ricketts houses combined forces (and several hundred dollars) to purchase enough black and white plastic, transformed the Hollywood sign to read “Caltech”.

(Reference:

<http://www.admissions.caltech.edu/pranks>