

## Editor's notes:

Isn't it amazing what we think we know about children before we even have them? But I'll bet that there are a few things even you may not have known. For example, did you know . . . :

- How many seconds it takes to microwave fish sticks;
- How to change a diaper in total darkness in the back seat of a car on a child who's standing up;
- How brightly the moon can shine at 3 a.m.;
- That you can never own too many sippy cups;
- What Cheerios sound like and feel like when you step on them in bare feet;
- How to balance a lunch box, an extra coat, a briefcase, a diaper bag, and a baby while opening a minivan door;
- How much you can dilute apple juice while still retaining its taste;
- The importance of naps.

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Not all medical instruments need to be high-tech. Two Rice University under-graduates have shown how a basic salad spinner can be used to separate out blood and plasma to determine whether a patient is anemic.

The students told the *Science Daily* website they started working with the salad spinner for an assignment in their Introduction to Bioengineering and World Health class. The challenge was to develop a way to diagnose anemia with a cheap, easily portable device that didn't require much power. The students will field test their device in Ecuador and Swaziland as part of an effort to bring new ideas and technologies to underdeveloped nations.

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If you still haven't done much this summer, here are a few dates that might make it more fun for you this month:

**Civic Holiday, August 1** – This is a statutory holiday celebrated in Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia. Also celebrated this day: Heritage Day in Alberta and New Brunswick Day.

**Friendship Day, August 7** – A time to focus attention on friendships, more important than ever in this fast-paced, highly mobile age. Since 1935, Friendship Day has been observed on the first Sunday in August.

**International Clown Week, August 1-7** – Be a clown! Celebrate the antics of clowns and the wholesome entertainment they provide.

**Elvis Week, August 10-16** – Celebrating the life of Elvis Presley, this Memphis event includes a Graceland Trivia Tour, a candlelight vigil at Graceland Mansion, youth karaoke, and, of course, lots and lots of Elvis tribute artists.

**Victory Day, August 14, 1945** – This day commemorates Japan's surrender to the Allies during World War II.

**International Left-handers Day, August 13** – In honour of all southpaws, many of whom tend toward creative genius. Leonardo da Vinci, Pablo Picasso and Charlie Chaplin were all left-handed.

**Kiss and Make Up Day, August 25** – A day to make amends with people and to work on relationships.

**Twins Day Festival, August 5-7** – Twinsburg, Ohio, is host to the Twins Day Festival, held every year on the first full weekend of August. The first festival in 1976 brought 37 sets of twins; today, it attracts more than 3,000 pairs, (the largest gathering of twins in the world), as well as parents of twins, triplets, and other multiple births.

Festival highlights include a Double Take Parade featuring identical twins, twin talent shows, a group photo and many twin contests for things like most look-alike/least look-alike twins. In 1993, the festival hosted its first double wedding of two sets of twins (two brothers marrying two sisters).

## Take one tablet, and forget about TV?

Tablet computers like the Apple iPad may be new, but they're already making an impact on our habits. A March 2011 survey of over 1,400 U.S. tablet users by AdMob found that 77 percent were spending less time on their traditional desktop or laptop computers since they started using their tablets, and one-third report that they're spending more time with their tablets than watching TV.

Other findings:

- 68 percent use their tablets for at least 1 hour a day;
- 82 percent use them primarily at home;
- 59 percent spend more time on their tablets than they do reading books (although 46 percent reported using their tablet to read e-books);
- 84 percent use their tablets to play games;
- 78 percent use them to search for information;
- 74 percent use their tablets for email.

## Left-Handers Day

Left-Handers International honours the 10 percent of the population that is left-handed. Of that percentage, though, only a few are totally left-handed; many southpaws often use their right hands to golf, bat a baseball, or do other tasks.

Archaeologists note that Stone Age tools indicate that the population was once evenly divided between right-and left-handers. Different theories exist about why right-handedness became more prevalent. One suggests that sun worship played a part because, to follow the sun in the Northern Hemisphere, one must move from left to right throughout the day, thus giving the right side more significance.

Another holds that, because the heart is on the left, warriors had to hold their shields with their left hand to protect their hearts, wielding weapons with their right, which became the dominant hand. Religion also seemed to favour right-handedness.

The Bible contains more than 100 favorable references to the right hand and 25 unfavorable references to the left. This may have been the reason that many parents actively sought to make their left-handed offspring right-handed.

## Napoleon evades a Waterloo onstage

An actor playing Napoleon on the stage was enjoying tremendous reviews in the press, making some of his fellow troupers jealous. An actor who played one of Napoleon's marshals in the production hatched a plan to bring him down to Earth.

During one scene, Napoleon had to read out loud a long letter delivered by the marshal. The actor had never learned the letter by heart; night after night, he simply read the text off the pages his colleague handed him.

So for one performance, the jealous actor brought blank pages for "Napoleon" to recite, and waited for the inevitable fumbling improvisation.

But the quick-thinking actor smiled and handed the pages back to his fellow actor. "Marshal," he said, "please read the letter to me."

## Do you know your gold?

If you have been following the debt crisis looming in the United States, you have probably been following the uptick in the price of gold. Other than the historic price that this metal is selling at these days, how much do you know about this metal?

**Gold:** It fills our dreams, our hopes, and our fantasies. It symbolizes wealth, style, beauty, and power. But how much do you really know about it? Here are a few facts about the precious element that may surprise you:

- We pour more steel in one hour than the volume of gold poured in all of recorded history.

- Experts believe that as much as 80 percent of gold on Earth is still in the ground.
- About 75 percent of all gold ever produced has been extracted since 1910.
- Because it's so pliable, one ounce of gold can be stretched into a thread 50 miles long.
- The biggest nugget of gold ever found was discovered just two inches below ground in Australia in 1869. Measuring 10 by 25 inches, it yielded more than 2,000 ounces of pure gold.
- From 1933 to 1974, private ownership of gold was illegal in the United States.
- The chemical symbol for gold is Au. It comes from *aurum*, the Latin word for gold.
- An atom of gold has 79 protons, an equal number of electrons and 118 neutrons.
- Most of the gold mined in history is still in circulation.

## Why Do We Say It?

*Do you know where these common expressions come from?*

*Barking up the wrong tree* originated with hunting dogs that would bark at the bottom of a tree where they mistakenly thought their quarry was hiding.

When you *can't hold a candle* to someone, you can't measure up. This comes from the practice of apprentices holding a candle so their masters could see what they were doing. If an apprentice couldn't even do that, he was obviously inferior.

If your temper gets out of control and you *fly off the handle*, you're like a loose axe head that flies off its handle.

*Stealing one's thunder:* this phrase originated in 1709 when John Dennis, an English playwright, invented a new method of simulating the sound of thunder on stage that used metal balls rolling around in wooden troughs. Dennis' play was not successful but his technique was, and when he realized it was being used in a later production of Macbeth, he purportedly accused the director of stealing his thunder.

*A flash in the pan,* something with great promise that doesn't come to fruition, dates back to Gold Rush days. A miner might see a flash in his pan that didn't turn out to be gold. Similarly, something *doesn't pan out* when it doesn't meet expectations.



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