

Editor's notes:

Thank goodness, January, the gloomiest month of the year, is over. The days are getting longer and there are unmistakable signs of the sun peeking out more and more.

Here's what else we look forward to in February:

Groundhog Day, February 2 -- While waiting for the groundhog this year, consider that these hibernating mammals also go by "woodchuck," "marmot," and "whistle pig" -- the latter because groundhogs sometimes emit a loud, sharp whistle when frightened. Let's hope for clouds; legend has it that if the groundhog sees his shadow, we're in for six more weeks of winter.

Jell-O Week, February 11-17 -- Kraft Foods sponsors this week to highlight one of its most popular products. More than 300 million boxes are sold each year, which translates into nine boxes every second. When the product first debuted in 1897, the four original flavours were strawberry, raspberry, orange, and lemon; today the company offers 18 varieties.

Valentine's Day, February 14 -- While this holiday of love represents the single most profitable 24-hour period for florists and is a boon to candy and card companies, private investigators also report a surge in business. Many handle double their normal case load as they snoop to see who is buying gifts and spending time with illicit valentines.

Chinese New Year

The Chinese New Year, based on the lunar calendar, begins on February 18. This is the Year of the Pig, one of 12 signs in the Chinese zodiac. People born in 1923, 1935, 1947, 1959, 1971, 1983, and 1995 were born under the sign of the pig and are said to be warm, trusting, and fun-loving.

Famous "pigs" have been Lucille Ball, Humphrey Bogart, Thomas Jefferson, Ernest Hemingway, Alfred Hitchcock, and Ginger Rogers.

Traditionally, the new year is celebrated for a full 15 days, with special observance each day, culminating in the Lantern Festival on day 15, when children carry lanterns in a parade. To ensure good luck and prosperity in the new year, the entire house must be cleaned before New Year's Day, but no one should sweep or dust on the first day because it might sweep good fortune away.

Valentine's Day Around the World

America and Canada are not the only countries that enjoy Valentine's Day. Here are how other countries celebrate the day:

Denmark -- Danes exchange white flowers called snowdrops and send humorous notes in which the sender signs his or her name in dots (one dot for each letter). If the recipient guesses the correct name, the sender will give him or her a candy egg at Easter.

Italy -- On this day, many couples either become engaged or announce their engagements.

Mexico -- On "Dia del Amor y la Amistad" (Love and Friendship Day), Mexicans randomly assign secret friends to receive anonymous gifts (similar to the Christmas tradition of Secret Santa).

Japan and Korea -- Women give chocolate to men they like. On March 14th, it's the men's turn to reciprocate with white chocolate or marshmallows, and this is deemed "White Day." (For those who received nothing on either day, there's Black Day the following month, and those unlucky souls gather to eat noodles with black bean sauce.)

Be Mine

Necco's Sweethearts Conversation Hearts, those pastel sugar candies with short sayings printed on them, celebrate their 105th anniversary this year. The hearts are North America's best-selling candy for Valentine's Day, with more than 8 billion manufactured each year. The idea actually began in the 1860s, when printed paper mottoes appeared in "cockles," candies formed in the shape of a scallop, or cockle belt. Daniel Chase, whose brother, Oliver Chase, founded NECCO, devised a way to print sayings on lozenges, which became popular at parties and weddings. Many of today's sayings date back to the original Conversation Hearts, including "Be Mine," "Be Good," "Be True," "Kiss Me," and "Sweet Talk."

In the 1990s, NECCO began updating some sayings, including "Fax Me" and later, "E-Mail Me." Some of the words may be new, but the candy -- made of sugar, corn syrup, gelatin, gums, colouring, and flavouring -- hasn't changed since it debuted in 1902.

Happy Valentines Day!



Oscar Quiz

In honour of this month's Academy Awards, see if you can match these famous lines with the actors and actresses who said them, the correct movie and the character they played.

Line

1. As God is my witness, I'll never go hungry again.
2. Go ahead, make my day.
3. You can't handle the truth!
4. Love means never having to say you're sorry.
5. Toto, I've got a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore.
6. You talking' to me? You talkin' to me?
7. May the Force be with you.
8. Houston, we have a problem.
9. Yo, Adrian!
10. Here's looking at you kid.

Character

- A. Jim Lovell
- B. Dorothy Gale
- C. Scarlett O'Hara
- D. Rick
- E. Harry Callahan
- F. Rocky Balboa
- G. Col. Nathan Jesse
- H. Travis Bickle
- I. Obi-Wan Kenobi
- J. Jennifer Cavalleri

Movie

1. Star Wars
2. Casablanca
3. Gone With the Wind
4. Rocky
5. Love Story
6. Taxi Driver
7. The Wizard of Oz
8. Sudden Impact
9. Apollo 13
10. A Few Good Men

Actor

- A. Clint Eastwood
- B. Vivien Leigh
- C. Alex Guinness
- D. Humphrey Bogart
- E. Tom Hanks
- F. Robert De Niro
- G. Ali MacGraw
- H. Judy Garland
- I. Jack Nicholson
- J. Sylvester Stallone

Answers: 1C3B; 2E8A; 3G1O; 4J5G; 5B7H; 6H6F; 7L1C; 8A9E; 9F4J; 10D2D

The Hollywood Walk of Fame



The Hollywood Walk of Fame is the world's most famous sidewalk, featuring a long line of bronze star-shaped plaques embedded in pink and charcoal terrazzo squares. It runs on Hollywood Boulevard from Gower Street to LaBrea Avenue, and around the corner on Vine St. from Yucca St. to Sunset Boulevard. It was created in 1958 by a Southern California artist, Oliver Weismuller, while working for the city.

The stars honour five categories of celebrities: movie stars and directors (represented by a motion picture camera), television personalities (a TV set); singers, songwriters, and recording artists (a phonograph record); radio stars (a microphone); and live stage performers (comedy-tragedy masks). More than 2,000 have their names on stars, with two performers usually added each month.

The first star was awarded to actress Joanne Woodward. Non-human characters, such as Mickey Mouse, Kermit the Frog, Big Bird, Lassie, and Rin Tin Tin have been honoured.

Celebrities can have more than one star; Gene Autry has the most, one in each category. Winners are determined by the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce.

Prevent Procrastination

Most of us procrastinate from time to time. If one of your new year's resolutions is to minimize this habit, try these tips from the efficiency consultants at Pace Productivity:

- Create an environment that is conducive to work. Close the door, clean off your desk and hold your phone calls.
- Make a to-do list, scheduling tasks in order of importance.
- Schedule unpleasant tasks early in the day and reward yourself for doing them.
- Set deadlines for yourself and share them with your colleagues. Ask them to check up on you.
- Don't get caught up in being perfect. Maintain your high standards but recognize when good is good enough.