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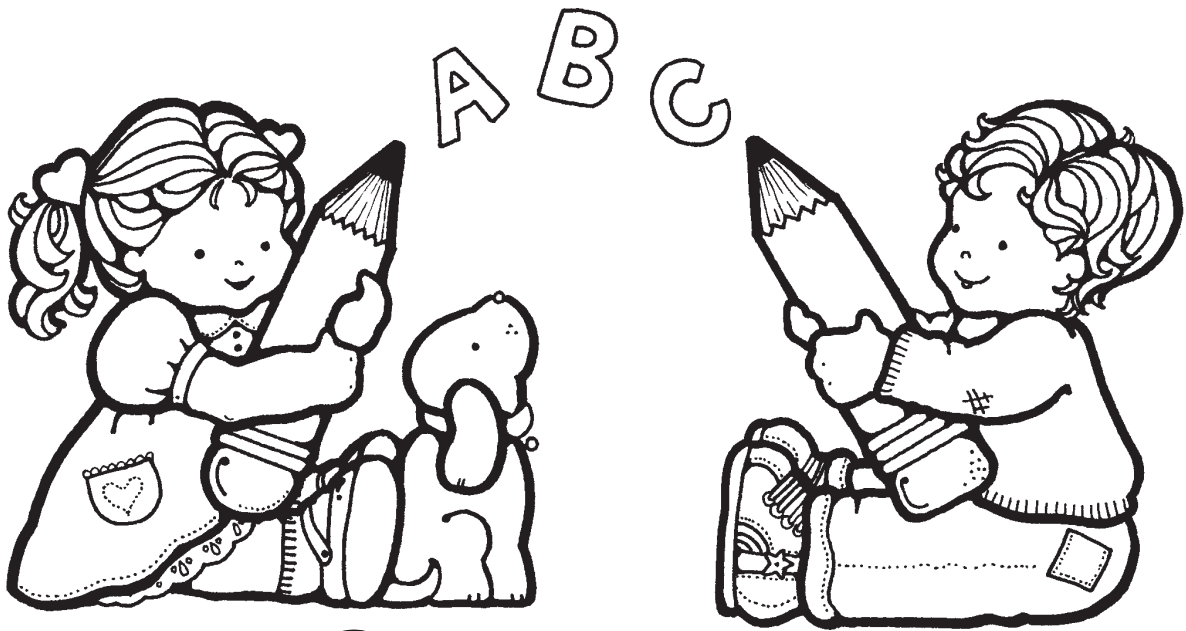
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Our Calendar

A calendar is a system of measuring and recording the passage of time. The first calendars were developed about 5000 years ago by the Babylonians. These calendars were not very accurate. Clocks had not been invented yet to keep track of time, so people watched the changing seasons. But the early people did not know that the seasons were caused by the earth's orbit around the sun. They studied the sun, and they also studied the stars and the changing positions and shapes of the moon. They recorded the changes they saw in the sky for hundreds of years. Then they tried to predict exactly when winter would arrive so that they could prepare for it.

The calendar we use today comes from early Rome. Romulus, the first legendary leader of Rome, probably borrowed it from the Greeks around 738 B.C. It had 10 months and a total of 304 days in a year. The early Romans seem to have ignored the other 61 days of the year that came in the middle of winter!

By 46 B.C., the Roman calendar was three months ahead of the seasons. Autumn came in July, and winter came in September. Religious holidays and festivals came during the wrong seasons. Finally, Julius Caesar, the Roman Emperor, asked for help in improving the calendar. He told the people to ignore the moon in calculating the calendar. A lunar month is 29 1/2 days long. If the lunar month is used for 12 months, the year lasts 354 days. This is 11 days short of a solar year. Caesar knew this was part of the problem.

To correct the errors in the calendar, Caesar declared a "year of confusion" in the year 46 B.C. It lasted 445 days, instead of 304 days. Then the Julian calendar started. It had 12 months, 365 days, and 6 hours in a year. Unfortunately for the Romans, this was not quite right. A true solar year lasts 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, and 46 seconds. This is how long it takes for Earth to orbit the sun. Caesar's calendar was 11 minutes and 14 seconds too long. This seems very small, but by the year 1582, the Julian calendar had gained 10 days.

In October 1582, Pope Gregory XIII wanted to correct the calendar. With astronomers' advice, he dropped 10 days from that month and began the leap year. Every February would have an extra day in century years that can be divided by 400. This was the Gregorian calendar. It is within 26 seconds of the true solar year. Many countries, including the United States, still use the Gregorian calendar! We have only made a small correction: in the years 4000 and 8000 there will be no extra day added.

Many countries in Europe began using the Gregorian calendar immediately. But England and its American colonies refused to change until 1752. Russia didn't change until 1918, and Turkey didn't change until 1927. When England changed to the Gregorian calendar, the Julian calendar was 11 days in error. September 2 became September 14 overnight. People thought their lives had been shortened! Most of England's holidays and festivals were moved. Some were cancelled. Workers complained because they had 11 days less to work to pay their bills. They carried signs saying, "Give us back our 11 days!"

From time to time, people still suggest ways to change our calendar. But few people want to change it. An old English farmer may have expressed people's feelings best when he said, "A crowing rooster and an empty stomach is the only calendar I need!"

Labor Day

A holiday for working people is an old idea. Before the year 0, the Greeks had set aside a day when laborers paraded in the streets carrying torches. Many centuries later in England, guild members celebrated together. A guild was a group of people who were learning the same skills and doing the same work. Each guild had its own patron saint. A day was picked for the members to honor the saint, and feasts and festivals were held on that day. There were as many saints honored as there were guilds. The celebrations were held on different days. Eventually, most of the countries of Europe decided to celebrate laborers on the first of May. This became known as Labors' Holiday or Labor Day.

In America, there was no holiday for the laboring people. Peter J. McGuire is the person who first suggested setting aside a day to honor laborers. He was a member of the Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, an organization like a union or guild. Peter proposed the first Monday in September for Labor Day. He chose this day because it was about midway between Independence Day and Thanksgiving, the two great holidays Americans already celebrated. He also felt that autumn was one of the most pleasant seasons of the year. Families were returning to the city from vacations, and children were making plans to return to school. Peter made his proposal in May 1882, and on September 5 of that year, the first Labor Day celebration was held in New York City.

The idea spread rapidly. Oregon was the first state to make it an official observance. By 1893, 20 states took the same action. A bill to make Labor Day a national observance was introduced into the United States Congress. It was passed, and President Cleveland signed it into law in June 1894. Labor Day became very popular. In 1910, the Federal Council of Churches established the day before Labor Day as Labor Sunday, and in 1917, the council prepared a Labor Sunday message to be read in churches. The practice still exists in some churches.

In early days, most Labor Day activities started with a workers' parade that ended at a park or meeting area. The parade was followed by a large picnic. Special guests were invited to speak to the laborers. While children played, men and women listened to concerts. Some towns and cities became famous for their Labor Day programs.

Following World War II, the Labor Day celebration changed. Labor Day became a day for joining crowds at beaches and resorts or a day for resting at home. It was no longer a day to gather with coworkers and their families. Today it is the laborer's day to spend as he or she wishes.

In 1906, Peter McGuire died. To show their appreciation of him, the Chicago Union of Carpenters Brotherhood donated a bronze memorial plaque in his honor at their headquarters. In 1961, the plaque was moved to the national headquarters in Washington, D.C. In 1956, a special stamp was issued by the Postal Service to honor laborers and Peter J. McGuire.