

## Ace of Spies

It is fitting that Sidney Reilly, the man known as the “Ace of Spies” and the “greatest spy in history,” had a mysterious past. While no one truly knows where he was born, where he was trained, the true nature of his adventures and exploits, or even his birth name, Reilly’s end is all too well-known. In November of 1925, Soviet agents caught and executed the super spy, a grim ending that turned the man into a myth.

Some reports suggest that Reilly began his life of duplicity during his teenage years. As a teenager, he faked his own death and left Russia for Brazil, where he worked odd jobs, changed his name to Pedro, and eventually got a job as a cook for British intelligence in 1895. During a mission, he allegedly saved the entire group, an act that won him safe passage to London. But still another story says that, during the same year, Reilly was in



Paris, where he killed two Italian anarchists aboard a train before resurfacing in London. Either way, it was while living in London that he was recruited as an informant for Scotland Yard’s Special Branch, a precursor to the British secret service.

Through his contacts at Scotland Yard, Reilly eventually went to work in Russia, where he was recruited by the Japanese. He became a double agent, gathering intelligence for both Great Britain and Japan. The life of a spy certainly suited Reilly. He would later travel to Germany to steal technology and weapons. He would appear again in Russia, orchestrating the assassination of Vladimir Lenin and a coup against the Bolsheviks. He would fake German acts of sabotage to draw the United States into World War I.

Whether these exploits and others were factual or not, Reilly’s death catapulted him to near-mythical status. During the 1930s, Sidney Reilly was a household name. He was the model for Ian Fleming’s James Bond. He became the villain in countless Russian movies. In 1983, he was depicted by Sam Neill in the British television series *Reilly, Ace of Spies*.

## November Birthdays

In astrology, those born from November 1–21 are Scorpions of Scorpio. Scorpions are passionate, dedicated, and resourceful. Scorpions may seem intimidating, but they are just no-nonsense people who value honesty and loyalty above all else. Those born from November 22–30 are Archers of Sagittarius. The Archers are the travelers of the zodiac, curious and energetic, with open minds craving new experiences and challenges.

Will Rogers (cowboy) – Nov. 4, 1879  
 Vivien Leigh (actress) – Nov. 5, 1913  
 Carl Sagan (astronomer) – Nov. 9, 1934  
 Tracy Morgan (comedian) – Nov. 10, 1968  
 Charles, Prince of Wales (royal) – Nov. 14, 1948  
 RuPaul (model) – Nov. 17, 1960  
 David Ortiz (ballplayer) – Nov. 18, 1975  
 Goldie Hawn (actress) – Nov. 21, 1945  
 Robin Roberts (journalist) – Nov. 23, 1960  
 Charles Schulz (cartoonist) – Nov. 26, 1922  
 Chadwick Boseman (actor) – Nov. 29, 1976

## All Spruced Up



Howard Hughes rose to fame in the 1920s as a film director but

later gained infamy as a recluse and eccentric. In 1932, Hughes used the fortune he had built in film to found his own aircraft company. When the United States entered World War II in 1941, the U.S. government commissioned Hughes to design a massive flying boat that could carry men and supplies over long distances. Steel was hard to come by thanks to wartime rationing, so Hughes’ team used wood, laminated birch, and spruce, to construct what was then the world’s largest aircraft. The so-called *Spruce Goose* had a wingspan longer than a football field, boasted eight propeller engines, and could carry 700 soldiers. By the time the massive plane was completed in 1946, the war was over. But Hughes swore it would fly and it did, once, on November 2, 1947.

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## Celebrating November

**Native American Heritage Month**

**Inspirational Role Models Month**

**Adopt a Turkey Month**

**Dia de Los Muertos**  
*November 1*

**Diwali**  
*November 4*

**World Chili Day**  
*November 6*

**Veterans Day**  
*November 11*

**International Men’s Day**  
*November 19*

**Game & Puzzle Week**  
*November 21–27*

**Thanksgiving Day**  
*November 25*

**Hanukkah**  
*November 28–December 6*

**Mason Jar Day**  
*November 30*

## Deliberate Acts of Kindness

The phrase “survival of the fittest” is often used to describe the tough tactics people use to get ahead in modern society, but scientists have determined that a far more effective coping strategy might be “survival of the kindest.” The second week of November is World Kindness Week, a perfect opportunity to make kindness a part of our everyday routines.

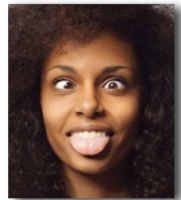
Humans have evolved into one of Earth’s most social species. While many people tend to think of humans as inherently competitive with each other, fighting for resources, mates, or even promotions at work, scientist and psychologist Dacher Keltner takes another point of view. He believes that humans are built to be kind. Our generosity, self-sacrifice, play, modesty, compassion, awe, gratitude, and even embarrassment all present powerful evidence of our innate drives for kindness and caring. Research shows that when people act kindly toward others, they take more pleasure in society and are more likely to feel satisfied and happy. New research suggests that our vagus nerve in particular may have evolved to support and encourage altruistic behaviors. Perhaps stimulation of the vagus nerve is what prompted writer Anne Herbert to write, “Practice random kindness and senseless acts of beauty” on a placemat in a California restaurant in 1982.

Herbert’s notion that we should practice random acts of kindness is not new. Jews have practiced *mitzvahs*, or good deeds for others, for millennia. In the cafés of Naples, Italy, hardworking people who unexpectedly come into money pay for two coffees, a tradition called *caffè sospeso*, taking one for themselves and leaving the other for someone less fortunate. In 2006, the Free Hugs Campaign was launched on YouTube, encouraging people to share the simple act of a hug with others in need of comfort. For some, kindness is easy. For others, sharing public acts of kindness may take practice. Start by doing one small, kind thing for someone. As the Greek fabulist Aesop once said, “No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.”



## Tongue Twisters

Serious speakers celebrate the second Sunday of November with especially circumlocutory spiels. Say that five times fast because November 14 is Tongue Twister Day!



Many of the first tongue twisters were not intended to entertain. J.W. Shoemaker included several in his 1878 textbook *Practical Elocution* as a means to improve pupils' speech and diction. He included such doozies as, "Some shun sun-shine; do you shun sun-shine?" and "A shot silk sash shop." Elocution was a regular part of the school-day routine, with emphasis not only on proper pronunciation and diction but on modulation of pitch, proper conveyance of emotion, and integration of physical movement.

The most famous tongue twister of all, regarding Peter Piper and his peck of pickled peppers, first appeared in print in 1813 in, you may have guessed it, a textbook titled *Peter Piper's Practical Principles of Plain and Perfect Pronunciation*. Historians believe that the rhyme was probably in common use long before that. Peter Piper himself may have been based on the 18th-century French horticulturalist and botanist Pierre Poivre, who introduced spices like nutmeg and clove to the French islands of Mauritius, Réunion, and Seychelles. The word *poivre* means "pepper" in French, leading many followers to draw a connection between the man and the tongue twister.

If you think the aforementioned tongue twisters were difficult, then you might not want to try these next ones. In 2013, the Acoustical Society of America gathered at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for their 166th meeting. In an experiment to investigate speech patterns, researchers asked participants to recite different tongue twisters. The most difficult one of all was "Pad kid poured curd pulled cod," usurping "The sixth sick sheik's sixth sheep was sick" as the world's toughest tongue twister. Try saying each five times fast to determine for yourself which one is more challenging.

## Better Off Red

November 5 is Love Your Red Hair Day, and love it while you still can because rumors persist that the recessive redhead gene is causing redheads to go extinct! Luckily, this rumor is not true. Red hair is caused by a mutation of the MC1R gene, which carries instructions for making a protein called the melanocortin 1 receptor. Due to the mutation, this protein creates a type of melanin, or pigment, called pheomelanin, that causes red hair, freckles, and light skin that can burn easily. Because the MC1R gene is recessive (like blue eyes), two parents both have to carry the gene for the possibility of it being expressed in their offspring. With only about 1–2% of the world's population possessing the recessive genes for red hair, some folks worry that the number of redheads will shrink until there are none left. Luckily, even those who do not have red hair may still carry the gene. All it takes is a lucky roll of the genetic dice for red hair to be expressed in an individual. This is why red hair sometimes skips generations and appears years down a family line.

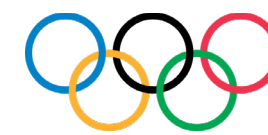
## First in Space



On November 3, 1957, a stray dog from the streets of Moscow named Laika made history by becoming the first organism to orbit Earth in outer space, a journey that paved the way for human space flight. In 1957, humanity knew little about the effects of space conditions on organisms. Many scientists believed that living things would not survive the launch off the planet's surface, much less the conditions of outer space. While Laika's trip was always considered to be one way, this did not stop the scientists from growing to love her. Before the launch, one scientist brought her home to play with his children. When Laika was placed inside the rocket capsule, the technician kissed her on the nose. Over the decades since Laika's trip into space, she has become a prominent figure in both Russia's history and popular culture around the world.

## Olympic Revival

In 1832, after years of fighting for independence against the Ottoman Empire, the Kingdom of Greece finally became a sovereign state. Evangelos Zappas had joined the fight, rising to the rank of major in the revolutionary army. After the war, he moved to Romania and became one of the wealthiest men in Eastern Europe. These two factors—Zappas' passionate patriotism and his vast personal resources—led him to singlehandedly finance the revival of the Olympic Games in Greece on November 15, 1859.



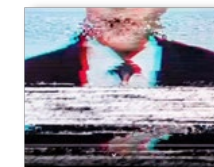
Zappas found inspiration for reviving the Olympics from the writings of the poet Panagiotis Soutsos. Greece's long subjugation by the Ottoman Empire, especially when contrasted with the glories of ancient Greece, was a source of national embarrassment. In 1833, after the country obtained independence, Soutsos penned a poem entitled *Dialogue of the Dead* in which he imagines that the ghost of the philosopher Plato returns to Greece only to lament its fall from glory. Plato asks, "Where are all your theatres and marble statues? Where are your Olympic Games?" Soutsos would eventually petition the Greek government to declare a national holiday commemorating Greek independence, with the chief festivities of the day being a revival of the Olympics. Interest in resurrecting the Olympic Games grew for 20 years, finally culminating in Zappas' offer to fully fund the revival.

In 1856, Zappas made a personal plea to King Otto of Greece, offering not only to fund the games but to provide cash awards to the victors. Greek government officials were not enthusiastic. They worried that the Olympics, as an ancient tradition, would hinder Greece's push to modernize the country, but King Otto was won over by the prospect of Zappas' full sponsorship. On November 15, 1859, the first modern Olympic Games was held in Athens. Upon Zappas' death in 1865, he left a fortune dedicated to funding future Olympiads, which would be held in 1870, 1875, and 1888.

## Super Tuesdays

Election Day in the United States always falls on the first Tuesday after the first Monday of November. In 1792, federal law allowed states to vote at any time within a 34-day period before the first Wednesday in December. Most states chose an early date in November because the fall harvest season had ended and the harsh winter weather had not yet begun. Also, the counting of election results would coincide with the new calendar year. In an agrarian society, a Tuesday election also allowed voters to attend church on Sundays, spend Monday traveling to the polls, and then make it back to their farmer's markets on Wednesday to sell produce. It wasn't until 1845 that Congress mandated the entire country vote on a uniform day so that the elections of one state could not influence those of another. While the Tuesday date has stood for decades, it is not without controversy. Some people argue that holding elections on a workday precludes certain workers from voting. Some states have responded by making Election Day a holiday, while others continue to lobby for Election Day to be moved to a Saturday.

## Voice from Outer Space



On November 26, 1977, viewers of a news program in the south of England were shocked by a strange and unexpected interruption. The picture wobbled and a deep, otherworldly voice announced, "This is the voice of Vrillon, a representative of the Ashtar Galactic Command." The name Ashtar might have been familiar to some listeners. In 1952, George Van Tassel, an avid believer in UFOs, claimed that he had communicated telepathically with an alien of the same name. More than 20 years later, Ashtar was back, this time in the form of Vrillon. The voice spoke for six minutes, urging Earthlings to give up their "weapons of evil." While authorities are certain the transmission was a hoax, the person claiming to be Vrillon was never found.