



Note to teacher: Read this article aloud to your students

What is the Gregorian Calendar?

The Gregorian calendar is used throughout most of the modern world. Invented in 1582, the new calendar was considered an improvement on the earlier Julian model (and all other calendars used before that). In the Gregorian calendar, four years make up a cycle, with an extra or “leap” day added to the fourth year to keep the dates and months in line with the seasons and solar cycle.

With the new calendar system, there were twelve monthly divides of similar, although unequal lengths. February, the second month, was the only month to contain 28 days, so the added day in leap years became February 29th. Leap years exist once every four years, and only occur in years that are divisible by four. There is an exception to the divisible-by-four-rule, and that is if the year ends in -00 (such as the year 2100). To make things really confusing, there is one more exception to the exception. Years ending in -00 that *can* be divided by 400 *are* in fact leap years (so the year 2000 was a leap year).

The Gregorian calendar was decreed valid by Pope Gregory XIII on February 24, 1582, but was not accepted by any European nations until October of that year. The first countries to begin the use of the calendar were Spain, Portugal, and Italy. France and Holland quickly followed, both adopting the new method before the end of 1582.

Non-Catholic countries, such as England, understandably were hesitant about accepting a calendar that was created to further the goals of the Roman Catholic Church. Eventually, the benefits of a common date system became impossible to dismiss. While the calendar had been created at the whim of the Catholic Pope, its scientific basis made a lot of sense.

It took several centuries, but by 1929 most countries in the world had begun using the Gregorian calendar. China was the last major nation to adopt the system. Other countries, such as Japan, accepted the use of the calendar for dealings with the western world (America and Europe), but still maintained local systems in place for centuries.

In today's world, all modern nations use the same calendar. Still, some people think it might be a good idea to change the calendar again. Not because it doesn't work, but because it is so confusing. They propose a simpler calendar where all of the months have the same amount of days, and each weekday always falls on the same date in the month. But it would take a lot of convincing to change the calendar... just like it did nearly 500 years ago.

Notes: After reading the article, discuss why it was so complicated to create a calendar and have everyone accept it. Is there room for improvement in our new calendar? Would it be easy or difficult to change?