

Stories of Words: Names



By: Elfrieda H. Hiebert
& Lynn W. Kloss



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HELLO
my name is

Jessica
Mak

Learning About Words

What's your name? Maybe you were named for your mom or dad, or for someone else in your family. Many families name babies after an older relative to honor him or her and to carry on the person's name.

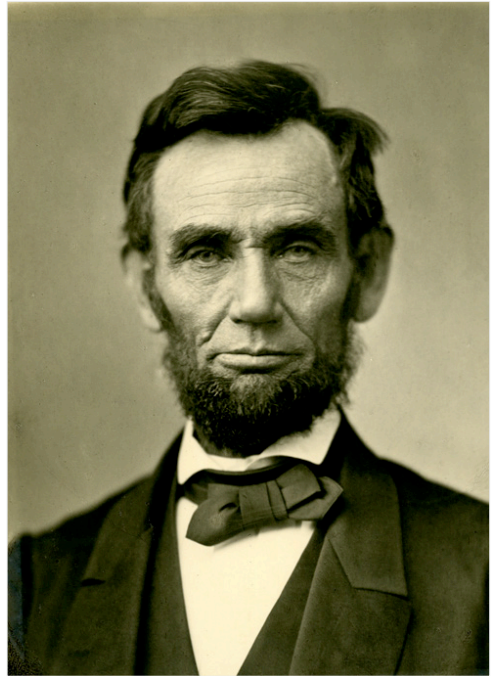
Names say a lot about a person. Your first name was given to you by your parents, and it might say something about their hopes for you. You may have the same last name as your dad or your mom. Your last name could be a combination of their names, too. It might also be a name that your parents chose for you. Last names usually link a person with a family. In any case, if you are named for someone, your name honors that person.

Sometimes places and things are named in this way, too—to honor a person or event, or to keep an important memory alive. Words like this, in which people’s names are used to form new words, are called *eponyms*. *Eponym* is a Greek word that means “to give one’s name to something.”



You might notice the base word, *-nym*, in *eponym*. It means “a name.” Think of other words you know that have this base word: *synonym*, which means “the same name,” and *antonym*, which means “the opposite of the name.” The prefix *epo-* in *eponym* means “called after,” so an eponym is a word that uses a name in a new way.

You can learn a lot about a place and its history by finding out about its name. You can find out what people valued and who their heroes were.



1

WHERE ARE YOU?



What is your state's name? Many states were named for important people, such as a kings, queens, or explorers. This is the most common type of eponym.

British Names

Do you live in Virginia or Georgia? Before they became states, these areas were colonies of the British Empire. Virginia was settled in the 1580s, when Queen Elizabeth I ruled Great Britain. The settlers decided to name the colony Virginia, which comes from a nickname for Queen Elizabeth I. Queen Elizabeth I never married, and so she was known as the Virgin Queen.

Georgia was founded later, in 1733. At that time, King George was on the British throne, so the settlers named their colony after him.



French Names

In the 1680s, a French explorer named La Salle traveled down the Ohio River to where it joined the Mississippi River. Eventually, he reached the area that is now Louisiana. La Salle claimed most of the land he traveled through for France, and he named it La Louisiane, after King Louis XVI of France. In French, *La Louisiane* means “the land of Louis.”

La Louisiane, which stretched as far north as Canada and as far west as the Rocky Mountains, was eventually called the Louisiana Territory. In 1890, Thomas Jefferson purchased the Louisiana Territory from France. The area was then called the Louisiana Purchase. Finally, it became the state of Louisiana.

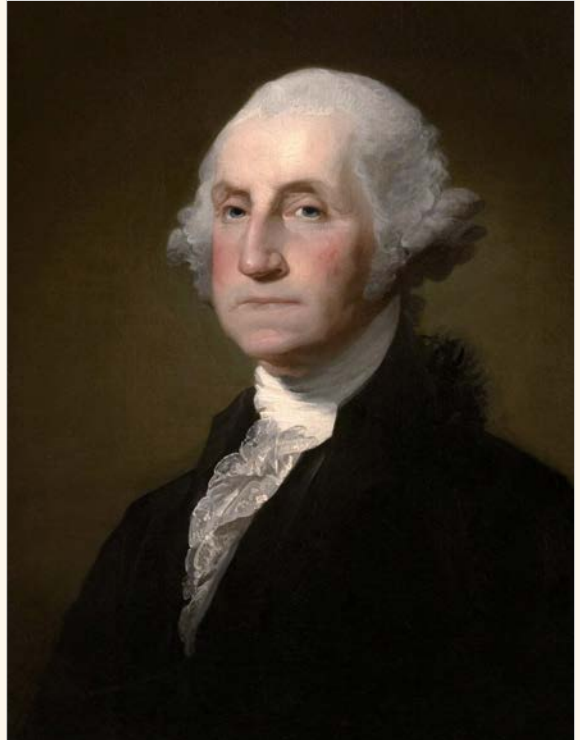


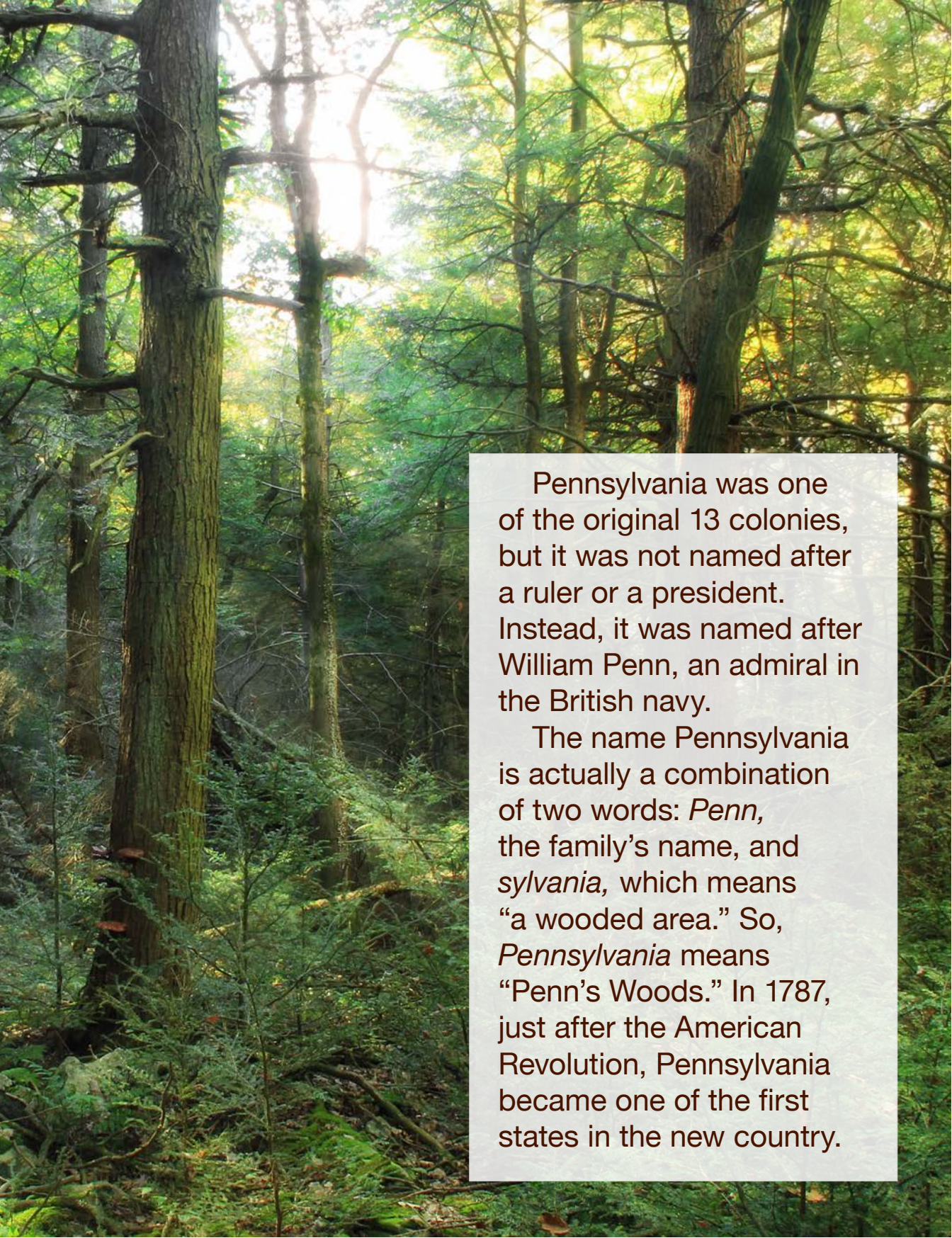
American Names

Not all of the states were named for a king, a queen, or an explorer. Some were named for people who were famous for other reasons. Washington and Pennsylvania are two examples of this kind of eponym.

The state of Washington was not one of the original 13 U.S. colonies. Those colonies were all in the eastern United States. The area that is now Washington State was originally part of the Oregon Territory, which is in the western United States.

The Oregon Territory was large, and in 1853 it was divided into two smaller territories. The northern part was named the Washington Territory to honor George Washington, the country's first president. In 1889, it became the state of Washington.



A photograph of a dense forest with tall, slender trees. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating a bright, dappled light effect. The ground is covered in green ferns and other forest floor vegetation.

Pennsylvania was one of the original 13 colonies, but it was not named after a ruler or a president. Instead, it was named after William Penn, an admiral in the British navy.

The name Pennsylvania is actually a combination of two words: *Penn*, the family's name, and *sylvania*, which means "a wooded area." So, *Pennsylvania* means "Penn's Woods." In 1787, just after the American Revolution, Pennsylvania became one of the first states in the new country.

You can find all of these state names in an atlas of the United States. Oddly enough, the word *atlas* is itself an eponym.

In the 16th century, a mapmaker named Mercator drew the figure of Atlas, a Greek god, in a book of maps. Atlas was one of the gods called Titans, who were large and powerful.

In Greek mythology, Atlas was said to hold the pillars that kept the heavens and the earth apart. He's often shown holding the world on his shoulders. That is how Mercator drew him in his book of maps. Eventually, Atlas's name became an eponym, representing any book of maps.



2

NAMING THE MONTHS

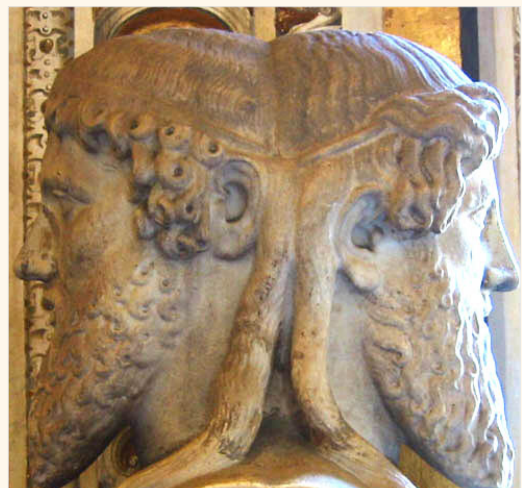
You've just read that many state names are eponyms, named for famous people in U.S. history. The names of the months are eponyms, too.



Calendars were invented to help farmers know when to plant and harvest their crops. They also helped people remember events that occurred regularly. These included the flooding of rivers, religious festivals, and the phases of the moon. The word *month* actually means “moon,” since calendars were originally based on the phases of the moon.



The ancient Romans invented the calendar we use today, and they named their months to honor their gods, goddesses, and emperors. The first month, January, was named for the Roman god Janus. He was the god of beginnings, of sunrise and sunset, and of doors. He is shown as having two faces: one that looks forward and one that looks backward. This relates to the way people look at a new year: as a time for looking both to the past and to the future.



Other months were also named for Roman gods and goddesses. March, for example, was named for Mars, the god of war. May was named for Maia, the goddess of spring. June was named for Juno, the chief goddess of the Romans.

Just as the people of the United States named Washington State and Washington, D.C., to honor a president, the Romans named two months to honor their emperors. July is named for the emperor Julius Caesar, and August is named for Augustus Caesar.

The last four months of the year were named for their place in the original Roman calendar. At first, the Roman calendar started in March. That makes September the seventh month, and its name reflects this. *Septem* is the Latin word for “seven.” Likewise, *octo* (as in *October*), is the Latin word for “eight.” *Novem* (*November*) is the Latin word for “nine,” and *decem* (*December*) is the Latin word for “ten.”





Only February and April are not eponyms. *February* is from the Latin word *februare*, which means “to make something pure.” In February, the Romans had a festival of forgiveness. The origin of *April* is not as clear. It’s possible that *April* is from the Latin word *aperire*, which means “to open.” This may have related to the fact the many flower buds open in April.

3

BUILDING TO THE SKY

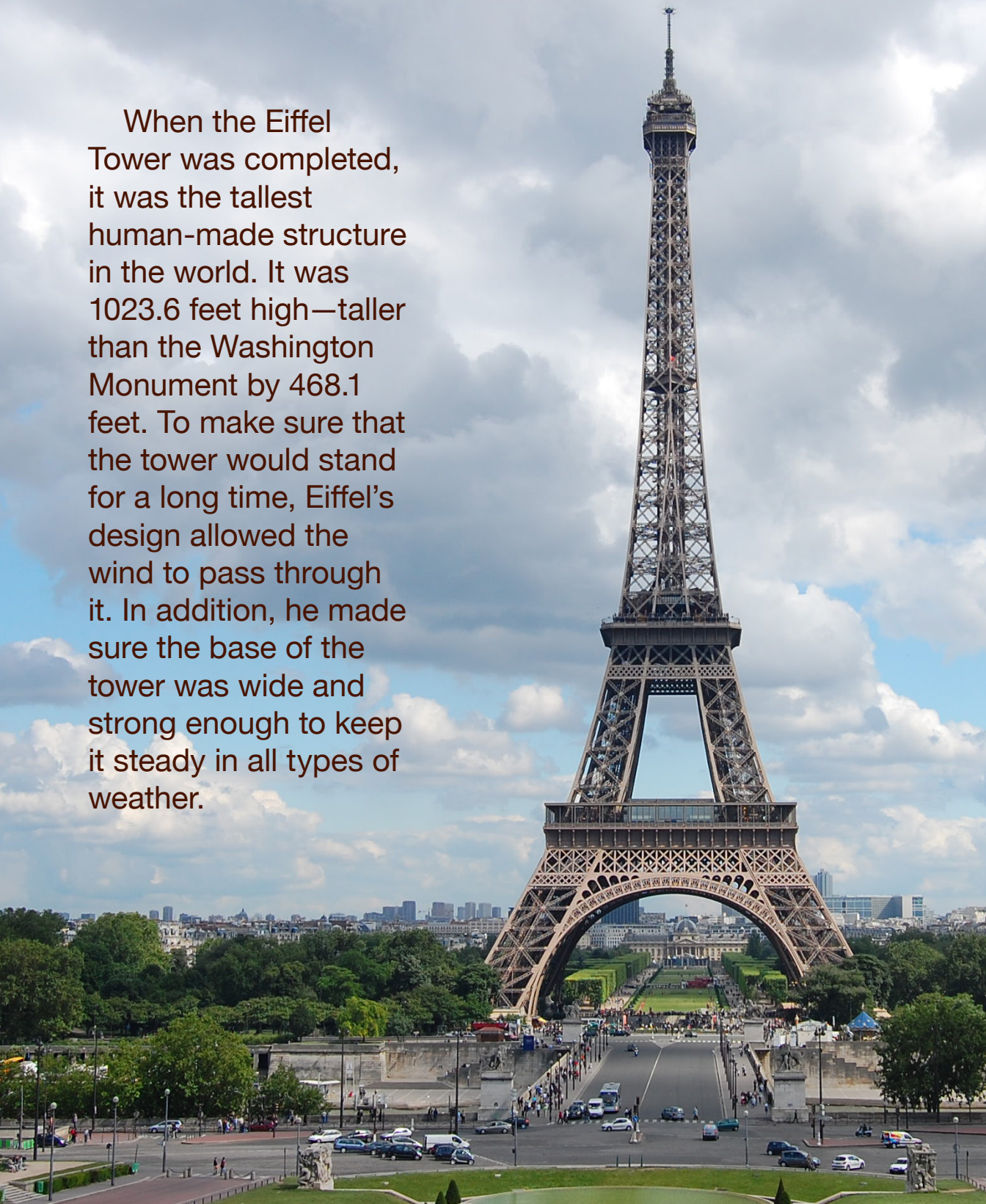
The Eiffel Tower

You've probably seen a picture of the Statue of Liberty. Maybe you've even seen it in person. This famous statue was partly designed by Gustave Eiffel, an architect from Paris.

In 1889, Paris was getting ready to host the World's Fair. Eiffel thought he could build a tower that would be the most attractive building at the fair. Not everyone was convinced the tower could be built. Many people thought it would be destroyed by winds or storms. Eiffel proved them wrong.



When the Eiffel Tower was completed, it was the tallest human-made structure in the world. It was 1023.6 feet high—taller than the Washington Monument by 468.1 feet. To make sure that the tower would stand for a long time, Eiffel's design allowed the wind to pass through it. In addition, he made sure the base of the tower was wide and strong enough to keep it steady in all types of weather.



Originally, the tower was supposed to be taken down after 20 years. But Eiffel made sure the tower would stay up by placing radio antennas at the top. Later, television antennas were added.

As the tallest structure in Paris, the Eiffel Tower played a major role in the lives of those living in the area. Today, it is considered to be a symbol of Paris. It is a building that most visitors to Paris see and photograph.



The Ferris Wheel

Four years after the Paris World's Fair, in 1893, the organizers of the Chicago World's Fair wanted to build something that was as grand as the Eiffel Tower. An engineer named George Ferris proposed to build a vertical wheel that turned, carrying people up into the air and then back down to the ground. However, the organizers did not believe that Ferris could build this vertical wheel or make it safe. They also thought no one would want to ride on it.

George Ferris was certain his idea could work, so he drew the designs and eventually convinced the organizers to allow him to build the wheel. While it was being built, people often referred to it as the "wheel inside Ferris's head." After a while, the wheel came to be known as the Ferris wheel.



Once it was completed, in 1893, the Ferris wheel was an amazing piece of engineering. Standing 264 feet tall, it had 36 cars that could carry 2,160 people around in a circle.

Thousands of Thomas Edison's new light bulbs made the Ferris wheel an even more extraordinary sight. In the end, George Ferris was right. It was possible to build a huge wheel that carried people into the air. In fact, it was so popular that people wanted to get married on it. Today, a Ferris wheel is a necessity at fairs. And his name, like Eiffel's will be remembered for a long time because they became eponyms.



4

LET'S EAT!

Sandwiches

You may eat sandwiches for lunch, but did you know that there was an actual person named Sandwich?

People have been putting meat between two pieces of bread for hundreds of years. However, about 300 years ago, the fourth Earl of Sandwich, in England, ordered a servant to give him some meat between two pieces of bread. The meal he ordered became quite popular, and soon the meal was called a sandwich. In this way, the earl's name became an eponym.



Graham Crackers

You might also be surprised to learn that there was a person named Graham who invented the popular crackers. In 1829, Reverend Sylvester Graham, of New Jersey, believed that people shouldn't eat foods that were high in fat and sugar. He created a new way of eating called the Graham Diet, which included crackers made with whole wheat flour, not white flour.

Oddly, Reverend Graham probably wouldn't like today's graham crackers, because they are made with more white flour and sugar than he thought people should eat. Graham's name lives on, though, in the cracker he invented.



Apples and Cherries

Certain fruits were named after the person who discovered them. For example, the McIntosh apple was discovered by John McIntosh. He was clearing land in his Canadian farm in late 1792 when he found an apple tree that had very tasty apples.

The original McIntosh apple tree lived until 1908, more than 100 years after it was discovered by John McIntosh. Today, McIntosh apples are one of the most popular apples sold in the United States.



A similar thing happened with the Bing cherry. In 1875, Seth Lewelling, a farmer in Oregon, was experimenting with tree grafts to create new types of cherries. He grafted a twig from one kind of cherry tree onto the branch of another one to see what kind of cherries would be produced.

In 1855, he created a cherry that was especially large and sweet. These cherries also did not get damaged when they were shipped to distant markets. This meant that Seth Lewelling could sell lots of cherries.

To honor the worker who took care of the tree, Ah Bing, Seth Lewelling named the cherries Bing cherries. Today, if the cherry you ate was sweet and large, the chances are good it was a Bing cherry.



5

BOYCOTTS, BLOOMERS, BENEDICT ARNOLD, & BEARS

Boycott

Has someone ever asked you to do something you thought was unfair? Did you do it? If you refused, you might have been staging a boycott. In a boycott, a person or group of people refuses to do something to protest an action. For example, just before the American Revolution, England put a tax on sugar that the Americans thought was too high. To protest the tax, the Americans refused to buy sugar. They boycotted sugar, and so hurt England's profits.



The word *boycott* is an eponym created from the name of Charles Boycott, an English person who owned land in Ireland. Boycott thought he could charge very high rent on the cottages on his estate because someone would always pay to live there. For a while, Boycott was right. Then one day, the farm owners refused to work on his land, so Boycott couldn't harvest or sell his crops.

Then his servants and other people living nearby refused to work for him. Even Boycott's mailman refused to deliver his mail. Finally, Boycott returned to England. Now when a person or group refuses to deal with another person, group, or business because they think they are being treated unfairly, their protest is said to be a boycott.



Bloomers

In the 1800s, women were expected to wear skirts all the time. Then a woman named Amelia Bloomer decided she would wear a kind of pants called pantaloons. These were wide, loose pants that were worn under a skirt. Pantaloons let women move about without getting their skirts caught or dirty. They also made women feel free because they could move more easily.

In 1849, Amelia Bloomer was the editor of *The Lily*, the first newspaper for women. Bloomer began to write about pantaloons in *The Lily*. At this time, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were campaigning for women's right to vote. Many women's rights campaigners wore pantaloons, so women showed their support for women's rights by wearing them.

Soon, pantaloons came to be called bloomers after Amelia Bloomer. Over time, *bloomers* became another word for underwear.



Benedict Arnold

Benedict Arnold was a general during the American Revolutionary War. At the start of the war, he fought for the Americans and won several battles. Though they never fought alongside each other, Benedict Arnold was a friend of George Washington. Then in 1779, Benedict Arnold became a traitor, meaning he betrayed his country.



Several things happened to make Benedict Arnold unhappy. He was caught between leaders who couldn't agree, and he was blamed for many things that went wrong that were not his fault.

Arnold began to feel unhappy, and when the British offered him a large sum of money, he said he would make sure they won the battle at West Point, New York. West Point is on the Hudson River, so it was an important location in controlling the river.

His plan was soon found out, and Benedict Arnold quickly left the United States as a traitor. Even though he fought bravely for America at the start of the war, he is most remembered for betraying his country. Today, anyone who acts as a traitor is described as "a Benedict Arnold."

Teddy Bears

Do you have a teddy bear? Many children and adults do. Have you ever wondered why it's called a *teddy bear*?

President Theodore Roosevelt, whose nickname was Teddy, was well known as a hunter. In 1902, the governor of Mississippi invited President Roosevelt to hunt bears with him and some friends.

By the end of the hunt, President Roosevelt had not killed a bear, so some of the other hunters found an old bear and tied her to a tree so that the president could have a successful hunt.

However, President Roosevelt refused to kill the bear. He thought it was not fair to kill an animal in this way. When newspapers found out about this story, they ran cartoons about President Roosevelt saving the bear's life.

Then a candy-shop owner in Brooklyn, New York, put two stuffed bears in his window that his wife had made. They called the bears "Teddy's bears," and the name stuck.



Our Changing Language

Words continue to be used in a language only if they're needed to express an idea or to describe someone or something. Like all words, some eponyms remain in a language for a long time, while others disappear quickly.

One eponym that's had a long life is Trojan horse. This huge wooden horse is from Greek mythology, so it's thousands of years old. The horse was built during a battle between the Greeks and the city of Troy. It was presented to Troy as a present from the Greek soldiers. However, instead of being a present, the horse caused the city's destruction. That's because a large group of soldiers was hidden inside the horse. Once the horse was pulled through the city's gates, the soldiers leaped out and conquered Troy.

Today, a Trojan horse is something that looks safe but hides something very harmful. It is often used to describe a computer virus that is hidden inside an ordinary-looking file.



Other eponyms have faded from most people's conversation, such as cardigan, which is a kind of sweater. It was named for a general, James Brudenell, who was the Earl of Cardigan, in Great Britain. He was a war hero in the 1850s. At that time, British soldiers wore sweaters under their uniforms to stay warm.

Cardigan sweaters originally had no sleeves, but they changed over the years, adding sleeves and sometimes buttons. They were very popular during the 1920s. At one time, most sweaters were called cardigans, but today, people don't often use that word. They simply say they are wearing a sweater.



New eponyms are created regularly, often from current events or popular heroes. Finding out about a word's history can open a window into the past and can tell you about things that people valued and wanted to preserve.



Glossary

Benedict Arnold a traitor during the American Revolution; his name has become an eponym for anyone who betrays others

Atlas a book of maps; the word is an eponym for Atlas, a Greek god

Bing cherry a cherry created by Seth Lewelling; its name is an eponym for Ah Bing, who worked on Lewelling's farm

bloomers a type of loose pants worn under a skirt; the word is an eponym for Amanda Bloomer

boycott to refuse to do something to protest an action; the word is an eponym for Charles Boycott

cardigan a type of sweater; the word is an eponym for the Earl of Cardigan, an English war hero

Eiffel Tower a large tower that was built by Gustave Eiffel

eponym a word that was created from a person's name

Ferris wheel a large wheel that was built by George Ferris to carry people up into the air



Georgia, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Washington states in the United States that were named for kings, queens, and heroes

graham crackers wheat crackers created by Reverend Sylvester Graham

month one of 12 sections of a year; the months were named by the ancient Romans

McIntosh apple a sweet apple discovered by John McIntosh

nickname a name that is used to refer to a person, often shortening the person's name or describing him or her

nym a word part that means "a name"

sandwich a meal made with bread and a filling, it is an eponym for the Earl of Sandwich, in England

Teddy bear a stuffed animal named after U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, who refused to kill a bear

traitor a person who betrays a cause, a country, or someone's trust

Trojan horse something that looks harmless, but hides great danger; the word is an eponym for a horse from Greek mythology



Think About It

- Ask your mom or dad about your name. Why did they choose that name? Did they name you for someone in your family? What are some other names in your family?
- Most people name pets, toys, or stuffed animals. Choose one of these things that's special to you and tell why you gave it the name you did.
- Work with a friend to find out the meaning of your town's or your state's name. Was it named for a well-known person? Was it a word that was originally from another language? Share your findings with the class.



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