



WHAT THEY'LL LEARN

- What a leap year is
- Why the leap year was created
- How many days there are in each month
- Counting forwards and backwards in fours
- How to organise a party

Jump to it! Let's learn about leap years



Help children to discover the facts and fiction around 2024's extra day, with this intriguing lesson plan from **Judith Harries**

@judeharries

Take a leap into the leap year and enjoy the fact that 'an extra day means extra play' with these fun cross-curricular activities for the classroom and playground.

Find out about 'leaplings' and learn the rhyme that helps you remember the days in each month. Try some number games too, using the four times table, and measure the lengths of leaps to see who can jump the furthest.

You can even hold a party on or around the 29th and pack it with as much leap day-themed fun as possible. And why not make some food for everyone to tuck into while they celebrate?



START HERE

Introduce the term 'leap year'. Begin by asking the class if anyone knows what it means. Can anyone guess? Recite the months of the year with the children, and ask if they know which month it is today. Show the children a calendar and ask them to point out different months on it. What is different about this February compared to the other months in the year? Can they tell you how many days there are in February? Explain that this year there will be an extra day, or leap day. Invite children to think about how they would like to celebrate the extra day. What would they like to do? How could they make it into a special day?



MAIN LESSON

1 | WORDS AND RHYMES

People who have their birthday on leap day are called 'leaplings'. There are over four million leaplings in the world. Are there any in your school or community? When it's not a leap year, leaplings can choose to celebrate their birthdays on 29th February or 1st March.

One of the most well-known traditions of a leap year is that women are 'allowed' to propose to men, unlike the usual convention.

Can the children invent some new (and perhaps rather more modern) ideas for things that are allowed on 29th February only? Make a list of their suggestions and organise a class vote to choose the favourite.

Use this traditional rhyme to help children learn the number of days in each month. Practise saying it with the children until they can remember it by heart. *Thirty days have September, April, June, and November, All the rest have thirty-one, Excepting February alone, And that has twenty-eight days clear, And twenty-nine in each leap year.*

2 | MISSING NUMBERS

Start by talking about the fact that this year, 2024, is a leap year because it can be divided by four. Try counting in fours, forwards and backwards, chant the four times table, and ask the children to make groups of four.

Do some leap year counting. Provide number lines for children to complete



missing multiples of four, forwards and backwards. For example: four, eight, blank, 16, 20, blank, 28, blank. Invite children to write a new one for a partner to complete.

Play this leapfrog number game using lily pad shapes and plastic frogs. Provide children with a lily pad-shaped template and ask them to cut out some lily pads from green paper or draw them with green felt pens. Add a number from the four times table to each pad. Can they make a frog jump from pad to pad in the right order?

Make it harder by writing number sentences on the pads using different operations that end with four or a multiple of four, e.g. $5 + 3 = ?$, $17 - 5 = ?$, $2 \times 2 = ?$, or $20 \div 4 = ?$.

Cut out giant lily pads from green paper and write a different number from the

four times table onto each of them. Place on the floor, out of order, and ask children to leap from pad to pad in order. Add some music and play 'musical lily pads' in the style of musical chairs, removing a pad for each round. Add some other pads with numbers that are not in the four times table to catch children out. If they land on a pad with an odd number, they are out!

Organise a leap year 'leaping challenge'. Stick some coloured tape on the floor and invite children to take turns to jump as far as they can after taking off from the tape. Measure each jump and see who can leap the furthest. Record the results in a table.

Talk about the bigger picture. Ask the children how many days there are in each year. Explain that the earth takes $365 \frac{1}{4}$ days to move

around the sun so, to stay synchronised with the seasons, the year needs an extra day every four years, giving us 366 days in a leap year. This idea was introduced by Julius Caesar, a Roman Emperor, in 45AD. If we didn't follow this pattern, the calendar would be unsynchronised with the seasons and eventually you'd end up with, for example, June being midwinter in the northern hemisphere.

3 | PARTY ON

On or around 29th February, organise a leap year party with your class. You can tell them that 'an extra day means extra play'!

Do some party planning with the children. Talk about the different things that will need organising for the party – invitations, decorations, food, games, etc.

Make some leap year bunting to decorate the party 'venue'. Which relevant words, numbers and pictures would the children choose to write on the bunting? Use leap, leaplings, February, 2024, 366, 29, $28 + 1$, and pictures of clocks and other timepieces. Create a banner to hang up saying 'Happy Leap Day 2024'.

For the party food, start with four different toppings for rice crackers. Make some green frogs from green apples and grapes. Bake some leapfrog chocolate cupcakes and add green icing and chocolate button eyes. Make some green jelly and add frog sweets or jumping beans for children to find inside.

Show the children how to leapfrog by jumping over an obstacle or another person bent over. Let them jump over each other (taking care that smaller children are not hurt). Can the children leap like other animals that jump, e.g. kangaroos, fleas, grasshoppers and hares? Try some of the other 'froggy' games suggested earlier.

Judith Harries is an experienced early years and primary school teacher. She specialises in teaching music and drama and creates educational content for a variety of publications.

EXTENDING THE LESSON



- Make a leap year timebox with the children. Ask them to design their own sticker featuring the 29/02/24 date using handwriting or a selection of printed fonts. Decorate a shoebox by sticking the dates all over it.

- How old will the children be when the next leap year comes? Invite them to write a message or letter to themselves in four years' time. Put all the letters in the leap year box and bury it, or hide it somewhere safe.

- Which other events are celebrated in February? In 2024, Lunar New Year fell on the 10th, while Pancake Day was on 13th February. St Valentine's Day takes place on 14th February every year. Can the children find any historical events that took place in February?

USEFUL QUESTIONS

- What is a leap year?
- Do you know any 'leaplings'?
- Which animals can leap or jump?
- When is the next leap year going to be?