

George and the Dragon

St. George's Day – 23rd April

DIFFICULTY:  

What is a Patron Saint?

The countries within our nation (England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland) have their own patron saint – a person they believe is a protector for a specific area of life. Each of these countries has their own named patron saint and a separate day (named after the saint) is given to celebrate their life and achievements each year. Scotland has St. Andrew as their patron saint – with a thistle as their flower, Wales has St. David – with a leek or daffodill and Ireland has St. Patrick – with the lucky shamrock as their emblem.

Saint (St.) George is the patron saint of England and Saint George's day is celebrated annually on 23rd April nationally. The colour red and English red roses are popular choices of décor for the celebrations as they link to the legend as well as the English flag and the flag of Great Britain. The English flag (a red cross on a white background) is the symbol of St. George's day and was adopted by Richard the Lionheart – the great military leader. He assigned this symbol to the armour and war attire worn by his soldiers.

The legend of St. George

When St. George arrived in Libya as part of his travels, he found it had a large pond, almost as big as a lake, where it was believed a terrifying dragon lurked. The dragon was frightening everyone in the country so, every day, the people would feed him a sheep in the hope he would stop. When the sheep had all perished, the dragon had demanded that the people give him a young girl each day instead. Saint George discovered that all the young girls had now been killed and the only girl remaining was the King's daughter. Unless a way could be found of slaying the dragon, the princess would be killed the next day. The King of Egypt had promised his daughter's hand in marriage to the knight who could prevail. Saint George was determined to be victorious, and the next day he rode out to the lake. He saw the princess waiting but Saint George sent her home to the palace and attempted his brave task. When the dragon heard him approaching, he came out of his cave and roared at him – George was not afraid! He struck the monster with his spear, but the dragon's scales were so hard that the spear just shattered. He did not give up though. Instead, he raced at the dragon and used his sword to slay it under its wing where there were no scales and it was easier to pierce. The dragon fell dead at Saint George's feet – he was victorious!





The Truth

Saint George has long been associated with England, bravery and honour, however the real Saint George wasn't English at all! The truth is that he was born in Cappadocia (which is now part of Eastern Turkey) in the 3rd Century (AD270) and because this was so long ago, not much is known about him. It is thought that he was a soldier and part of a Christian family. At the age of just 17 he joined the Roman Army and it is said he was a very brave soldier. History tells us that around that time the emperor (who was a pagan) wanted to kill all Christian people and Saint George being the brave person that he was, begged and pleaded with him to stop. For his efforts to protect his people, he was severely tortured, but well respected by his faith for what he stood for and believed in. He was sadly beheaded on 23rd April AD303 which is why the English national day is celebrated on this date. It became a national feast and day of celebration only in the year 1415.

How do we celebrate St. George's Day?

A red rose has always been the national flower of England and is seen on heritage and tourist signs around the country. On St. George's Day, many people wear a red rose or have red roses as decorations in their home.


At some venues across the country, there are more elaborate celebrations including re-enactments, dressing up and even 'dragon-slaying'!

Street parties, with decorative bunting and flags lining the kerbs have become a more recent way of celebrating as the event is becoming more popular.

Church services for scout troops and some military are held across the country on 23rd April to celebrate Saint George and his links (both historical and modern) to these groups.

The Future

Even though it is a national celebration, it is not an event that is celebrated by all in England. This is the case for various reasons. However, there are many people campaigning to have St. George's day become a national holiday and treated like a Bank Holiday. Many patron saints' days are now national holidays in their countries – for example, Saint Patrick's Day in Ireland and Saint Andrew's Day in Scotland. However in England, Saint George's Day is considered to be a normal working day.



Questions

1. What is a patron saint and why are they celebrated?

2. Why is 23rd April the day St. George's Day is celebrated?

3. Name the 3 other patron saints and their national flowers:

	Patron Saint	National Flower
Ireland		
Wales		
Scotland		

4. Why was St. George put in prison?

5. Why was St. George considered to be a brave man?

6. Why do people think it is strange that St. George is the patron saint of England?

7. Describe how you think the King of Egypt was feeling during the legend?

8. Why do you think some people don't celebrate St. George's Day?

9. Name 2 ways St. George's Day is celebrated.

10. Where on the body did St. George manage to slay the dragon – why?



Questions – ANSWERS

1. What is a patron saint and why are they celebrated? **A person who is well-respected for a specific country/topic and are celebrated for their achievements in that specific area**

2. Why is 23rd April the day St. George’s Day is celebrated? **It was the day St. George was beheaded.**

3. Name the 3 other patron saints and their national flowers:

	Patron Saint	National Flower
Ireland	St Patrick	Shamrock
Wales	St David	Leek or Daffodil
Scotland	St Andrew	Thistle

4. Why was St. George put in prison? **Standing up to the emperor**

5. Why was St. George considered to be a brave man? **Joining the army at just 17, standing up for what he believed – even against the emperor**

6. Why do people think it is strange that St. George is the patron saint of England? **He wasn’t born in England so wasn’t English**

7. Describe how you think the King of Egypt was feeling during the legend? **Terrified at the threat to his daughter and the distress caused to his country**

8. Why do you think some people don’t celebrate St. George’s Day? **Various reasons**

9. Name 2 ways St. George’s Day is celebrated. **Wear red roses, red rose decorations, street parties, organised events, church services**

10. Where on the body did St. George manage to slay the dragon – why? **Under the wing – skin was thinner for the spear to attack**

11. The emperor was said to be a ‘pagan’. What do you think this means and why did it affect St. George? **A non-Christian and so because St. George was a Christian he was part of the Christian community that the emperor wanted to kill.**

12. It is well known that the legend of St. George was created. Why do you think this story has stood the test of time and is still told today? **Various answers. Myths and legends were popular at that time. Dragons being linked to death/evil. The real truth is very limited so a legend created instead.**

