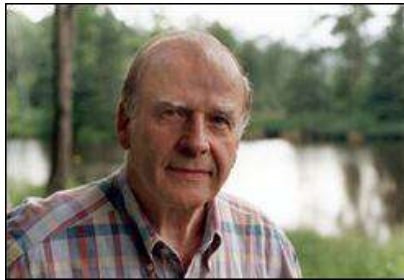


The History of Earth Day

By Amanda Davis
Scholastic Kids Press Corps



Gaylord Nelson, the man whose work resulted in the creation of Earth Day—an international holiday.

Imagine a world without trees. What if the rain forests, and all of the exotic plants and colorful animals that call it home, suddenly did not exist?

In 1962, Gaylord Nelson decided something needed to be done to protect the environment. The work that he began led to what we now know as Earth Day.

Nelson realized very few people were concerned about environmental problems like **deforestation**, the destruction of trees. "For several years, it has been troubling me," Nelson wrote in a 1962 article, "that the state of the environment is simply not important in the politics of our country."

Nelson then headed to Washington, D.C., where he hoped to convince President John F. Kennedy to take a stand on environmental issues. Nelson first met with Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who agreed that it was an important issue. It wasn't long before President Kennedy heard Nelson's concerns and agreed that action should be taken.

The President set out on a five-day, 11-state conservation tour in September 1963. Although Kennedy's high-profile tour was not a success, Nelson was not ready to give up. Nelson continued to speak to audiences across 25 states about the importance of the environment. Although his point of view began to catch on among most people, politicians still were not listening.

"The idea that became Earth Day," said Nelson, "occurred to me while on a conservation speaking tour out West in the summer of 1969." It was September of 1969, at a conference in Seattle, when Nelson announced that he would stage a nationwide grassroots demonstration on behalf of the environment the next spring. He invited everyone in the audience to attend.

On April 22, 1970, more than 20 million demonstrators and thousands of schools and local communities participated in Nelson's demonstration. The occasion made people sit up and pay attention to environmental issues. Word about the environment began to spread. Rising environmental awareness would eventually lead to the passage of new clean air and water legislation and the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency.

On March 21, 1971, the UN Secretary-General signed a proclamation establishing Earth Day as an official international holiday. Now people all over the world are learning about environmental issues in their communities. In fact, over a billion people in 174 countries will celebrate Earth Day this year.

Gaylord Nelson died on July 3, 2005, but his contributions will always be remembered as younger generations continue his fight to preserve the world's environment.

Earth Day Graffiti

Read the article and draw pictures that illustrate the main points in this column.
(Include at least 6 drawings.)



Name: _____

Earth Day Observations

Period: _____

Reflection Questions: Please answer the questions using complete sentences:

1. Describe the process that was gone through to create Earth Day:

2. What do you think the story says about the ability that one person has to help solve important issues that exist in our society?

3. The Scholastic News article does not mention that Gaylord Nelson had when he came up with the idea for Earth Day. He was... _____

Does this new information change your opinion about the impact that one person can have? Explain why or why not?

4. Why do you think the article failed to mention his position in the government?

5. Based upon our studies of environmental issues, would you say that we are making progress towards the goal of protecting the environment since the first Earth Day in 1970? Explain why or why not?

