

Today We Learn About The Delicious Donut

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A Brief History of Donuts

The history of the donut is a long and delicious one, with roots that stretch back across continents and centuries.

Early Fried Dough: The concept of frying dough and sweetening it is far from new. Ancient Greeks and Romans enjoyed fried dough treats, and similar pastries have been found in various cultures throughout history. But the direct ancestor of the modern donut is generally traced to the Dutch.

The "Oily Cake": In the 17th and 18th centuries, Dutch immigrants brought their "olykoeks" (or "oily cakes") to what was then New Amsterdam, now New York. These were sweet, fried dough balls, often with a raw center. To solve this, bakers would sometimes stuff the center with nuts or fruit that didn't require a long cooking time, which is one possible origin of the name "doughnut."

The Iconic Hole: The introduction of the donut's signature hole is a subject of popular legend. One widely told story credits an American sailor named Hanson Gregory in the mid-19th century. Dissatisfied with the greasy, undercooked centers of the dough balls, he allegedly punched a hole in the middle with a tin pepper box. The hole allowed the dough to cook more evenly, creating a lighter, more consistent treat. While the story might be apocryphal, the innovation of the hole was a turning point for the pastry.

The Donut Goes to War: Donuts became a symbol of comfort and home during World War I. Women volunteers from the Salvation Army, known as "Doughnut Lassies," would serve fresh donuts to American soldiers on the front lines in France. Because they only needed simple ingredients and a kettle of oil, donuts were relatively easy to make in the trenches, providing a welcome taste of home. This act cemented the donut's place in American culture and history.

The Rise of the Cream-Filled Donut: While fried, filled dough has been around for centuries (a 15th-century German cookbook even has a recipe for a jelly-filled variant), the modern cream-filled donut gained popularity in the United States in the mid-19th century. The Boston cream donut, in particular, is a famous American invention inspired by the Boston Cream Pie. This donut, with its custard filling and chocolate glaze, became so beloved that it was designated the official donut of Massachusetts in 2003.

Writing Prompts for National Cream-Filled Donut Day (September 14)

1. **A Hole-Filler's Tale:** The donut hole was invented to fix a problem. What if a different kind of filling was created to solve a different problem? Write a short story about an eccentric baker who invents a new cream filling with magical properties to solve a local town's crisis.
2. **The Great Donut Heist:** The prized recipe for the world's most delicious cream filling has been stolen! Write a mystery story from the perspective of a seasoned detective who must follow a trail of crumbs and clues to find the culprit before National Cream-Filled Donut Day is ruined.
3. **A Day in the Life:** You are the best-selling cream-filled donut at a new, trendy donut shop. Write a narrative from your perspective, detailing your journey from a simple ball of dough to a decadent dessert. What do you see? What do you hear? Who are the people who choose you?
4. **A Philosophical Debate:** Two donuts sit in a display case on September 14th. One is a classic glazed ring, and the other is a decadent cream-filled one. Write a dialogue between them, as they debate which is the superior treat and what it means to be "complete."
5. **A Letter to a Loved One:** Write a letter from a soldier during World War I or II, describing the joy of receiving a cream-filled donut from a Salvation Army volunteer. How does this small treat remind them of home and give them hope?

