History of COMIC BOOKS



David Smith
and Jodene Smith

Table of Contents

For teachers' inspection ONLY

The Beginning of Comics 4
The Golden Age of Comics 8
The Silver Age of Comics 14
Punk Rock 80s 24
The Death of Comics? 30
Comic Books Are Forever 38
Glossary 44
Index 45
Check It Out! 46
Try It! 47
About the Authors 48

The Beginning of Comics

For teachers' inspection ONLY

Bam! Pow! Zing! What do these words make you think of? If you answered "a comic," then you already know a bit about comics. But there is so much more.

Political cartoons could be considered the first comics. They were used to make fun of political figures such as King George of England or President Abraham Lincoln. The cartoons also questioned authority. Artists drew these authority figures with weird bodies or exaggerated heads to make fun of them. King George was often drawn with a big behind. Imagine the popularity of that cartoon! Sometimes political cartoons were used to draw attention to injustices or to highlight current events. This style of comic still exists in newspaper editorial pages and magazines.

Color Is King

The Sunday comic pages began printing in color in the late 1800s. This was a big deal because the rest of the newspaper was black and white. Even movies were black and white back then!



For teacher's inspection ONLY

THINK LINK

- Why are comics so much fun to read?
- Are comic books true art or just entertainment?
- Who is your favorite comic character? Why?

BAM!

What Is a Comic?

Comics are stories told using pictures. The words being spoken are shown in word balloons. Clouds show what a person is thinking or dreaming.



Newspaper Heroes

In the early 1900s, the Sunday newspaper had an 8- to 16-page comic section! It was wrapped around the outside of the newspaper because it was everyone's favorite part.

The most famous comics from this time are *Gasoline Alley*, *Little Nemo in Slumberland*, and *Dick Tracy*. *Gasoline Alley* is filled with jokes about cars and small-town life. *Little Nemo* shows the adventures of Nemo in his dreams. *Dick Tracy* is about a detective. He faces off against all kinds of bad guys, such as Flattop Jones, who really has a flat head.

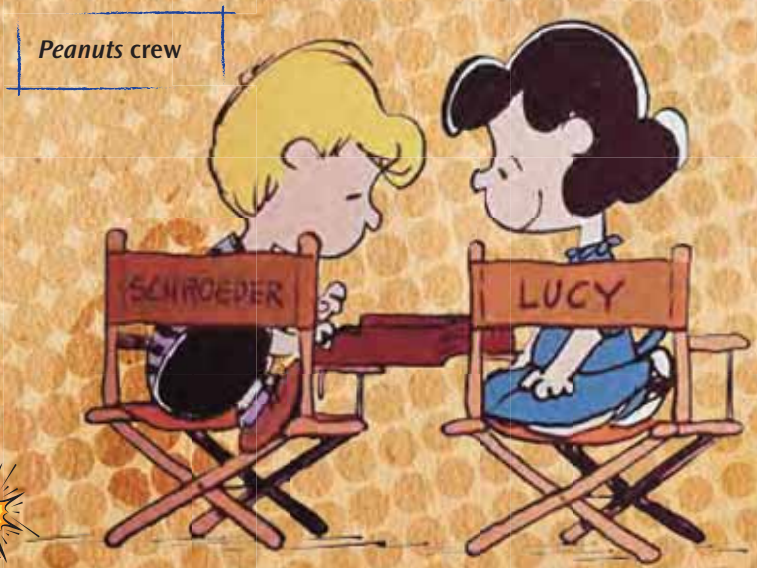
For teachers' inspection ONLY

Make Me Laugh

Comic strips, also called *funnies*, usually had one to four pictures in a row. In the early 1900s, the strips were popular because they usually told jokes. Most comic strips told the entire joke in one strip. But some comic strips told stories that continued from day to day. Comics such as *Little Nemo in Slumberland* became story driven. They also began taking up more space in the comics section. Rather than only four panels, they took up a whole page! These longer and more story-driven comics are what evolved into full comic books.

The Cat Who Hates Mondays

Garfield is another world-famous comic strip. Garfield is a fat, lazy cat who complains to his owner, Jon, all day. He's known for loving lasagna and hating Mondays. This comic strip was created by Jim Davis in 1978 and continues today.



Peanuts **crew**

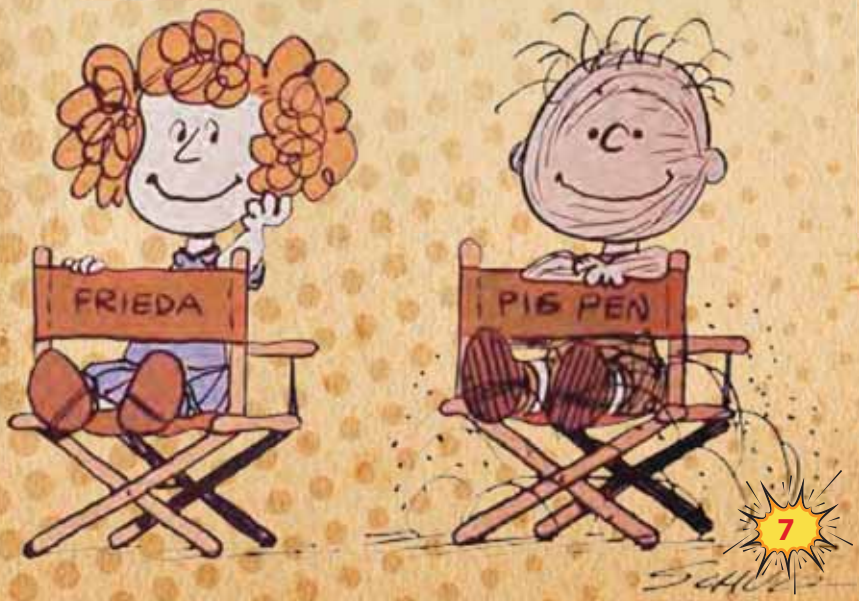
For teachers' inspection ONLY

Quit While You're Ahead

Cartoonist Bill Watterson quit his beloved and enormously popular comic strip *Calvin and Hobbes* after ten years. He feared that his comic would become stale and lose its humor. Many people believe that if the strip had continued for many decades, it would perhaps have rivaled Charles M. Schulz's *Peanuts*.

Great Comic, Charlie Brown!

In time, *Peanuts* became one of the most popular and well-known comic strips. *Peanuts* is a comic strip about Charlie Brown, his friends, and his dog Snoopy. Charles M. Schulz created this four-panel comic in 1950. Schulz drew the *Peanuts* gang for over 50 years. *Peanuts* appeals to all ages because readers can identify with the different characters. Charlie Brown is the original "wimpy kid," but he has the coolest dog ever! The consistent four-panels drawn by Schulz made this format widely used by other comic-strip writers.



For teachers' inspection ONLY

The Golden Age of Comics

Comics became so popular that they were too big for newspapers. They needed their own magazines, called comic books. At first, comic books were about humor, detectives, and romance. But everything changed with the success of Superman, who first appeared in *Action Comics* #1. Early issues of this series sold so well that he was awarded his own magazine, *Superman*, in 1939.

Birth of the Superhero

Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster created *Superman*. During the Depression, they were looking for a hero to write positive stories about. They tried to get newspapers to print their comic strips. After a lot of rejection, they put their strips into a book and had it printed. The first successful comic book was born!

Superman was a smash success. Some early issues sold over a million copies. This led to new superhero comics. Others tried to duplicate the success of *Superman*. The heroes were always good and had incredible powers. These superpowers were the new story element that gave heroes the edge against evil.

Why The Golden Age?

This period is known as *The Golden Age* because it marks the first time these popular stories were told. Original comic books from this time are also the most valuable.

For teacher inspection ONLY

The Original Superpowers

Superman's superpowers have served as the basis for countless other superheroes. They include flight, heat vision, x-ray vision, super strength, super intelligence, the ability to deflect bullets, and super speed. He also has a secret identity, which becomes common for many other superheroes.



Superman is stronger and smarter than police and villains.

For teachers' inspection ONLY

Reader's Guide

1. Which period of time mentioned in the book changed comics the most?
2. Page 42 tells readers that comics "can even teach us about ourselves." Describe whether you agree with this statement, using evidence from the book.
3. Reread the sidebar on page 27 titled "Social Commentary." If you were going to write a story based on a social issue that matters to you, what would you write about and how would you address the issue?
4. Spider-Man, Superman, and Wolverine are all popular heroes, but they are also very different types of heroes. With which types of heroes do young readers most closely relate? Explain your thinking.

