

Creator of “Peanuts”

Pre-reading

Questions:

- Who is the creator of the “Peanuts” comic strip?
- What do you know about him?

Definitions:

- Syndicate – published in a number of newspapers or magazines at the same time



Reading

Charles Schulz is the most widely syndicated cartoonist in history. His work has been in over 2600 newspapers in 75 countries. “Peanuts” is one of the best-known comic strips in the world. Schultz’s Snoopy, Charlie Brown, Lucy, and Linus characters appear in holiday TV specials, are found on clothing and other items in stores worldwide, and can be visited at Camp Snoopy at the Mall of America.

Charles Schulz was born in the fall of 1922 to Karl and Dena Schulz. He was the only child of the St. Paul, Minnesota barber and homemaker. Karl Schulz did his best to provide for his family, but when the Depression hit, times were tough. He earned only 35 cents per haircut, and at one time was seven months behind on rent at the Family Barbershop.

Charles Schulz’s passion for drawing could be seen at a young age. As a kindergartener, he drew a man shoveling snow with palm trees in the background (some relatives had just moved to California). His kindergarten teacher saw the drawing and said, “Charles, someday you’ll be an artist.”

His awkward years of junior high and high school were not as encouraging. In fact, Schulz hated high school. At Central High in St. Paul, he was treated like an outcast and flunked many classes. His senior year, he was asked by the art teacher to draw some school scenes for the senior yearbook. He enthusiastically completed the work. Unfortunately, his cartoons were deemed unworthy, and they did not appear in the completed 1940 yearbook.

Discouraged, but not defeated, Schulz began taking cartooning courses from the Federal Schools (now known as Art Instructions School) in Minneapolis. His instructor gave him a C plus in the class entitled “Drawing of Children.” By 1945 Schulz was an instructor at the school earning \$85 a week.

It was at the Art Instructions School where one of Schulz’s most famous characters was born. Schulz worked at the school with a man named Charlie Brown. However, the real Charlie Brown was like the comic strip Charlie Brown in name only. Schulz transferred many of his own early frustrations and worrisome attitude into his beloved main character. Schultz had another friend from Minneapolis named Linus.

Schulz’s diligent cartooning efforts began to pay off in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s. In 1947 he sold a cartoon called “Li'l Folks” to the St. Paul Pioneer Press. It ran weekly for two years. In June of 1950 Schulz signed a five-year deal with United Feature Syndicate of New York, who named his strip “Peanuts”. On October 2, 1950 “Peanuts” **debuted** in seven newspapers.

By 1958 “Peanuts” was in 355 U.S. papers and 40 foreign dailies. In that same year, Charles Schulz moved from his home in the Twin Cities to Santa Rosa, California where he built a twelve room house and studio. The address of his new home was One Snoopy Place.

By the 1990s, Schulz grossed 20 million dollars a year. He retired from the “Peanuts” strip on January 3, 2000. His health had declined due to colon cancer and a series of small strokes. Ironically, Charles Schulz died on February 12, 2000, one day before his final Sunday strip appeared.

Understanding

1. What does the phrase “discouraged, but not defeated” mean in this story? _____

2. Whose personality can be seen in Charlie Brown? _____

3. How would you describe Schulz’s high school years? _____

4. Why is the timing of Schulz’s death described as ironic? _____

5. What does the word **debut** mean? _____

6. Is it surprising to you that Schulz went from “rags to riches”? Why or why not? _____

7. Where was Charles Schultz born? _____

Writing

Option A: Summarize the reading in your own words.

Option B: Write about one of your favorite “Peanuts” characters. What do you like about him or her?

Option C: If you were to create a cartoon, what would it be about? What would you call it?
