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CARICATURES ARE THE WORLD'S

Most Popular Characters

by Farrell and Wilbur Cross

¹ During World War II an American bomber was attacked by Japanese fighter planes over the Pacific. Limping along on its single functioning engine, it reached a small, jungle-clad island, where the pilot managed to crash-land on a stretch of beach. The crew, aware that they were safe perhaps only for the moment, clambered out of the damaged aircraft speculating on the disposition of the natives: Would they be friendly? The answer was not long in coming; soon a group of half-clothed warriors, armed with antediluvian weapons, could be seen edging warily out of the underbrush. The Americans nervously fingered their sidearms; the tension increased. Suddenly one of the natives broke from his fellows and raced toward the plane.

² "Mikki Muss! Mikki Muss!" he shouted delightedly, pointing to the nose of the ship where, painted in characteristic air force fashion, a Mickey Mouse rode astride a huge aerial bomb.

³ Mickey Mouse, who has probably enjoyed more widespread popularity than any other single cartoon character in the world, typifies the universal appeal of cartoons and caricatures. What is this appeal? "People read comics," says one authority, "because they find themselves reflected in them." By observing comic characters in embarrassing but painfully familiar situations,

readers see, with some relief, that they are not alone.

⁴ The use of the cartoon as a medium of expression is by no means a recent development—historians who care to stretch the point can show evidence of humorous drawings on the walls of caves inhabited some twenty thousand years ago, during the Reindeer Age. The real history of comic art, however, began (to set an arbitrary date) in the latter half of the first century A.D., about the time that Pompeii was embalmed in volcanic ash. Examples of wall art from the period include many scenes that appear to presage early American comic strip stereotypes: the innocent dupe about to be victimized by a practical joker; the henpecked husband being scolded by his shrewish wife; the scoundrel about to be clobbered on the head with a stick.

⁵ Cartoons, through the ages, have not only met the needs of people to attempt to make light of their own misery, but have also reflected the attitudes and activities of the times. The cartoons of two thousand years ago, in an age when people died young and bloodshed was common, tended to reflect murder and violence; cartoons of more primitive peoples often showed semi-religious themes, with mortals at the mercy of the gods; the drawings of the Middle Ages re-

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flected the same bawdy humor found in Chaucer. Yet, throughout history there is a remarkable recurrence of themes strongly in evidence today.

⁶ Comic art as we know it today was founded in the great Age of Caricature, which encompassed the period from the middle of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth. In England, during the reign of Queen Anne, William Hogarth established himself as the father of English caricature by satirizing politics, manners, and morals. He used the comic-strip technique in his famous series of engravings, *The Rake's Progress*, and was one of the first cartoonists to utilize the balloon to contain the speeches of his characters.

⁷ The comic strip itself came into being in the United States through the deadly competition between two newspapers. It began in 1896, although in Europe regular comic strips had existed earlier; in February of that year the old *New York World*, seeking an unusual method of increasing its circulation, decided to try an experiment, chiefly to test out the problem of printing with yellow ink.

⁸ That Sunday, in the section of the newspaper devoted to funny drawings, readers of the *World* discovered three-quarters of a page entitled "The Great Dog Show on M'Googan's Avenue." Drawn by Richard F. Outcault, it featured a bald-headed, large-eared boy in what looked like a tattered, outsized nightgown colored bright yellow. This was the "Yellow Kid," a character who was to stimulate the birth of many other comic and bizarre cartoon figures in the next few years. The urchin survived just long enough to give the comics their start, arouse the competitive envy of other newspapers, and inspire the term *yellow journalism* to describe any manner of newspaper reporting that was sensational in nature.

⁹ Soon comics were so prevalent as to attract the attention of serious critics. One reader of *Mutt and Jeff* in its early days gave voice to a characteristic attitude when he complained, "It is not clear what these comics are. We cannot call them caricatures, for a caricature is based upon, or aimed at, something that exists. . . . But these effigies under consideration have no actual relationship with anything that is to be seen upon our earth."

¹⁰ Despite the critics, comics flourished in metropolitan newspapers from coast to coast and, in 1915, nationwide syndication was instituted, carrying the comics to rural and small-town papers. Editors began to realize that their cartoonists were influential; circulation rose and fell according to the types of comics a newspaper carried. A cartoonist had merely to depict his character in a dangerous situation to generate a truckload of mail from readers with ideas about how the character could escape.

¹¹ The other side of the cartoon business, political cartooning, attained a similar rapid rise to solid prominence. One of the first and most famous examples of cartoon satire in America was published by Benjamin Franklin in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* of May 9, 1754. It was a crude device—a snake cut into eight segments, representing the American colonies, with the inscription "Join, or Die." With the birth of the new nation, political campaigns and issues became the prime subject of the caricaturist's art; controversial political figures were always depicted with huge noses, grasping hands, or large ears that were invariably attuned to words being spoken by the devil.

¹² Though some of the early American political cartoons would look crude and lacking in imagination to us today, they helped to make American history. The term *gerrymander* (to divide an area into election districts in an unfair way, calculated to control the election results in one's favor) was born with Elkanah Tisdale's famous cartoon of 1812, pointing out the dragon shape made by a group of unfair political districts created by Governor Gerry in Essex County, Massachusetts. The cartoon and the word are still used to refer to outrageous political practices.

¹³ One of the best examples of the cartoonist's power was that of Thomas Nast, who in the 1870's pitted his art against the corruption of Boss William Tweed and Tammany Hall in New York. His cartoons, more than any other factor, were responsible for driving Tweed off his throne and sending some of his Tammany pals off to prison or oblivion. Nast was the creator of such familiar symbols as the Tammany tiger and the G.O.P. elephant. Although he did not originate the Democratic donkey, he popularized it.

¹⁴ Perhaps the most popular characters in the

comics of the future will be those created by political cartoonists. Already political cartooning has become such an important aspect of journalism that there is a Pulitzer Prize especially for this field. Be that as it may, one thing seems certain—cartoons are here to stay. Cartoons appeal to persons of all ages, nationalities, colors, races, and creeds; because of their simplicity and basic attraction, they are recognized, understood, and appreciated by scholars and illiterates alike.

HOW WELL DID YOU READ?

Did you see the writers' point?

1. The significance of the opening anecdote lies in the contrast between the
 - A seriousness of war and the humor of the comics
 - B primitiveness of the natives and their familiarity with cartoons
 - C modern plane and the natives' antediluvian weapons
 - D suspicions of the airmen and the friendliness of the natives
2. The opinion of the critic in paragraph 9 and the opinion of the writers are
 - A identical in some respects
 - B totally different
 - C identical in all respects
 - D substantially the same
3. The story of Boss Tweed and Thomas Nast shows
 - A the potential power of political cartoonists
 - B how humor can be used as a weapon
 - C how cartoons can influence the attitudes of the readers
 - D all of the above
4. Many Roman cartoons of the first century A.D. contained
 - A less murder and violence than today's
 - B little that could be called true humor
 - C mainly semireligious themes
 - D themes that have always been popular

Do you remember the important facts?

5. The greatest psychological appeal of cartoons lies in the fact that
 - A cartoons oppose the attitudes of the times
 - B people can identify themselves with cartoon characters
 - C people like to escape from their everyday problems
 - D laughter is revitalizing
6. The cartoon *The Yellow Kid* was
 - A an experiment that became a classic
 - B a short-lived, sensational feature
 - C a copy that was more successful than the original
 - D the first real caricature

Did you recognize cause and effect?

7. Criticism such as that directed at *Mutt and Jeff* was
 - A an aid in popularizing comics
 - B almost the downfall of the new features
 - C proof that comics were important
 - D a revelation of the weakness of the comics
8. Nationwide syndication made it possible for rural newspapers to
 - A carry the same comics city papers carried
 - B hire more cartoonists of their own
 - C make their local comics popular elsewhere
 - D diversify in many unrelated areas

Can you draw the right conclusions?

9. The Pulitzer Prize for political cartooning is an indication of the
 - A universal appeal of cartoons
 - B stature cartooning has achieved
 - C influence of good journalism
 - D public's faith in journalism
10. Cartoons will probably continue to exist as long as
 - A daily newspapers are published
 - B human nature remains the same
 - C controversial issues are present
 - D there exists a need for reform

LEARN ABOUT WORDS

A. Often you can tell the meaning of a word from its context—the words around it.

Directions: Find the word in the paragraph that means

1. climbed (1)
2. exemplifies (3)
3. predict (4)
4. taken advantage of (4)
5. very strange (8)
6. small boy (8)
7. images; likenesses (9)
8. produce (10)
9. matched (13)
10. phase (14)

B. A word may have more than one meaning. Its meaning depends on the way it is used.

Directions: Decide which meaning fits the word as it is used in the paragraph. Write the letter that stands before the meaning you choose.

11. broke (1)
 - A escaped
 - B started
 - C separated
12. situations (3)
 - A locations
 - B jobs
 - C circumstances
13. medium (4)
 - A means
 - B environment
 - C something indeterminate
14. reflected (5)
 - A thought about
 - B mirrored
 - C thrown back
15. issues (11)
 - A outlets
 - B matters
 - C results

- C.** *poly* (much; many; more than one)
pan (all; every)

A knowledge of these **prefixes** will provide you with a key to the meaning of many unfamiliar words.

Directions: Use the prefix *poly-* or *pan-* to complete each word so that it fits the definition. Write the word.

16. ___acea (a cure-all; a medicine for all diseases)
17. ___chrome (of many colors; sensitive to many colors)
18. ___demic (of all the people; universal)
19. ___gamy (practice of marriage with more than one wife)
20. ___glot (speaking many languages well)
21. ___theon (temple erected in honor of all the gods)
22. ___theism (belief in many gods)
23. ___orama (unlimited view in all directions)
24. ___demonium (originally, the palace of all the devils; now, confusion)

D. An **idiom** is an accepted phrase or expression that does not mean literally what it says.

It is *as good as* lost.

As good as is an idiom meaning "nearly" or "practically."

Directions: The idioms in column II are built on the word *good*. Write the idiom that best fits each meaning in column I.

I	II
25. very; entirely	come to no good
26. useless; worthless	for good and all
27. as a profit	good and
28. able to pay or give	make good
29. large quantity	no good
30. end in failure	to the good
31. kind; generous	good deal
32. repay for; replace	good-hearted
33. permanently; finally	good for