

Walt Disney

Young Walt Disney loved to draw. One day, when he was 6 years old, he found a bucket of black gooey tar. Using a stick and the tar, he painted a large picture on the side of the white farmhouse where he lived. He didn't realize that when the tar dried it wouldn't come off!

In 1910 the Disneys moved to Kansas City where Walt's father became a newspaper distributor. Walt, now age 8, had to get up at 3:30 each morning to help deliver papers. "Your pay," stated his **stern** father, "is the home I provide for you." At school, Walt formed a close friendship with his classmate Walter Pfeiffer. The two boys put together comedy acts that they performed at amateur nights at theaters. Although he liked performing comedy, Walt's greatest joys were drawing cartoons and taking Saturday classes at the Art Institute.



By 1920 Walt was pursuing his dream of becoming a cartoonist. He accepted a job at Kansas City Film Ad, a company that created animated commercials for local businesses. These ads were made by using cut-out paper figures with movable joints. Walt became fascinated by animation and learned everything he could on the subject. Spending hours every night in his father's garage, he experimented with filming series of drawings—a technique the best animators were using. In 1922 he formed his own company that made animated cartoons called Laugh-O-Grams. Just one year later, though, his company went bankrupt. With almost no money left, 21-year-old Walt headed for Hollywood. In time he had a new company, Walt Disney Productions, that was creating Oswald the Lucky Rabbit cartoons.

On November 18, 1928, a new Disney cartoon titled Steamboat Willie opened in New York City. Billed in the program as "the **FIRST** animated cartoon with **SOUND**," it featured an **endearing** mouse named Mickey, whose voice had been done by Walt. The film was a huge hit. By 1934 Disney had produced more than 60 Mickey Mouse cartoons. The next year, the company used a new technology to make the first Mickey Mouse cartoon in color.

With his cartoon business now a success, Walt began looking for new challenges. He decided to produce America's first full-length animated film. It was to be based on the fairy tale Snow White. Walt supervised every step of the production, pushing everyone to meet his high standards. The film, which took three years to complete, had its first presentation on December 21, 1937. When the movie ended, the audience stood up and cheered.

Over the next 21 years, Walt built Walt Disney Productions into an empire of family entertainment. Working nonstop, he led his company into the production of live-action movies and television programming. In 1955 he realized his most ambitious dream when Disneyland opened in California. This extraordinary man, who brought joy and laughter to so many, died in 1966.

COMPREHENSION CHECK

- Which of these words best describes the picture that Walt made on the side of his family's white farmhouse?
 A. permanent B. colorful C. animated D. tiny
- In paragraph two, Walt's father is described as stern. Which of these is the best synonym for *stern*?
 A. handsome B. strict C. generous D. lively
- When he was a young teenager, Walt helped create something called "The Two Walts." Based on what you read in this biography, you can conclude that this was
 A. a television program. B. an animated cartoon.
 C. an animated commercial. D. a comedy act.
- According to what you read in this biography, which of these statements is true?
 A. The company that made Oswald the Lucky Rabbit cartoons went bankrupt.
 B. Animated cartoons made before 1928 were silent and in black-and-white.
 C. In 1920 the best animation was done using cut-out paper figures.
 D. Laugh-O-Grams were animated commercials for Kansas City businesses.
- In paragraph four, it says that Steamboat Willie "featured an endearing mouse named Mickey." Which of these is the best synonym for *endearing*?
 A. lovable B. silent C. unpleasant D. scary
- What made Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* an important event in motion picture history?
 A. It was the first animated cartoon with sound.
 B. It was America's first animated film in color.
 C. It was America's first full-length animated film.
 D. It was Disney's first live-action movie.
- Why was 1955 a very special year for Walt Disney?
 A. It was his first year in Hollywood.
 B. His cartoon business had finally become a success.
 C. His company had produced its fiftieth Mickey Mouse cartoon.
 D. It was the year that Disneyland opened.
- Which of the following helped Walt Disney make his company so successful?
 A. He made sure that the films he produced met his high standards.
 B. He worked very hard and looked for new challenges.
 C. He used new technologies to make some of his films important "firsts."
 D. all of the above