Stan Lee, creator of a galaxy of Marvel superheroes, dies at 95

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff
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LOS ANGELES, California — Legendary comic book creator Stan Lee died Monday, November 12. He was 95 years old. Lee helped revolutionize the comic book. He also helped Hollywood makes billions of dollars by introducing human frailties in superheroes such as Spider-Man, the Fantastic Four and the Incredible Hulk.

Lee died in Los Angeles, California.

As the top writer at Marvel Comics and later as its publisher, Lee was widely considered the architect of the contemporary comic book.

He revived the industry in the 1960s by offering the costumes and action craved by younger readers. However, he also insisted on including sophisticated plots, college-level dialogue, science fiction and even philosophy.

Millions responded to the unlikely mix of realistic fantasy and many of his characters, including Spider-Man, the Hulk and X-Men went on to become stars of blockbuster films. Recent projects he helped make possible include the films "Black Panther" and "Doctor Strange" and the TV "Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D."

He Had A Joy For Things "Bigger Than Life And Magical"

"I think everybody loves things that are bigger than life. I think of them as fairy tales for grown-ups," he said in a 2006 interview. "We all grew up with giants and ogres and witches. Well, you get a little bit older and you're too old to read fairy tales. But I don't think you ever outgrow your love for those kind of things, things that are bigger than life and magical and very imaginative."

Lee considered the comic-book medium an art form and he produced many comic books. By some accounts, he came up with a new comic book every day for 10 years, that would be 3,650 comic books.

"I wrote so many I don't even know. I wrote either hundreds or thousands of them," he said.

Lee Brought Comic Book Characters To Life In The 1960s

He hit his stride in the 1960s. That's when he brought the Fantastic Four, the Hulk, Spider-Man, Iron Man and numerous others to life.

"It was like there was something in the air. I couldn't do anything wrong," he recalled.
His heroes, meanwhile, were not just do-gooders, unlike Superman from rival DC Comics. The Fantastic Four fought with each other. Spider-Man was convinced to do superhero work by his alter ego Peter Parker, who had to deal with things like crushes and dandruff. The Hulk was known for his hatred of himself. Daredevil was blind and Iron Man had a weak heart.

Jeff Kline was the executive producer of an animated show on TV. He said, "the beauty of Stan Lee's characters is that they were characters first and superheroes next."

**Symbols Of Social Change: Black Panther, Savage She-Hulk**

Some of Lee's creations became symbols of social change. The inner turmoil of Spider-Man represented 1960s America, for example. The Black Panther and The Savage She-Hulk mirrored the travails of minorities and women.

Lee scripted most of Marvel's superhero comics himself during the 1960s. This included the Avengers and the X-Men, two of the most enduring superhero groups. In 1972, he became Marvel's publisher and editorial director, four years later, 72 million copies of Spider-Man were sold.

"He's become our Mickey Mouse," he once said of the masked, web-spinning crusader. Mickey Mouse is the character most people think of when they think of Disney.

**"X-Men" and "Spider-Man" Hit The Big Screen**

The first big-budget movie based on Lee's characters, "X-Men," was a smash in 2000, earning more than $130 million at North American theaters. "Spider-Man" did even better, taking in more than $400 million in 2002.

Stanley Martin Lieber was born December 28, 1922, in New York. He grew up a fan of "Hardy Boys" adventure books and Errol Flynn movies. He got a job at Timely Comics after graduating from high school.

Within a few months, the editor and art director quit. This left the 17-year-old Lee with creative control over the company, which eventually became Marvel. Lieber changed his name, thinking Lee would be used for "silly little comics." And he would keep his real name for writing books.

**His Early Work And Early Years Of Comics**

His early work largely reflected popular movies — westerns, crime dramas, romance, whatever was the rage at the time. He worked for about 50 cents per page.

Lee spent some time in the Army during World War II, writing for training films. Then he was back at Marvel to begin a long and admittedly boring run of assembly line comic book production.

In the 1950s the government was worried about the impact of comics on children. They didn't want comics to show violence. They also didn't want them to encourage children to disobey authorities. This limited the kinds of comics that could be created.

Lee said he was also working for a publisher who considered comics as fare only for children.

"One day I said, 'This is insane,'" Lee told The Guardian in 1979. "I'm just doing the same type of stories as everybody else. I wasn't taking pride in my work and I wanted to quit. But my wife said, 'Look, why don't you do the kind of comics you want for a change?'"

**"The Fantastic Four" Comics Hit Stands In 1960**

The result was the first issue of "The Fantastic Four," in 1960, with the characters, plot and text from Lee and the illustrations by famed Marvel artist Jack Kirby.

The characters were normal people changed into reluctant superheroes through no fault of their own.

Writing in "Origins of Marvel Comics," Lee described the quartet this way: "The characters would be the kind of characters I could personally relate to, they'd be flesh and blood, they'd have their faults and..."
foibles, they'd be fallible and feisty and — most important of all — inside their colorful, costumed booties they'd still have feet of clay."

"The Amazing Spider-Man" followed in 1962 and before long, Marvel Comics was an industry behemoth.

**He Also Worked For Marvel Rival DC Comics**

Lee's direct influence faded in the 1970s as he gave up some of his editorial duties at Marvel. But with his trademark white mustache and tinted sunglasses, he was the industry's most recognizable figure. He lectured widely on popular culture.

Lee continued to do work for Marvel and at one point went to work for DC Comics to reinvent Superman, Batman and other signature characters for Marvel's one time rival.

The dapper, friendly comic book genius continued to work into his 90s on numerous projects, including comics, films and DVDs.

Lee is survived by his daughter, Joanie, and a younger brother who also worked in comics, Larry Lieber.

Directions: Use the information found in the article to identify the best response for each item.

R1: Cite text evidence to support an analysis of what the text says explicitly

1. According to the article, why did Stan Lee want to quit the comic book industry?
   A. He felt pressure from his wife to leave the company he was working for and start writing his own comics.
   B. He felt that he was restricted by the government and his publisher to write comics that he didn’t want to write.
   C. He felt that he could not write characters like the ones he read about in "Hardy Boys" or saw in the movies.
   D. He felt that he was forced to take on the responsibility of running a comic book company when he was just 17.

R1: Cite text evidence to support an analysis of what the text says implicitly

2. Why were Stan Lee’s superheroes so easy to relate to?
   A. They were do-gooders that were very similar to Superman from DC Comics.
   B. They were characters who had impressive powers and saved people.
   C. They were violent and often encouraged kids to ignore authority figures.
   D. They were imperfect characters who made mistakes and faced challenges.

R4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases

3. Read this paragraph from the section “His Early Work And Early Years Of Comics.”
   In the 1950s the government was worried about the impact of comics on children. They didn’t want comics to show violence. They also didn’t want them to encourage children to disobey authorities. This limited the kinds of comics that could be created.

   What is the meaning of the word impact as it is used in the section/article?
   A. to come into forcible contact with another object
   B. to have a strong effect on someone or something
   C. a collision
   D. an effect on health and well-being

R2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text

4. Read the list of sentences from the article.
   1. Spider-Man was convinced to do superhero work by his alter ego Peter Parker, who had to deal with things like crushes and dandruff.
   2. The inner turmoil of Spider-Man represented 1960s America, for example.
   3. The Black Panther and The Savage She-Hulk mirrored the travails of minorities and women.
   4. His early work largely reflected popular movies — westerns, crime dramas, romance, whatever was the rage at the time.

   Which two sentences, taken together, provide the BEST evidence to support the idea that Lee’s comics touched upon serious and important issues facing society?
   A. 1 and 3
   B. 1 and 4
   C. 2 and 3
   D. 2 and 4