

Finding Inspiration in the Funny Pages

Using comic strips to inspire young writers makes sense for many reasons. First, comics can ease one of the toughest parts of the writing process: finding ideas and getting started. As you know, many students regularly groan that they “don’t have anything to write about.” But introducing and discussing a comic strip can help get their creative juices flowing. Because students come to know comic characters well, they feel as if old friends are guiding them into the writing process. Because the comics touch on a variety of kid-friendly, compelling issues, students won’t have any problem coming up with ideas to write about! And best of all, because this book includes so many comics on so many topics, you’ll be able to make writing a regular part of every day, an important step in nurturing children into literacy.

A second reason it makes sense to use comics to teach writing is that they appeal to readers of all levels. The pictures and simple text work together to help struggling readers successfully read a strip. At the same time, students won’t feel as though the material is babyish; most kids are proud to read newspaper comic strips because they see the strips as something grown-ups enjoy.

A third—and very important—reason to teach writing with comic strips is that comics often call upon students’ higher-order thinking skills. A comic rarely states its main idea outright; instead it implies or gently hints at its message. That means your students will put their thinking skills to the test as they interpret, reflect, and write.

Special Features of This Book

This prompt collection is designed to meet the needs of busy teachers who want to make writing enjoyable, relaxing, and meaningful. In this book, you will find the following:

- ★ creative prompts that help students practice a wide variety of writing genres and call upon young writers to predict outcomes, understand the main idea, compare and contrast, make character sketches, generate lists, connect the comics to their own lives, express their own opinions, and more
- ★ background information about the featured comic strips, characters, and cartoonists
- ★ a thematic banner at the top of each page for easy reference
- ★ a topical index (page 64) to help you find prompts that connect to your curriculum
- ★ two or more prompts for each comic strip so you can choose which is best for your class or allow students to choose their favorite prompt
- ★ a resource list (page 63) including Web sites and books to help you create additional comic-strip writing prompts

Using the Prompts

The following tips will help you make the most of the comic-strip prompts:

- 1 Read aloud or make copies of the background information and character sketches provided for each comic strip. This will help your students become more familiar with the strip—and better able to respond creatively to the writing prompts.
- 2 Allow your students to choose the prompt they'd like to respond to for each strip (each strip includes two thought-provoking prompts). Each prompt includes several questions or ideas for writing topics. Children can choose from among these prompts based on the direction in which they wish to take their writing. They don't need to answer every question.
- 3 Use the Web addresses and other resources listed in the back of the book to e-mail or write to a cartoonist whose work your class particularly admires. Students can pose questions and express their admiration while building letter-writing skills.
- 4 In addition to having students respond in writing to each comic strip, invite them to act out the scenes. Students can use their imagination to portray what happened before the first illustrated frame—or what might happen next.
- 5 As you read the daily newspaper, keep your eyes open for comic strips that relate to your curriculum. Clip them out and write your own prompts to go with each one. Encourage students to do the same.
- 6 Use the prompts as part of a classroom Comic Corner. Make copies of some of the prompts, and store them in a folder or binder in a designated area of your classroom. Send students to the Comic Corner when they finish work early, while you are working with small groups, or when individual students are looking for something to do.



GARFIELD

Created by Jim Davis

Background Information

Garfield is among the best known and most beloved comic characters ever created. When this humorous strip about a lazy tabby cat was first syndicated in 1978, it appeared in 41 newspapers. Today it is printed in more than 2,600 newspapers around the world. The comic strip is the most widely syndicated Sunday strip in the United States, and it has more than 220 million faithful readers. Collections of *Garfield* strips have been translated into 26 languages and have frequently hit the tops of best-seller lists. Through the years, the comic strip has given rise to a popular animated CBS television series, *Garfield and Friends*, and more than a dozen prime-time TV specials.

Garfield cartoonist Jim Davis began drawing when he was a child. As a result of his asthma, Davis spent much of his free time indoors with pencils and paper. And his family's farm provided plenty of inspiration for drawing cartoon cats: At one time more than two dozen cats roamed the property! Today Davis has a dog named Molly, but, surprisingly, he does not own a cat.

Because *Garfield* has an audience that spans many nations and generations, it usually deals with simple, universal themes such as friendship, as well as daily routines such as sleeping, eating, and watching television. With his wit and subtle wisdom, Garfield the cat is sure to delight your young readers!

Cast of Characters

Garfield: A lazy tabby cat who loves naps and every kind of food except vegetables

Jon Arbuckle: Garfield's kind owner, who leads a simple life and always seems to be serving Garfield a meal

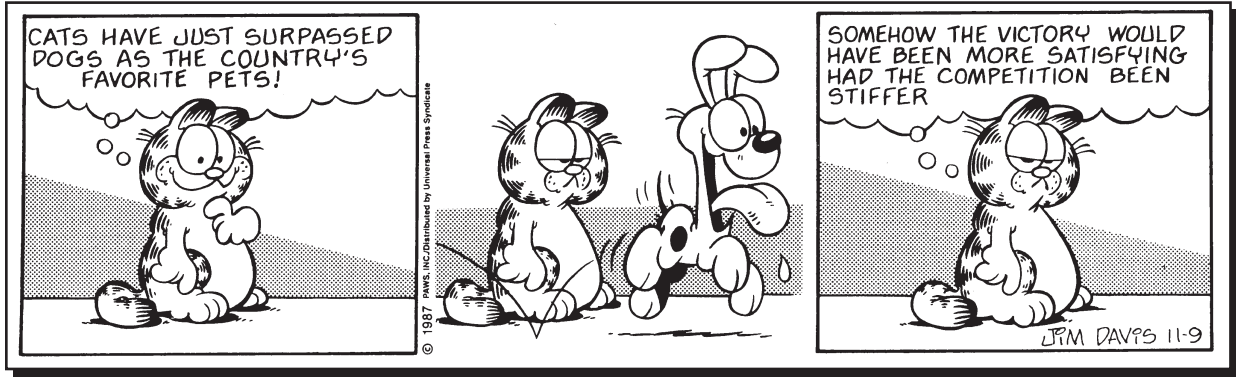
Odie: The other pet in the Arbuckle household. Often teased by Garfield, Odie is not the smartest dog under the sun!

Pooky: Garfield's beloved teddy bear

Name _____

Date _____

Number One Pet?



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Write About It: Which animal makes a better pet: a dog or a cat? Write an imaginary conversation on this topic between Garfield the cat and Odie the dog. Have each animal argue why he deserves the title “the country’s favorite pet.”

Keep Going: On a piece of posterboard, draw a picture of your favorite pet. It can be a real pet that you know or one you’d like to have one day. Beneath the picture, write at least five sentences explaining why this pet is so great. Be sure to give your poster a title, too!

Name _____

Date _____

Dream On



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Write About It: What did Garfield do while he was dreaming? How do you suppose Jon, his owner, will react? Do you think cats and other animals really dream? If so, what do you think they dream about? Choose three kinds of animals and describe a dream each one might have.

Keep Going: What is the strangest dream you remember having? Write a story telling what happened in your dream. Include as many details as you can, such as the setting or location of your dream, the characters in your dream, and even how you felt.