

Muppet Mania

Oscar the Grouch, Miss Piggy, Grover. Kermit the Frog, Cookie Monster, the Fraggles. These are a few of the beloved characters created by Jim Henson. These heartwarming muppets still bring a smile to people's faces, even thirty years after Jim's death.

Jim Henson was born in Mississippi in 1936. He started making puppets when he was in college. At that time, most puppets were made from wood. Jim wanted to make a puppet that would be easier to move. He also wanted to be able to show more personality than wood would allow. So he searched for a different material that would work. He ended up using foam rubber and plastic covered with fabric.

Jim called his creations muppets. That was his made up word, which was a combination of marionette and puppet. In the 1950s and 60s, the muppets appeared in short sketches on TV. In 1969 they rose to fame on *Sesame Street*.

The muppets got their own TV show, *The Muppet Show*, in 1976. This show mixed comedy sketches performed by muppets with appearances from celebrity guests. It was slow to find an audience but eventually became very popular.

Jim's muppets also starred in their own movie in 1979. It was called the *Muppet Movie*. More movies starring muppets have been made in the years since then.

One of the techniques that Jim used with the muppets was to have the camera focus on the puppet while the puppeteer was out of the frame. The puppeteers didn't have to be hidden behind a screen, which gave them more freedom. The puppets could also show more lifelike movements and detailed expressions.

Jim was known for his unique sense of humor. Some of his comedy sketches were very funny, like Pigs in Space and the Swedish Chef. He said, "I've always tried to present a positive view of the world in my work. It's so much easier to be negative and cynical and predict doom for the world than it is to try and figure out how to make things better." Jim's work continues to make people laugh everyday.



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. Which muppet was NOT mentioned in the passage?
 - a. Gonzo
 - b. Miss Piggy
 - c. Kermit the Frog
 - d. Swedish Chef

2. Muppet is a combination of the words puppet and _____.
 - a. Monster
 - b. Marionette
 - c. Multicolored
 - d. Minion

3. How did the muppets first become popular?
 - a. The Muppet Show
 - b. Sesame Street
 - c. The Muppet Movie
 - d. Sketches on TV

4. Why did Jim decide to use foam rubber and plastic covered with fabric instead of wood?
 - a. So the puppets would be easier to move
 - b. So the puppets wouldn't catch on fire
 - c. So the puppets could show more personality
 - d. A and C

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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