

POPEYE THE SAILORMAN

A nautical comic strip character and cultural icon



Popeye first appeared in the Thimble Theatre comic strip on 17 January 1929. He was hired by Olive Oyl's brother Castor Oyl to take Castor and a friend to Dice Island, an offshore gambling casino, where they engaged in various adventures and misadventures. Popeye disappeared from the comic strip after a few weeks, but was brought back due to reader requests. He soon became the main character in the comic strip, which was eventually renamed Popeye. Olive Oyl was Popeye's true love, but she divided her attention between Popeye and Bluto. Other characters that later joined the strip were Swee'Pea (a foundling adopted by Popeye), J. Wellington Wimpy (a hamburger-loving cowardly moocher), and Eugene the Jeep (a yellow doglike animal with magical powers). The comic strip is still in publication, one of the longest running ever. Popeye later appeared in comic books and animated cartoons. In 1938, Popeye was adapted to radio and, in 1960, Popeye made his debut on television. The live-action musical motion picture Popeye was released in 1980. Directed by Robert Altman, the movie starred Robin Williams (in his first movie), with Shelly Duvall as Olive Oyl and Paul Smith as Bluto. Although most of the action in the comic strips occurs ashore, many of the characters (particularly the evil ones) retained a nautical flavor. Popeye's most famous attribute was his large and powerful forearms, which became invincible when he downed a can of spinach. Records show that consumption of spinach by children grew noticeably as Popeye expanded in popularity. The comic strip popularized the word "goon", meaning a thug or lackey and the word "jeep" was adopted by Willys-Overland for its World War II military vehicle. "Wimpy" came to symbolize a likeable but cowardly person and was later used as the name for a chain of hamburger restaurants. Popeye and his friends have had long and influential lives.