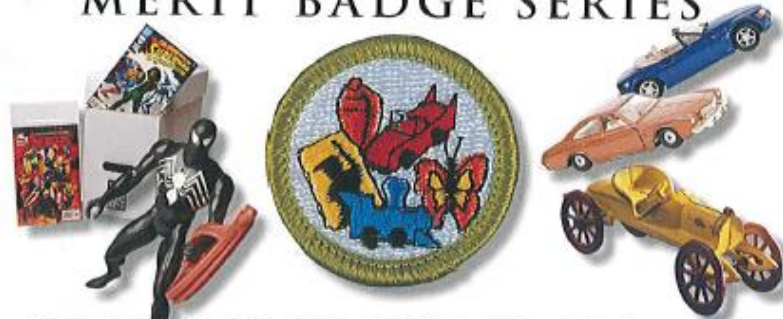


MERIT BADGE SERIES



COLLECTIONS



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COLLECT
2008



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA.

Requirements

1. Prepare a short written report or outline for your counselor, giving a detailed description of your collection,* including a short history. Be sure to include why you chose that particular type of collecting and what you enjoy and have learned from your collection.*
2. Explain the growth and development of your collection.
3. Demonstrate your knowledge of preserving and displaying your collection.
 - a. Explain the precautions you need to take to preserve your collection, including
 - (1) Handling
 - (2) Cleaning
 - (3) Storage
 - b. Explain how best to display your collection, keeping in mind preserving as discussed above.
 - c. Explain to your counselor the events available for a hobbyist of this collection, including shows, seminars, conventions, contests, and museum programs and exhibits.
4. Demonstrate your knowledge of collecting and investing. Discuss with your counselor
 - a. How investing and speculation would apply to your collection
 - b. What you would look for in purchasing other collections similar to yours
 - c. What you would expect in return value if you decided to sell all or part of the collection

*Stamp and coin collecting are excluded from eligibility for this merit badge.

35875
ISBN 978-0-8395-3242-2
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5. Do the following:
 - a. Discuss with your counselor at least 10 terms commonly used in your collection and be prepared to discuss the definition of each.
 - b. Show your counselor any two groups from your collection. Explain how you organized your collection and why you chose that method. (Note: If your collection is too large to transport and your counselor is unable to view your collection directly, photographs should be available to share.)
 - c. Explain how your collection is valued by other collectors, and display to your counselor any price guides that may be available.
 - d. Explain how your collection is graded for value, physical defects, size, and age. Show the various classifications or ratings used in your collection.
 - e. List the national, state, or local association responsive to your collection.
 - f. Show the location of and explain to your counselor the identification number (if applicable), series, brand name (if any), and any other special identification marks.
6. Discuss with your counselor the plans you have to continue with the collection in the future.
7. Discuss with your counselor why and how collecting has changed and how this applies to your collection.
8. Find out about career opportunities in collecting. Pick one and find out the education, training, and experience required for this profession. Discuss this with your counselor, and explain why this profession might interest you.





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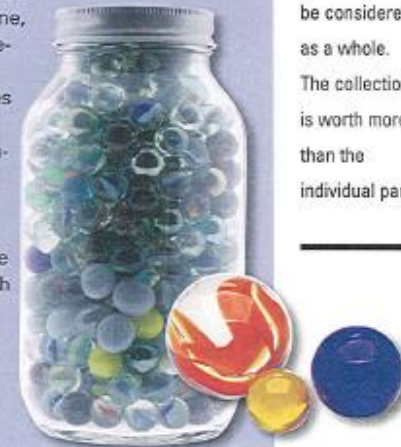


Treasure Hunts and Paper Chases

Collecting was once a pastime of the wealthy. Many well-to-do people collected fine art, musical instruments, ancient coins, and rare books. But with the Industrial Revolution in the early 1800s came mass production. Suddenly the new consumer society could afford to buy all kinds of goods.

Don't Lose Your Marbles

Marbles have been found in strange places, including ancient Egyptian tombs. However, most collectible marbles have been produced within the last 160 years. Marbles are made of many substances, including glass, stone, minerals, clay, pottery, porcelain, and china. Some of the first porcelain and china ones were made in the 1840s. Glass marbles became popular in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and mass production of marbles began around the same time. Some rare marbles, which can fetch close to \$1,000 each, have names as colorful as they look: popeyes, sparklers, agates, and rainbows.



A collection is not just an accumulation of things, but a well-ordered grouping of several items to be considered as a whole. The collection is worth more than the individual parts.

If you enjoy nature, you might collect rocks, fossils, shells, or leaves. If you enjoy sports, you might collect sports cards, baseballs, caps, uniforms, pennants, hockey pucks, or bumper stickers. If toys interest you, so might superhero or action figures, cars, or model airplanes or trains. If military history piques your curiosity, you might collect uniforms, helmets, insignia, medals, flags, or maps.

This pamphlet will give you specific ideas and tips for collecting. You will also find expanded information about comic books, sports cards, and rocks—some of the most popular collectibles.



In the past, butterfly collecting was a very popular hobby. Collectors captured butterflies and pinned them to boards. Today, however, people prefer to observe butterflies in the same way others “watch” birds—by taking photos and making sketches.



The die-cast model car craze began in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the introduction of Matchbox cars. The hobby of collecting cars skyrocketed in 1968 when toymaker Mattel launched Hot Wheels. These die-cast metal cars came with special torsion-bar suspension and low-friction wheel bearings, making them the “fastest in the world.” Other die-cast brands include Corgi, Dinky, Ertl, Johnny Lightning, Lledo, Racing Champions, Team Caliber, and Tootsie Toy.

Teachers, librarians, and counselors familiar with your field of collecting can help you find sources to research your ideas.



Moving action figures are popular collectibles. Introduced in 1964, G.I. Joe was the first movable action toy in the United States. The World War II soldier came complete with movable limbs and realistic cloth uniforms. In 1970, G.I. Joe figures got realistic hair. Other action figures were introduced during the 1970s, including toys based on the movie *Planet of the Apes* and the television series *Star Trek*.

Mapping Out Your Treasure Hunt

Your first step toward starting a collection is figuring out what you want to collect. Look around your bedroom. Do you already have two of something, such as sharks’ teeth or license plates? Add one more to either pair and you have yourself a small collection. Perhaps you like old things. If you could live in the past, what century would you choose? Maybe you would like to travel back in time by collecting antique tools or toys, cookie cutters, or documents from that historical period.

Browse through an encyclopedia or flip through catalogs of collectibles in a library or bookstore. Search the Internet (with your parent’s permission) for information and clubs relating to your interest. For example, if you like snow globes, then enter “snow globes” in the search field. You will find a list of Web sites about these collectibles, where to find different kinds of snow globes, and how to care for them.

There are lots of places to find collectibles. Look in the yellow pages to find specialty stores under these headings: Antiques Dealers, Collectibles, Comic Books, Gift Shops, Hobby Shops, Rock Shops, and Sports Cards. The people working in those shops can give you a lot of information and tell you about local clubs and upcoming events.

Flea markets, swap meets, and conventions are great places to find items to add to and broaden your collection. Arrive early to look at what is available. If you can wait to buy an item, return hours before closing on the final day because many vendors lower prices just before the event ends.

Cataloging, Displaying, and Storing a Collection

Properly cataloging your collection is very important for several reasons. It provides essential information for proving the genuineness of your collection. It is a record of financial transactions that you may have to report on an official tax form if you sell your collection for a big profit. It also is a document about your collection that you may need to produce if your collection becomes so valuable that you should carry collectibles insurance.

The records for all the items in your collection make up your *master list*. You might want to keep this information in a three-ring binder or set up an electronic catalog. When you acquire an item for your collection, give it a number. In your master list, record

- The number you gave the item
- A brief description of the item (age, condition, etc.) and a picture (if possible)
- How much you paid for it
- The date and place you acquired it
- The current price guide value
- Any other information that will help explain its significance
- Location of the item (notebook, box, cabinet, etc.)



No. 27
Spider-Man by Mattel (1984)
Description: Black costume, secret wars
Condition: Excellent, with small scuff mark
on left shoulder
Purchased: 6/28/03 in Houston, Texas, for \$30
Current Price Guide Value: \$25
Location: Third from left on bookcase shelf

The information you record in your catalog file will depend on the item collected. For example, if the item is a manufactured product, you might record the name of the company and any model or serial numbers. For a limited-edition item, list the number and the size of the edition.



This Wedgwood teacup is the 119th cup produced in a limited edition of 3,000 teacups. Wedgwood is considered one of the finest china companies in the world.

As you hunt for new items to add to your collection, consider carrying a copy of your master list with you. Even if you don't have a large collection yet, you will not have to rely on your memory to know whether an item you already own is graded higher than one you are thinking about buying. Plus you will not accidentally sell one of your items for less than you paid for it.



Thrift shops and garage sales are good places to buy inexpensive cases and containers to house your collection. You might even find a piece of your collection that you have been hunting!

A *limited edition* is the issue of a collectible item—such as a book, art print, medal, or commemorative plate—in a small set quantity.

It is best to keep comic books and sports cards in their protective jackets or in boxes because handling them will decrease their value.

Display Tips

How you display your collection depends on the kind of collection you own. Because of their fragility, certain nature collections such as pressed flowers or leaves should be displayed like framed pictures or mounted on felt boards. Other natural objects such as rocks and fossils can be kept in divided cases or boxes. However, do not keep the boxes under your bed where they are out of sight and out of mind. Part of the fun of having a collection is showing it off and sharing it.

Use your imagination and a little sense of humor (if appropriate) to showcase your collection. Tack a collection of skeleton keys around a doorframe. Display shells in inexpensive bowls or an empty aquarium or showcase a collection of marbles in a recycled divided container meant for assorted chocolates.

One way to show off and share your collection is by entering contests. Some are sponsored by collectors' clubs, conventions, and even state fairs. Local libraries and historical societies often present personal collections that tie in with their exhibits.



Storage Tips

You will want to protect your collection so that it maintains its value and can be enjoyed for many years.

- Store (and display) your collection in a cool, dry place.
- Protect your collectibles from dust, extreme temperatures, and direct sunlight.
- For collectibles such as comic books and sports cards, use a protective polyester film sleeve or a box made with acid-free materials.

Save the packaging, certificates, and other materials that come with an item, and assign them the same collection number. Collectibles kept in perfect (Mint) condition in their original boxes with all accompanying materials are worth more than the item without its packaging. They are worth even more if the original box has never been opened.

Store collectibles with moving parts (such as die-cast cars and action figures) or painted items (such as figurines) in individual, divided, and numbered containers. Wrap delicate pieces in soft cloth, bubble wrap, or wadded-up newspaper to prevent scratches and other types of damage. Gently wipe dust from any collectible before storing. If your collectible is stored in a box that is divided into smaller sections, be sure to number each section and put that number in your records.



Depending on its scarcity, the value of a collectible model car could decrease by as much as 50 percent to 75 percent if the paint is scratched or chipped. Take the time to carefully wrap and store your items when they are not on display.

Adhesive labels can damage the surface of your collectible.

Instead, write the item's collection number on a piece of paper and keep it in the sleeve or the box.

Safeguarding Collectibles

- Hand-wash decorated china using only mild soap and warm water.
- Protect paper-based collectibles with acid-free products.
- Ask an expert's advice before cleaning older articles made of fabric or other delicate materials. Store these items in cool, dry locations, and do not seal these collectibles in plastic.
 - Avoid abrasives or chemical products such as bleaches or polishes, which could harm your collectible's finish.
 - Avoid tampering (this includes refinishing, replating, or restoring) or experimenting with a collectible. Doing so could drastically reduce its value.



Speculation is making a risky purchase based on the hope that you will be able to sell the collectible for a profit.

Collecting: For Fun or Profit?

Everyone has heard stories of rare collectibles that made their owners rich and famous. The hard fact is, most collectibles never bring megabucks when sold. No one knows which collectible will increase in value. So, as you collect, make your purchases with care. Read price guides, specialized catalogs, and collectors' club newsletters. Study auction results, and avoid paying too much for a collectible with the expectation that it will increase in value. It may be years before you can realize a profit.



The main point of price guides is to provide an extensive list (with photos) of collectible items by category along with suggested purchase prices based on condition. The guides pack a lot more information, too. You will find "state of the market" information about trends and recent sales; articles about the history of the category; warnings about reproductions; lists of upcoming events (auctions, exhibits, seminars, workshops, museum programs); contacts for collectors' clubs; auction announcements; and sale advertisements.

Determining Value: Factors That Matter

A combination of factors determines a collectible's value. Certain factors are more important than others, depending on the type of collectible. For example, if you collect *nostalgia*—sentimental items that remind you of the past—you might be willing to pay more than the item is worth because it has emotional meaning to you. Here are key factors that affect value.

Condition. An item in perfect shape with a like-new appearance will command a top price. It is much more valuable than the same item with flaws.

Authenticity. Do not assume that an item is genuine. Study examples of the real thing, and watch out for reproductions and forgeries. Look for identifying *marks* on the bottom of the item. A signature or date does not guarantee authenticity but should be considered a clue along with information about the design, material, and technique.

Age. An item at least 100 years old is an antique. Age alone does not determine an item's value, but age *and* scarcity, for example, combine for a higher value.

Scarcity. Regardless of age or condition, scarcity does create value because so few items are available. However, certain collectible items produced—and available—in large quantities may be in higher demand because they are more popular than the scarce item.

Provenance. The collectible has documented proof of the history of its ownership. This proof does not guarantee authenticity. Sometimes the value of an item with provenance comes from the celebrity status of a previous owner.

Context. An item has a higher value if it has historical or cultural significance. For example, a posted announcement about an upcoming meeting becomes more valuable if it is related to an important time in history, such as the Civil Rights Movement.

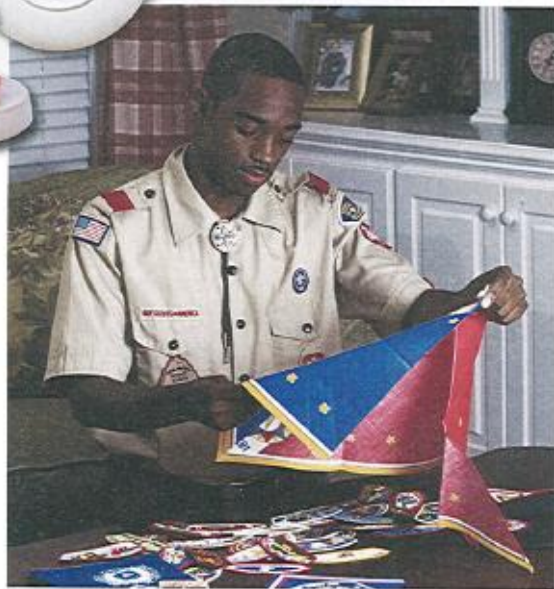
It usually is best to purchase one really good item rather than buying several slightly flawed pieces.



Invest your time in your collection, not just your money. Read as much as you can about your collectible items. Talk to experienced collectors and dealers. Save your money to purchase one really good item instead of buying several flawed pieces. Build your collection slowly and thoughtfully, adding more valuable pieces as your knowledge increases. Buy what you like, and don't let anyone talk you into selling or trading an item until you are ready.



A **mark**, or hallmark on the bottom of an item such as a china plate or porcelain figurine, provides identifying information: country of origin, manufacturer, age, material, model or pattern, name of the artist. A **touchmark** is the maker's mark impressed on pewter.



Colorful and relatively inexpensive, neckerchiefs from special events and locations are popular with Scout collectors. Other favorite items are neckerchief slides, both the standard metal BSA slides and handcrafted ones.

Collecting Scouting Memorabilia

As a Scout, you begin to collect neckerchiefs, pins, and activity patches just by participating. You collect badges that show your rank, council, patrol, and troop number, as well as your completion of merit badge requirements. You might also collect prized patches from Klondike derbies, camporees, and jamborees. Some Scouts also collect handbooks, merit badge pamphlets, and *Boys' Life* magazines. Others prefer Scouting gear such as compasses, canteens, and flashlights.



Scouting-related products from the past include playing cards, board games, bicycle bells, harmonicas, and even a couple of Scouting comic books—*Goofy Scoutmaster* and *Flintstones' Boy Scout Jamboree*. Other Scouting collectibles include Scout banks, paperweights, and coins. Artist Norman Rockwell featured the spirit of Scouting in many of his paintings, which have been reproduced on collectors' plates, mugs, and calendars.

The BSA's 75th anniversary in 1985 produced another series of collectibles. If you collect Scouting memorabilia, you may pick up some new items when the BSA celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2010.



Collecting Odds and Ends

People often assume that collectors are interested only in antiques of great value, such as early American furniture, Chinese porcelain from the Ming dynasty, or paintings by French Impressionists. But many fascinating collections contain the art and objects of everyday life. These items were printed or produced for practical purposes and were not meant to be saved.

Ephemera generally refers to "here today, gone tomorrow" paper collectibles. These include transportation timetables, airplane tickets, sporting event tickets, theatre programs, posters, advertisements and brochures, catalogs, menus, decorated shopping bags, business cards and letterhead, graduation announcements, record album covers, sheet music, Valentines and other greeting cards, magazines, and even candy wrappers.

Ephemera are paper collectibles that were originally meant to be thrown away.



A single-type item collection

Dealers and collectors have expanded the field of ephemera to include three-dimensional objects with the same short-lived purpose. Items include pens with company logos, political campaign pin-back buttons, matchbooks, hotel soap, gift or phone cards, and silicone wristbands.

Collectors tend to concentrate on a single type of item (for example, wall calendars) or on all types of items from a specific company, such as Coca-Cola or John Deere.



Rubber wristbands have become popular among collectors.

A *premium* is a tangible incentive given "for free." Yet, obtaining this reward usually requires the purchase of a product or service.

Advertising Premiums

Businesses are always trying to find ways to attract customers. One way they advertise is to sponsor a show or event. In the 1920s and 1930s, companies paid to sponsor radio programs aimed at children. They offered free prizes if the kids would send in a box top, label, or other proof of purchase from one of the company's products. In return, the children received a poem, sports ticket, or kid-friendly recipe.

Kids' adventure serials became very popular radio programs. In the 1940s, Ovaltine, a company that produced a chocolate malt-flavored powder for milk, sponsored "Captain Midnight." The company offered special premiums, including a club membership in Captain Midnight's Secret Squadron as well as metal secret-decoder badges.

In 1946, Ovaltine offered this Captain Midnight secret decoder called the "Mirro-Flash Code-O-Graph." Today, this "free" radio premium is valued between \$30 and \$75, depending on its condition.



Cereal Box Premiums

In the 1950s, cereal companies introduced sugar-coated cereals and targeted them at children. The art on the boxes tied in with licensed TV and cartoon characters such as Batman and the Flintstones. Premiums included on-the-box cutouts for airplanes, masks, and games. Cereal makers discovered that sales of their products related to the popularity of the characters on the boxes.

You can find radio and cereal box premiums at toy and antiques shows, flea markets, and garage sales. Subscribe to hobby newsletters and mail auctions. Talk to dealers and other collectors. Ask what they have for sale, or tell them what you are interested in buying.



Cereal box premiums are popular with young people who commonly eat the cereal as well as with adults.

Commemorative Ephemera

Some people like to collect *commemorative* items manufactured or printed to honor the memory of a famous person or special event. These souvenirs may include mass-produced items (for example, refrigerator magnets) and high-quality collectibles such as china plates and engraved silver cups. If you build a focused collection of commemorative ephemera, you will learn about the cultural and historical significance of the items as well as discover intriguing information that may inspire you to create "spin-off" collections.

This collection of commemorative ephemera for the 1939 Royal Train Tour of Canada was expanded to include the British king and queen's visit to the United States.



Collecting Ephemera: Emotional or Financial Investment?

Ephemera collectibles often carry emotional weight. The items may be souvenirs that have great personal meaning, such as toys from loved ones, travel stickers from a family trip across America, or quilts made by your grandmother. You may have a difficult time deciding to sell these items or even putting a value on these "priceless" items. However, people interested in advertising and *Americana* collectibles will have a strong opinion about their value from reading price guides and studying auction results, and from their own experience of buying and selling similar objects.

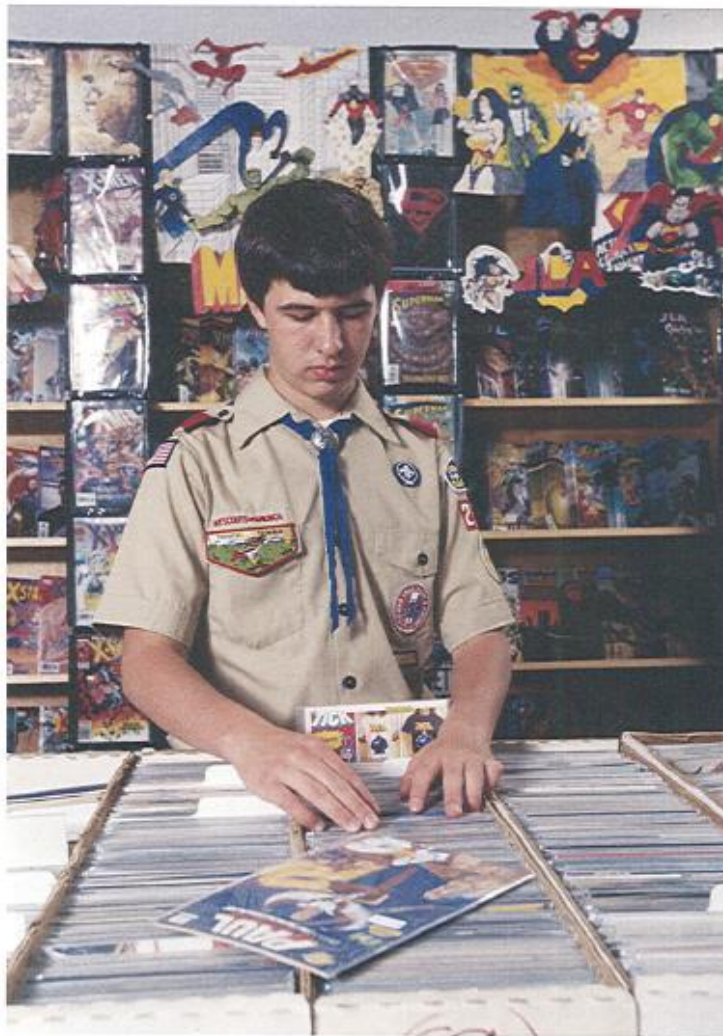


Americana is a field of collecting that includes objects from or about the United States.

A big factor that affects the value of ephemera is *crossover* appeal. For example, a postcard collector, or *deltiologist*, may be surprised to be involved in a bidding war over a stamped postcard featuring a photo of a painting of a Campbell's soup can. The other bidders include a stamp collector, a Campbell's soup brand collector, and an autograph collector (the postcard writer was the painter). That inexpensive postcard will sell for quite a profit because so many people have different and competitive reasons for acquiring it.

Gene Autry—"the Singing Cowboy"—wrote and recorded hundreds of songs, including "Here Comes Santa Claus," starred in Western films and TV shows, and headlined his own radio program. This pin-back button appeals not only to collectors of pins but also to collectors of comics, sheet music, entertainment, Christmas, and cowboy items.





Comic Books: Collecting Superheroes and Villains

The modern-day American comic book is a product of evolution. It began across the Atlantic Ocean more than 500 years ago with a multipanel *broadside* that made fun of religious subjects. Social unrest inspired political cartoons, with the characters' thoughts and speech captured in word balloons. Certain publishers gathered single-panel unrelated cartoons and reprinted them as collections on broadsides. Later, others published sequential multipanels that told a story in oblong strips. In 1818 in Boston, the comic paper called *The Idiot*, or *Invisible Rambler* introduced the first recurring character that spoke with word balloons.

A *broadside* is a large poster-size sheet of paper printed on one side.



In 1827, Swiss writer and artist Rodolphe Töpffer created a "picture novel" in a small oblong comic strip format. In 1842, American publisher Wilson and Company reformatted Töpffer's *The Adventures of Mr. Obadiah Oldbuck* as a 40-page, 195-panel *graphic novel* to fit its magazine format. Today some people credit Töpffer as the inventor of the modern comic strip and Wilson and Company as the first comic book publisher in America.

A *graphic novel* is a fictional story for adults published as a book in the form of a comic strip.

The first sequential comic strips appeared in an American humor magazine in 1852. As the popularity of comics increased, more illustrated humor magazines sprang up. *Puck* was the first to introduce color-tinted cartoons. Newspaper publishers noted the success of those magazines and added "comic supplements" to their Sunday editions to increase their sales.



On May 5, 1895, a New York newspaper reprinted *The Yellow Kid* in color. The cartoon, created by Richard F. Outcault, was originally published in a magazine in black and white. The "Kid" was a goofy-looking, bald-headed boy wearing what looked like a nightgown. Readers loved the colored cartoon and the Kid. The cartoonist secured a copyright for his character and licensed all kinds of Yellow Kid items—from toys to appliances to tobacco products. A 196-page comic book called *The Yellow Kid in McFadden's Flats* appeared in 1897.

Richard Outcault's cartoon, *The Yellow Kid*, is considered the forerunner of the modern-day comic book industry, which includes the licensing and merchandising of comic characters.

Publishers in the early 1900s produced comic or "funny" books in all shapes and sizes, with soft- or hardcovers—some even with dust jackets. Most reprinted comic strips from the "funny papers" sections of newspapers.

"Big Little Books" debuted in 1932 with the promise of providing big reading entertainment in a little book. The first title, *The Adventures of Dick Tracy*, sold for 10 cents. These hardcover books were approximately 4 inches square and ran several hundred pages long. The earliest Big Little Books featured reprints of art from newspaper comic strips, with stories adapted to the art.

Because of the commercial success of Outcault's "Yellow Kid" and later his "Buster Brown" comic character as a merchandising mascot for the Buster Brown Shoe Company, many businesses gave away comic strips created to promote their products. In 1933, some employees of the Eastern Color Printing Company (which printed the comic sections for different newspapers) obtained the rights to publish certain comics as a collection in a 32-page color comic magazine. Led by Harry Wildenberg and Maxwell Gaines, the group printed 10,000 copies of *Funnies on Parade* as a premium, or giveaway, for Proctor & Gamble Co. Unlike earlier comic "books," the format of *Funnies on Parade* was actually a quarter-folded newspaper sheet, which made it the size of a magazine similar to modern-day comic books.

In 1934, Eastern published 250,000 copies of *Famous Funnies #1* as a 64-page version of the 32-page giveaway comic magazine. The comic was not free—*Famous Funnies #1* cost 10 cents and was the first comic magazine sold successfully on newsstands. It also became the first monthly comic magazine, lasting 21 years with a peak circulation of 400,000.

The 1930s was a decade of new genres, or types: adventure, science fiction, and detective stories. The "Phantom" was the first hero to appear in a costume; the "Clock" was the first to wear a mask. The Golden Age of comics (and superheroes) began in 1938 when Superman made his first appearance on the cover of *Action Comics #1*. By the mid-40s, more than 400 superheroes followed, including Batman, Captain Marvel, Wonder Woman, and Captain America.

The comic book industry grew quickly during the 1950s, when 1 out of every 3 magazine-type publications sold in America was a comic book. Charles M. Schulz created *Peanuts* in 1955, and the early 1960s gave birth to the *Fantastic Four*, *Incredible Hulk*, *X-Men*, and *Amazing Spider-Man*. Then came comic strips based on TV shows and movies, such as *Star Trek* (1967) and *Star Wars* (1977).



The Superhero Who Almost Wasn't

In the early 1960s, comic-book writer and editor Stan Lee wanted to develop a superhero with whom the average reader could identify. So he talked to his employer, Marvel Comics, about creating Spider-Man.

"For quite a while, I'd been toying with the idea of doing a strip that would violate all the conventions and break all the rules," Lee said. "A strip that would actually feature a teenager as the star, instead of making him an adult hero's sidekick. A strip in which the main character would lose out as often as he'd win."

At first, the decision makers at Marvel Comics rejected Lee's idea for Spider-Man. They said it would fail because people hated spiders and readers would not want a hero who was an unpopular, pimply high-school student. Marvel Comics finally gave in, and the rest is history.

Spider-Man first appeared in 1962 as a character in the *Amazing Fantasy #15* issue. In March 1963, Spider-Man emerged as the central character under the title *Amazing Spider-Man* and has remained Marvel's leading superhero ever since.



When *Amazing Spider-Man* hit the scene in 1962, it had a unique twist: Spider-Man—the superhero—was not an adult, but a teenager.

Comic Book Ages

Victorian Age	1828 to 1882
Platinum Age	1883 to 1938
Golden Age	1938 to 1945
Atom Age	1945 to 1956
Silver Age	1956 to 1973
Bronze Age	1973 to 1985
Copper Age	1986 to 1992
Modern Age	1992 to present

The history of comics is defined in terms of ages or eras. These ages often overlap. While not "official," these time periods are considered standard. The beginning of the Golden Age—1938, when Superman first appeared—is the only year on which comic book historians all agree.

Collecting Comics

You can tell from learning about the history of comics that you can collect a variety of comics-related items. Whether you decide to narrow your focus to a specific genre (such as horror or sword-and-sorcery), Silver Age books, or comic character toys, you can find out more by browsing through catalogs, price guides, and collectors' magazines. With your parent's permission, log onto the Internet and search for comic book Web sites.

Talk to enthusiastic employees at comic-book stores. Join a local comic-book club. Attend swap meets and *comicons*, or comic conventions. You will meet other collectors, dealers, publishers, comic-book writers and cartoonists, and professional grading companies. As you learn more about the comic-book industry, you will collect more comics-related things *and* make some friends along the way.



Handling and Storing Comic Books

Comic books are flimsy and can easily be damaged. Most dealers and collectors do not want anyone touching their rare comics because even the smallest crease could reduce a comic's grade from Mint to Near Mint or Very Fine condition. (See the following section about comic book grades.) Always ask permission before handling another person's vintage comic book. Most dealers will remove the comic from its protective sleeve for you so that if the book is damaged, you will not be liable.

Fluorescent light, which has high levels of ultraviolet (UV) radiation, can quickly damage comic books. Even though tungsten filament lighting is less harmful than fluorescent, you should avoid exposing your comics to any light for a long period of time.

When handling valuable comics:

- First wash your hands. The oils from your skin can damage the books.
- Carefully remove the book from its protective sleeve.
- To minimize stress on the book's spine, gently lay the comic flat in the palm of your hand.
- If you have permission to look through the book, carefully turn the pages using your thumb and forefinger. Avoid bending the book open too far.
- When you are through, carefully return the book to its protective sleeve. Watch corners and edges to prevent any damage. If this is not your own comic, ask the dealer or owner to do this so that you will not be responsible for any damage.



Comic books are printed on paper—many on cheap paper. Acids used in the production and printing of the books cause the paper to crack and yellow over time.

To protect comic books, keep them away from light, heat, extreme cold, and humidity. Improper storage can seriously and permanently deteriorate the condition of your collection.



Place each book in its own acid-free, polyester film sleeve made specifically for long-term storage of comic books. Store the sleeves upright in notebooks or acid-free boxes. As you build your collection, you may want to organize your collection with labeled dividers in labeled notebooks or boxes. For example, you may decide to separate your comics according to historical age, publisher, or genre. Keep your collection in a cool (65 to 70 degrees), dry place away from direct sunlight and fumes. To encourage air circulation and help prevent mold and fungus from developing, be sure to leave a small space between storage boxes and the wall.

Polypropylene and polyethylene products contain chemicals that can damage your collection over time. These types of sleeves should be used only for temporary storage and should be changed every three to five years.

Grading Comic Books

Collectors should know how comic books are graded. A book's economic value is determined by its appearance; one in Poor condition will bring only a fraction of the price of the same one in Mint condition. The condition of the covers, inside pages, and spine all relate to a book's value. Discolored paper, missing portions or pages, fading, tears, markings, brittleness, soiling, and other defects will all diminish the value of the comic book.



Age, scarcity, and physical condition contribute to a comic book's value. The industry uses a complex 10-point grading system that is further broken down into a 25-point range—from .5 for Poor to 10.0 for Gem Mint—to determine the value of a comic book. Here are some guidelines to give you an idea about how comic books are graded.

As you learn about grading, try to obtain the same comic book in different conditions so you can make "apples to apples" comparisons.

Mint (9.9). Condition is nearly perfect, with only subtle binding or printing defects. The cover is flat with no surface wear. Inks are bright with high reflectivity (shininess) and little fading. Corners are square and sharp. The cover is centered and firmly secured. The staples are original and centered, with no rust. The paper is supple (flexible) and fresh. The spine is tight and flat.

Fine (6.0). Condition is above average. The book shows minor wear, but no significant creasing or serious defects. Minor wear on the cover is apparent. The inks show significant loss of reflectivity. Pages or inside covers may have blunted corners and a tan color, but are still supple with no signs of brittleness.

Good (2.0). The comic book has all pages and covers, but small pieces are missing inside. The largest missing piece allowed from the front or back cover is a 1/2-inch triangle or a 1/4-inch square. The book is somewhat creased, scuffed, or soiled, but is still readable. It may have up to a 2-inch split on the spine. The paper quality is low, but not brittle. The cover reflectivity is low or absent. The book has a moderate number of defects, but is still basically sound and whole.

Fair (1.0). The comic book is usually soiled and ragged, with many creases, tears, and folds. The spine is seriously split; the staples are gone. Up to one-tenth of the front cover is missing. Soiling may interfere with one's ability to read the story. The paper quality is low. There is a slight brittleness to the edges of the pages, but not in the center. Coupons have been clipped from pages. The comic book is valued at 50 percent to 70 percent of a copy in Good condition.

Poor (0.5). The comic book is degraded; it is worn, dirty, and torn. The book has severe stains, cover abrasions, and mildew. Its pages are brittle. It is missing staples and pieces of pages. The covers are split from top to bottom, but both halves are present. The value depends on the extent of the defects.

These comics show some moderate defects such as wear, spots, and rusty staples, which affect the comics' value.



Note: The grading descriptions are adapted from *The Official Overstreet Comic Book Grading Guide, 3rd ed.*, with permission from Gemstone Publishing.