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Peanuts

In cities around Japan, you can find shops that sell Charlie Brown dolls, Linus blankets and pencil cases that look like the dog Snoopy. The original characters were created by Charles Schultz in a newspaper comic strip he called '*Peanuts*.'

In the beginning, *Peanuts* was not successful. It first appeared in October, 1950, but only in seven local newspapers. Two of these newspapers soon stopped using *Peanuts*. So it wasn't an immediate success, but it slowly gained in popularity. By the end of the year, *Peanuts* appeared in twenty-seven newspapers. The second year was even better, and sales grew every year after that. People everywhere started reading *Peanuts*, and in the 1960s *Peanuts* became the most widely read comic strip in the United States.

The most popular character is, of course, Charlie Brown's dog Snoopy. Snoopy is one of the oldest *Peanuts* characters, but he was very different when the comic strip began. He walked on four feet and looked like a regular dog.

Peanuts has become a part of American and world culture. Some people say that Snoopy is now more popular than Mickey Mouse. There are a lot of *Peanuts* fans all over the world. *Peanuts* continued for almost 50 years. When an American comic strip artist stops or dies, a different artist often continues the comic strip. But Schultz did not want this. He said that *Peanuts* had to end when he finished drawing.

In 1999, Schultz got cancer. His health became worse and worse. At the end of 1999, Schultz announced his retirement. On February 13, 2000, the final *Peanuts* appeared in Sunday newspapers around the United States. But Schultz had died a few hours earlier. He was 77 years old. In the final *Peanuts*, Schultz wrote a message to his fans. At the end of it, he wrote, "Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Linus, Lucy, ... how can I ever forget them..." A lot of his fans cried when they read this. They shared Schultz's feelings.

(329 words)