

Barbie Doll

Ruth Handler invented the Barbie doll in 1959. She named it after her daughter, Barbie. She invented it because she had observed that her daughter enjoyed playing with teenage dolls better than baby dolls. Most adolescent dolls at that time were paper dolls. Mrs. Handler and her husband, Elliot, made the first Barbie doll in their garage. The dolls immediately became popular.

Five different versions were released between 1959 and 1961, all with subtle differences. The first Barbie had holes in her feet for a two-pronged doll stand. The next model had a new stand, making the hole in the feet unnecessary. In 1965, Barbie got bendable legs. The all-time, best-selling Barbie was called “Totally Hair Barbie.” It was released in 1992. This Barbie came with ankle-length hair that kids of all ages liked to brush.

After inventing Barbie, the Handlers created other dolls, such as Ken, who was Barbie's boyfriend. Ken was named after the Handlers' son. Other early dolls in the collection were Midge, Allen, Skipper, and Stacey.

Francie was the first African-American doll in the collection; she appeared in 1967. Francie is very rare and highly sought after by collectors. In 1980, another African-American doll was added to the set. In 1989, a UNICEF doll set was introduced. Barbie appeared as an African-American, Asian, Hispanic, and Caucasian doll in that collection.

In 1999, voters selected Barbie as a representative of the 1960s lifestyle for the U.S. Postal Service's *Celebrate the Century* stamp series. “Silken Flame Barbie” is the doll pictured on the stamp. That was 40 years after the Handlers invented the first Barbie doll.

Unit 10

- Some people think that Barbie's popularity is absurd. What is your opinion?

- Barbie has become part of our American culture. How is she reflective of society?

- Little girls are elated to get Barbies for presents. What are some of your most precious gifts?