

Jim Henson may have considered himself a puppeteer, but really he was a magician—a master of illusion who gave life to bundles of foam and wire known as muppets. Henson died on May 16, 1990 of pneumonia at the age of 53. With Henson gone, there is a little less magic in the world.



If Henson had one unique quality, it was his vivid imagination. After high school in 1954, he went to work as a puppeteer for a show called “Sam and His Friends” —the program gave birth to Henson’s greatest, yet most simple, creation: Kermit the Frog. In puppeteering, Henson discovered his purpose in life. After college, he began making television commercials with “muppets,” his term for a cross between puppets and marionettes. Henson’s career took off in 1969 with the children’s program “Sesame Street,” for which he created dozens and dozens of lovable characters,

from the always bickering Ernie and Bert to the forever grumpy Oscar the Grouch.

In the 1970s, Henson introduced a whole new slew of memorable characters, including Fozzie Bear and Miss Piggy, for his variety program “The Muppet Show,” which is said to have attracted more viewers than any other TV program in history, with an audience of 235 million viewers in 100 countries. The muppets made their film debut in 1979’s *The Muppet Movie*, one of the greatest family films ever made. Henson’s subsequent films included two *Muppet Movie* sequels and two fantasy films, *The Dark Crystal* and *Labyrinth*, which feature some of the most sophisticated puppetry ever captured on film. Henson’s final accomplishment was creating the shelled heroes in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*.

The muppets have captured our hearts, sparked our imaginations, and enriched our lives. Henson deserves our deepest gratitude for the whimsical flights of fancy he brought into this complicated world. Twenty years from now, people probably won’t be asking each other: where were you when you heard that Jim Henson died? But it is almost certain that Kermit, Miss Piggy, Grover, Cookie Monster, and Big Bird will still be enchanting children and adults worldwide. Henson’s spirit lives on in the magnificent, magical creatures he created in the short time he was here.