Big Little Books Encyclopedia Article

Big Little Books

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Big Little Books

The 1932 debut of Big Little Books was an important harbinger of the direction marketing to children would take in the future. The first inexpensive books available for children, Big Little Books were a precursor to the comics and such series as the Golden Books. The books were sold in dimestores such as Kresge and Woolworth where children could purchase them with their own spending money.

The Whitman Company, a subsidiary of the Western Publishing Company of Racine, Wisconsin, published the books. The first of the Big Little Books was *The Adventures of Dick Tracy Detective,* which was published in 1932. Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Orphan Annie, Popeye, Buck Rogers, Don Winslow, and Tarzan were among the many additional heroes. The popularity of the books had other publishers, such as Saalfield Publishing, Engel Van Wiseman, and Lynn Publishing, soon producing their own similar series. Approximately 508 Big Little Books were published between 1932 and 1949, but in the late 1930s the name changed to Better Little Books.

In pre-television days, Big Little Books provided the popular "action hero" and "girl" stories for school age children. Eventually the line was expanded to include retellings of classical literature such as *Little Women* and *The Three Musketeers,* cartoon characters from the popular funny papers, and even heroes and heroines taken from radio and movies, such as two books about Mickey Rooney. The books continued to be published into the 1970s, but, once comic books and other children's book series had come onto the market, were never as popular as they had been in the 1930s and 1940s.

In the 1990s Big Little Books were considered a collector's item. Because the printing sizes varied with individual titles, some are scarcer than others and therefore, more valuable. Another factor affecting their value is their condition. Among the most sought after are *The Big Little Mother Goose* and the Whitman-produced premiums from cereal boxes and other products.

Further Reading:

Jacobs, Larry. *Big Little Books: A Collector's Reference & Value Guide.* Padukah, Kentucky, Collector Books, 1996.

L-W Books, *Price Guide to Big Little Books & Better Little, Jumbo, Tiny Tales, A Fast-Action Story, etc.* Gas City, Indiana, L-W Book Sales, 1995.

Tefertillar, Robert L. "From Betty Boop to Alley Oop: A Big Bonanza of Big Little Books." *Antiques & Collecting.* Vol. 99, No. 5, 1994, 47-49.