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ZOOM

in on america

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An Andy Warhol portrait of Marilyn Monroe called 'Lemon Marilyn', 1962 (AP Photo)

COME TRUE

In this issue: Marilyn Monroe

Zoom in on America

Double M For Luck

Even though 53 years passed since Marilyn Monroe's death in 1962, her name and her face are no less recognizable today than they were during her lifetime. In a world in which celebrity status can pass in an instant, her staying power is phenomenal. She may not be at the top of the list of best actresses of all time, but Monroe remains one of the most iconic actresses of all time and an embodiment of the American Dream.

In search of a good stage name

Monroe was born Norma Jeane Mortensen (or Baker). At the age of 16 she changed her surname to Dougherty after she married a factory worker, James Dougherty. She did not keep the name Dougherty for long. Eager to pursue an acting career, she eventually settled on the stage name Marilyn Monroe.

Norma Jeane came up with the name along with Ben Lyon, an executive at the Twentieth Century Fox movie studio. Norma Jeane decided to use her mother's maiden name "Monroe" as her surname and Lyon suggested "Marilyn" after Marilyn Miller, a popular actress and singer in the 1920s. Lyon rightly foretold that the double M would bring Norma Jeane luck in her career. In addition to helping select Marilyn's name, Lyon also helped launch her career by arranging a screen test for her and signing her to her first studio film contract.

What's hairstyle and makeup for a pop star

At that time, Norma Jeane changed not only her name but the color of her hair. A natural brunette, she bleached her hair blonde to help her in the modelling she did for the Blue Book Modelling Agency. Monroe's hairstyle -- platinum blonde and curly -- has been considered the most iconic of all time. Her makeup, too, was an important part of building her image. Monroe believed that as a model, makeup was as important as the clothes she wore. After she became famous, she had her own makeup artist who never betrayed all the secrets of enhancing Monroe's natural beauty. Her hairstyle and makeup are easily recognizable today and have been imitated and re-interpreted by stars such as Madonna, Britney Spears, Gwen Stefani and Scarlett Johansson. Just like legendary singer Elvis Presley (see *Zoom in on America* issue of October 2014), Monroe also has a big army of impersonators.

Childhood

Monroe's childhood was an unhappy and lonely one. Due to her mother's illness and the absence of her father she lived in a number of foster homes and in an orphanage.

She was born in Los Angeles, California on June 1, 1926. Her mother, Gladys Pearl Monroe Baker, suffered a mental breakdown and was unable to take care of her daughter. Actually, Gladys spent most of her life in institutions.

Norma Jean's father, whose name was Edward Mortensen, left Gladys before Norma Jean was born. He was altogether absent from Norma Jean's life.

As a result of the lack of parental support, Norma Jeane spent her childhood in a dozen foster homes. Her mother sometimes visited her. Occasionally Norma Jean stayed in an orphanage. Changing homes usually also meant changing schools. Because of that Monroe's education was rather sketchy, a fact that bothered her in her adult life.



Marilyn Monroe is pictured here in her childhood days, in 1928. (AP Photo)

After she became a star across the United States, fans learned the story of her unhappy childhood. The contrast between her difficult and humble beginnings and her glamorous lifestyle as a star made Monroe even more appealing to her fans.

Attempts to build her own family

In 1942, when she was 16, Norma Jean's foster family decided to move to West Virginia. Norma Jean was faced with a choice to either return to an orphanage or get married. She chose the latter and married the neighbors' son, James Dougherty. Before they were married for one year, her husband had enlisted in the Merchant Marine and was shipped to the Pacific during World War II. Monroe worked in a factory and took up modelling. She was already thinking seriously about starting her acting career.

The marriage did not last long and it was dissolved when James Dougherty returned from the military service in 1946.

In the mid-1950s Monroe married Joe DiMaggio, a retired baseball star who had played for the New York Yankees. They were wed on January 14, 1954 but the marriage didn't even last until the end of that year. Nevertheless, Monroe and DiMaggio remained friends and he helped her in times of trouble. Her death on August 5, 1962 grieved DiMaggio deeply and for 20 years afterward he regularly sent flowers to her gravesite.

With two marriages having ended in failure, Monroe vested her hopes for a happy family life in her third marriage. In June 1956 she married playwright and screenwriter Arthur Miller. In the hope of making this marriage a success, and to join her husband's family, she converted to Miller's religion - Judaism. Miller wrote two of Monroe's films screenplays and they worked together on the set of Monroe's penultimate film, *The Misfits* (1961). The author of the screenplay was Arthur Miller and he wrote it especially for his wife. Unfortunately, the work on the movie set led to a lot of conflicts and Miller changed the story as the work continued. Shortly after finishing the movie Monroe filed papers for divorce, which was granted in 1961.

Monroe's unhappy personal life and work stress triggered her dependence on alcohol and prescription medications, which led to her overdose on the fatal night of August 5, 1962 and death at the age of 36.

Photographs

In the 1940s pin-up photographs -- mass produced pictures of actresses and models that were pinned-up on walls -- were very popular. Monroe, then Norma Jeane Dougherty, was photographed by famous Hollywood photographers such as Bruno Bernard. She became a model for *Yank*, the Army weekly magazine. Her success with the Blue Book Modelling Agency followed soon. Modelling lay at the beginnings of Monroe's career. Her posed glamour photographs helped build her status as the pop culture queen. Other important photographers for whom Monroe posed were Tom Kelley Sr., who photographed Hollywood celebrities in the 1940s and 1950s, Andre de Dienes, Alfred Eisenstaedt, Milton Green and Bert Stern. Her photographs were on the covers of such magazines as *Life*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Vogue*. The photo entitled "Marilyn in White", taken by Bernard, which shows the actress in her wind-blown dress from the movie *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), was selected as the "Symbol of the Century" by the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The image is also



A museum worker adjusts this photograph of Marilyn Monroe, taken by AP photographer Matty Zimmermann on September 1, 1954, in New York, as he prepares the exhibition on "Moments of the Century - masterpieces of reportage photography by Associated Press" at the Museum of History of Palatinate in Speyer, Germany, May 7, 1999. (AP Photo)

a symbol of Hollywood. The white dress was sold at auction for \$5.6 million, which makes it the world's most expensive movie costume of all time.

Forever Marilyn statue

The iconic status of the scene where Monroe's white dress is lifted by a subway vent was further enhanced when a 26-foot-tall sculpture "Forever Marilyn" by Seward Johnson was placed on Michigan Avenue in Chicago in July, 2011. The following year the sculpture was moved to Palm Springs, California.

Actress

Modelling was important, but Norma Jeane Dougherty wanted to be an actress above all. Having changed her name to Marilyn Monroe she signed a contract with the Twentieth Century Fox and started her acting career. Monroe starred in movies produced by Twentieth-Century, Columbia Pictures, RKO Studios, and Marilyn Monroe Productions, her own movie studio which she created in 1955.

Marilyn Monroe had a natural talent for acting. To develop it, she took singing and dancing lessons. She studied at the New York Lee Strasberg Actors Studio in the mid-1950s. In addition to skill, she possessed a charismatic personality, which showed as much in her public appearances as in the movies she starred. It is interesting to notice how Monroe dominates the screen in her movies. In a larger group she is the eye-catcher. In a close-up shot, she mesmerizes viewers. If Edith Piaf "could sing the phone book and make it sound good," Marilyn Monroe could look into the camera and make it look good.

Monroe's face, with its innocent and vulnerable expression, her characteristic, breathless way of speaking and singing, and her looks immediately conquered the hearts of Americans. She was proclaimed a "blonde bombshell." While they were all a natural part of the Marilyn Monroe phenomenon, they were also the result of studied, dedicated work on the part of Monroe.

She did not want to be stereotyped as the sheer sex-symbol without intellectual powers and many of her life decisions were connected with her struggle to prove such thinking wrong. For some fans, her good looks took precedence over her acting skills but film critics knew



A museum viewer gets an up close look at photos set in the eyes of a mural of Marilyn Monroe at the reopening of the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego in the La Jolla district of San Diego on March 9, 1996. This is the work of artist Alexis Smith (AP Photo)

she was a good actress and a talented singer.

Monroe's Movies

The first movies in which Marilyn Monroe appeared include *Dangerous Years*, released in December 1947, and *Scudda Hoo! Scudda Hay!*, from 1948. In these films Monroe played minor roles. Monroe has her breakout role in Howard Hawks' 1952 movie, *Monkey Business*.

Marilyn Monroe's most successful movies were comedies and the time of her most creative roles was the decade of the 1950s.

Her role as the Girl in *The Seven Year Itch* (1954), a movie directed by Billy Wilder, was a great success.

Another success was her role as Chérie, a saloon singer in Joshua Logan's *Bus Stop*. The role required poor singing and dancing and Monroe was greatly praised for her convincing performance. The director said about her acting: "I found Marilyn to be one of the great talents of all time..." He wanted Monroe to get a nomination for the Academy Award, but did not succeed. The actress never won an Oscar.

However, the next movie she starred in, Billy Wilder's *Some like It Hot*, did bring her a Golden Globe Award for Best Actress - Motion Picture Musical or Comedy for her role as Sugar Kane, the band's vocalist and ukulele player. The movie is the first on the American Film Institute list of 100 funniest movies in American Cinema. Billy Wilder, who found Monroe more and more difficult to work with on the set of this film -- she was notoriously late and consumed by stage fright -- nevertheless admitted that she had "absolute genius as a comic actress."

Monroe's last completed film, *The Misfits*, was directed by John Huston and starred Clark Gable, Montgomery Clift, Eli Wallach and Thelma Ritter.

Summing up

Marilyn Monroe built her stage appearance on the grounds of her charismatic personality, iconic image and perseverance. In her times the stage was still big enough for stars like her. She became a legend during her life, but she paid a high price for it.

MM Quiz

Basic

1. Marilyn Monroe was born in:
 - a. New York
 - b. San Francisco
 - c. Los Angeles
2. Marilyn Monroe was the moniker of:
 - a. Gladys Monroe Mortensen
 - b. Norma Jeane Mortensen
 - c. Norma Jeane Baker
3. Marilyn Monroe was married:
 - a. three times
 - b. two times
 - c. she never married
4. Joe DiMaggio was a baseball star with:

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Advanced

1. This film was a breakthrough in Marilyn Monroe's career:
 - a. *Men Prefer Blondes*
 - b. *Monkey Business*
 - c. *River of No Return*
2. Marilyn Monroe sang "I Wanna Be Loved By You" in this movie:
 - a. *Niagara*
 - b. *Some Like It Hot*
 - c. *The Misfits*
3. "Marilyn Diptych" was painted by this artist:
 - a. Andy Warhol
 - b. Seward Johnson
 - c. Salvador Dali

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Seward Johnson's 26-foot-tall sculpture of Marilyn Monroe (AP Photos)

- a. New York Yankees
- b. Boston Red Sox
- c. St. Louis Cardinals

5. Seward Johnson's sculpture of Marilyn Monroe, in her most famous wind-blown pose is in:

- a. Chicago
- b. Los Angeles
- c. Palm Springs, California

6. In *Some Like It Hot* Marilyn Monroe played the role of:

- a. Chérie
- b. Sugar Kane Kowalczyk
- c. the Girl

7. Marilyn Monroe received a Golden Globe Award for Best Motion Picture Actress in Comedy or Musical award for this movie:

- a. *Bus Stop*
- b. *The Seven Year Itch*
- c. *Some Like It Hot*

8. The author of the screenplay for *The Misfits* was:

- a. Arthur Miller
- b. John Shea
- c. Tennessee Williams

9. Marilyn Monroe's style was imitated by this star (these stars):

- a. Madonna
- b. Britney Spears

4. In the movie *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* Marilyn Monroe co-starred with:

- a. Jane Russell
- b. Elizabeth Taylor
- c. Bette Davis

5. In *Some Like It Hot* Sugar Cane (Marilyn Monroe) falls in love with:

- a. Joe (Tony Curtis)
- b. Jerry (Jack Lemmon)
- c. Osgood Fielding III (Joe E. Brown)

6. He utters the famous last line: "Well, Nobody's Perfect" in the movie *Some Like It Hot*:

- a. Joe (Tony Curtis)
- b. Jerry (Jack Lemmon)
- c. Osgood Fielding III (Joe E. Brown)

7. For missing many days of filming Monroe was dismissed from this film:

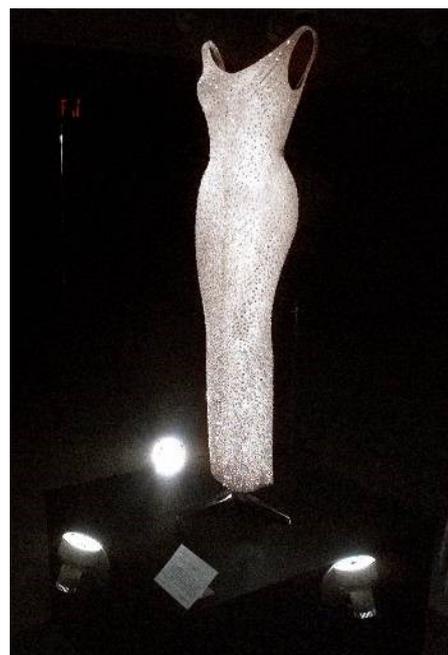
- a. *Let's Make Love*
- b. *The Misfits*
- c. *Something's Got to Give*

8. Marilyn Monroe's films grossed more than:

- a. \$200 million
- b. \$100 million
- c. \$400 million



A signed Marilyn Monroe photograph that reads "I love you Joe" from the personal collection of Joe DiMaggio. (AP Photo)



Marilyn Monroe's dress which she wore at Madison Square Garden in May of 1962 during her famous birthday tribute to President John F. Kennedy. (AP Photo)

Activity Page

Exercise 1 *From the Collectors' world:*

Work with another student. Answer the questions below.

1. Why do people collect items connected with famous people?
2. What items are collectibles?
3. Do you have a picture or a piece of clothing that shows a famous person? Who is it? What do you know about this person?

The photo on the right shows a block of Marilyn Monroe postage stamps issued by the Portuguese colony of Sao Tome and Principe, June 2, 1995, released by the International Collectors Society in Owings Mills, Maryland.

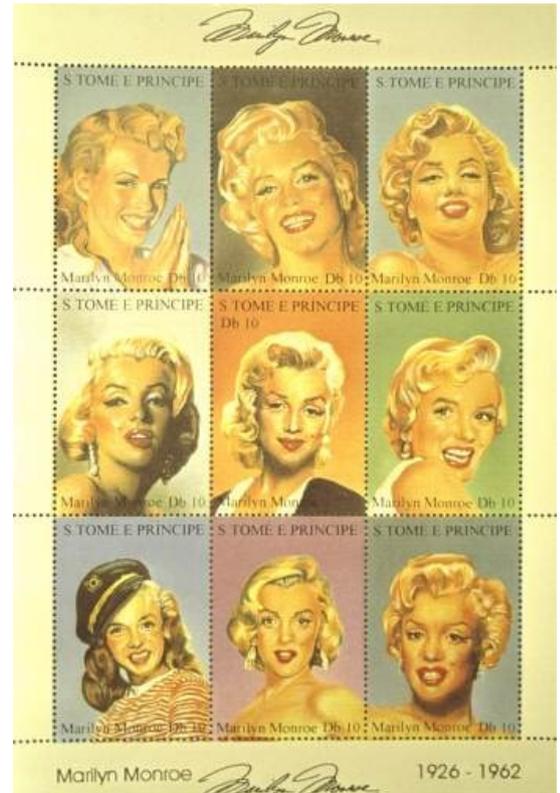


Photo AP

Exercise 2 American Idioms

Look at the idioms 1-7 and match them with the appropriate meaning a-g. Finally write down a sentence with each of them.

1. start from scratch
2. read between the lines
3. cross the wire
4. from rags to riches
5. by the sweat of one's brow
6. fly in the ointment
7. mum's the word

- a. understand the meaning of what someone meant by guessing at what he has left unsaid.
- b. by hard work
- c. from being poor to being wealthy
- d. say nothing about it
- e. a drawback or detrimental factor
- f. from nothing, with no help of anything done before
- g. finish the race

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in on america

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Marilyn Monroe is shown in this September 1950 photo..(AP Photo)