



William H. Cosby Jr.

On July 12, 1937, William H. Cosby Jr. was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His dad, William H. Cosby Sr. was in the Navy and his mom worked as a maid. But when William was only ten, his brother died and his dad left the family, and they suddenly had very little money. There was another little brother to take care of, so William began to help out at home and also started working in a grocery store.

William soon became known as just “Bill.” He was not a very good student, but he was a good athlete. He dropped out of school in the tenth grade and went into the Navy, like his dad. Then he realized he had made a mistake by quitting school, so he finished his high school degree while he was in the service. When he got out of the Navy, he got a scholarship to play football and run track at Temple University. He had decided to become a teacher, but while he was still in college, he began to realize that the thing he was best at was making people laugh. He finally decided to be a stand-up comedian. This means that he was going to take a microphone, stand in front of a crowd of people, and do nothing but talk—no tricks, no songs. Just talk and make them laugh. And laugh they did. Soon Bill was performing his act from New York to California.

Back then there were very few black men on television. In 1965, Bill became the first black to costar in a dramatic (serious) series, a show called *I Spy*. *I Spy* was very successful, but although Bill loved being on television, he wasn’t doing what he liked most—making people laugh. And Bill still had that nagging desire to be a teacher. Since he wasn’t a teacher, he decided to play one on *The Bill Cosby Show* in 1969. He also made recordings of his comedy routines and won eight Grammy awards for them.

Then Bill created a new television show with messages for children, *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids*, which was a huge hit. Fat Albert was a cartoon character that tried to teach children to be honest, loyal, and caring. Still pursuing his dream of being a teacher, he returned to college and got both a masters degree and a doctorate degree in education. But he didn’t work in a classroom—he decided to do his educating on television. His next big adventure was to read for Reading Rainbow and to start *The Cosby Show*, which became a hit its very first season. The lovable Huxtable family on this show faced all kinds of problems with their children but dealt with them with grace thanks to Bill’s common sense and humor. He became a role model for many fathers who were trying to cope with teenagers and work in a modern world. He even wrote a book, *Fatherhood*, that became a best seller—not bad for a guy who dropped out of high school in the tenth grade!

By Mary Rose

Dear Parents

Many of you fondly remember *The Cosby Show* featuring the Huxtable family. But do you know the real story behind the popular comedian Bill Cosby? Have fun as you listen to your child read this short biography out loud to you.

TIP OF THE WEEK

Authors use conventions of print, or specific text features, to help readers make sense of their work. Help your child find the following print conventions in this article:

- * italicizing a book title and a television show name
- * parentheses to set off a definition
- * commas or a dash to set off an appositive, which provides more information about a word or phrase

The Questions

Use a crayon, colored pencil, or highlighter to help answer these questions:

1. Circle or highlight the word *dramatic* in this article. Notice that it is followed by a word in parentheses. What is this word and why did the author put it there?

2. Circle or highlight the phrase *stand-up comedian*. Where does the author explain what a stand-up comedian is?

3. Circle or highlight the two places where there is a dash followed by three or four words. What is explained by the words following each dash?

4. Circle or highlight all of the italicized words. What do they have in common?

We have completed this assignment together.

Child's Signature

Parent's Signature