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Design It: What is a Stamp?



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INTRODUCTION TO LESSON 1

Essential Questions

What is a stamp? What are the informative parts of a stamp? How and when did stamps come into use? Why are there pictures on postage stamps?

Desired Outcomes

Students will understand that stamps are proofs of payments and that the central focus of the stamp is the subject. Students will know the history of stamps and understand why stamp design is needed on stamps. Students will gain the skills to identify informative parts of a stamp.

In This Lesson

Students will learn the history of how stamps appeared in postal operations and the evolution of stamps. Students will also learn and identify parts of a stamp that communicate information.

National Standards of Learning

- NSS-USH.5-12.4 Era 4: Expansion and Reform (1801–1861)
- NSS-WH.5-12.7 Era 7: An Age of Revolutions, 1750–1914
- NSS-EC.5-8.16 Role of Government
- NSS-EC.5-8.13 Role of Resources in Determining Income
- NSS-C.5-8.4 Other Nations and World Affairs

LESSON 1: INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES

Use this lesson unit to guide a discussion of stamp purpose, history, and identification. This unit will build a foundation into the stamp design curriculum by giving a historical overview of how and why stamps are an important part of the postal operations, how designs are an integral part of stamps, and how stamps are used today.

Materials and Resources

- Thinking Routines
- Supporting Materials for Teachers
- Handout: Informative Parts of a Stamp
- Handout: Sample of a Cancellation Mark
- Worksheet: History of Stamps and its Informative Parts

SUGGESTED THINKING ROUTINES AND ACTIVITIES²:

#1: Before starting the lesson, create a visual map or a type of visible documentation such as a diagram using information from the “Supporting Materials for Teachers” section so that students can get context for stamps definitions, history, and origins. An enlarged stamp template can be used to set the tone of the discussion.

Potential questions to ask:

- What do you know about stamps?
- What do you want to know about stamps?
- Who created stamps?
- What did they look like at first?
- Why was it necessary to have stamps?
- What would happen if there were no stamps?

#2: Hand out stamps to students. Ask them what do they see? What can they add to the visual map of what they want to know or already know? This activity will lead into the first part of the lesson plan.

#3 Have students complete “Worksheet: History of Stamps and Its Informative Parts” on pages 6 and 7 as an assessment. This could be done individually, in pairs or groups.

Lesson Extension:

Let students imagine that they are Rowland Hill. What would they do with their stamps? Would they do something differently? Could they create another form of prepayment? What would it look like? They could design their ideas on a piece of paper.

LESSON 1: SUPPORTING MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS

What are stamps? People use them to mail letters, bills, and postcards. Without prepayment, like stamps, people would not be able to mail their letters. They are self-adhesive images found on the upper right corner on an envelope. Stamps can be bought from a post office or from vending machine at specific locations. As of 2012, first class stamps are valued at 45 cents. Once a stamp has been used, a cancellation mark is imprinted over the stamp to prevent re-use. A cancellation mark is often made of squiggly lines with the name of the post office, the state and zip code, and the date of cancellation.

Stamps always include three important pieces of information in their design: subject, stamp value, and country of origin. It is important that the value is placed on the stamp so that people know how much to pay for it. The country’s abbreviation is included so that people from other countries know where the letter came from. Subject designs are important because it makes the stamp interesting to look at as well as reflect the country’s national identity.

Stamps are proof of payment—prepaid to be used for mail delivery services. How did stamps come to be an important part of postal operations? During the mid-eighteenth century, delivering mail was important. However, stamps were not yet invented and the cost of delivering mail was dependent on the amount of pages in a letter and the distance traveled. In fact, the recipient of the letter was often expected to pay for the postal delivery. Sometimes, if the postal expense was unexpected and costly, the recipient would not pay. This caused problems especially for the messenger because he depended on postage fees for his income.

2. “Thinking Routines.” Visible Thinking. Project Zero at Harvard Graduate School of Education. 13 October 2009. http://www.pz.harvard.edu/vt/VisibleThinking_html_files/03_ThinkingRoutines/03a_ThinkingRoutines.html.

In 1837, Rowland Hill, a former school teacher in Great Britain proposed a form of prepayment of delivery fees with proof of payment that could be attached to a letter. The first stamp was released in 1840 and was called the Queen Victoria Penny Black or, a shorter version, The Penny Black. It was valued at one cent. Stamps reduced postage fees and increased the volume of letters, revenues, and efficiency.



Just like the British, the U.S. government realized that it would be useful to create stamps to encourage prepayment to simplify mail and make delivery cheaper. Before stamps, the postmaster's method of identifying proof of payment was to write the word PAID on a letter, but prepayment wasn't required.

The first two stamps to appear in the United States in 1847 were a five-cent stamp with the image of Benjamin Franklin, the first Postmaster General and a ten-cent stamp of George Washington. The government chose to add stamps with designs for two main reasons: one is because the quality of a finely engraved image hinders counterfeit. Secondly, stamps are a way to convey national identity. The United States Post Office Department started stamping cancellation



marks over stamps. This prevented stamps from being used again and from losing revenues.

Originally, individual stamps had to be cut from a large sheet, and this quickly proved to be tiring and time-consuming. Many post office employees sought ways to speed up the process and found perforating the sheets ensured safely tearing the stamps without damage. Soon after, machines were created to perforate automatically after printing. Today, with the use of self-stick die cut stamps, perforations have become obsolete, but many stamps still retain the frilly white borders to recall that familiar format.

The stamps designed today reflect the history of stamp development in many ways.



Lesson 1

Informative Parts of a Stamp



- ← Country of Origin
- ← Stamp Value
- ← Subject Design

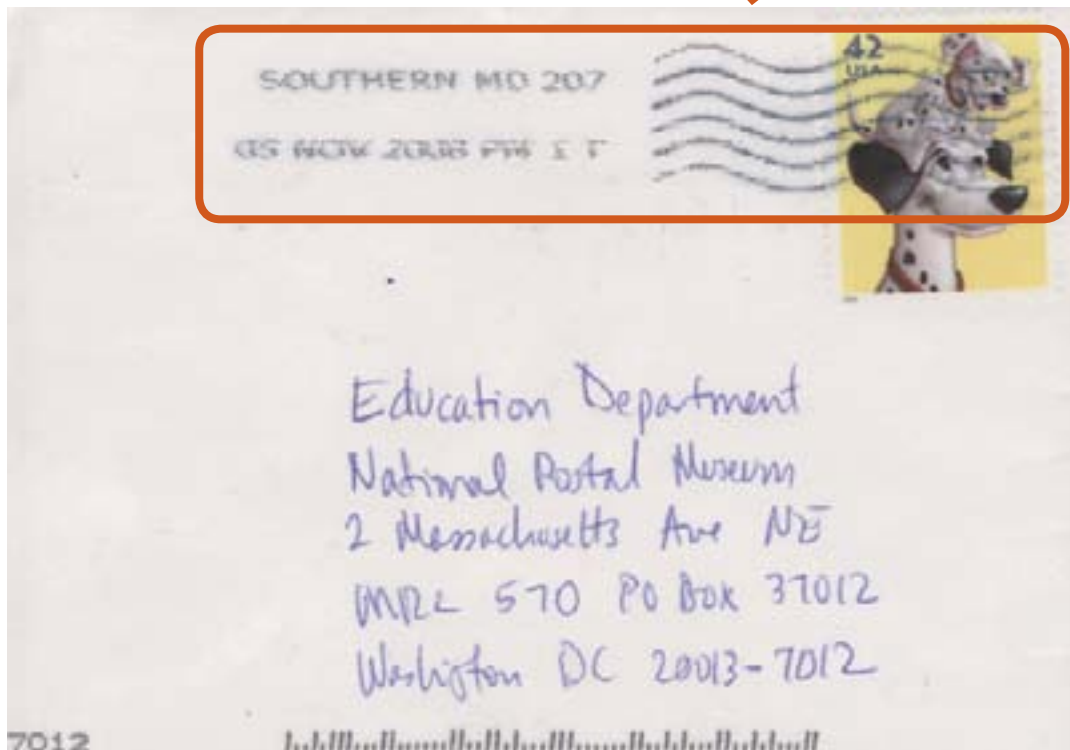
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Lesson 1

Sample of a Cancellation Mark

Cancellation Mark



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Lesson 1 Worksheet



History of a Stamp and its Informative Parts

Name: _____

Date: _____

Directions: Match the vocabulary with the definition.

Stamp

Invented the idea of stamps

The Penny Black

Represents national identity and prevents counterfeit

Rowland Hill

Proof of payment for mail delivery

Stamp Design

Subject, Country of Origin, and Stamp Value

Perforations

Had Ben Franklin and George Washington on it

Cancellation marks

Tiny holes around a stamp

Informative Parts of a stamp

Prevents re-use of stamps

First U.S. Stamps

First stamp in the world

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Lesson 1 Worksheet

History of a Stamp and its Informative Parts

Name: _____

Date: _____

Directions: Look at the stamp on the right side and write your answers to the questions on the left.

What is the Subject on the stamp?

How much is the Stamp Value?

Where is the Country of Origin?



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