Postal Pack
for Elementary School Students

National Postal Museum, Smithsonian Institution
The National Postal Museum takes care of 14 million stamps.

The Pony Express lasted only one and a half years.

City mail used to travel through tubes underground.

Camels, birds, dogs, and reindeer have all helped to deliver the mail.

American history is preserved in letters.

T/F  They're all true!
Welcome to the National Postal Museum! We hope your group will visit the museum and that these materials will enrich your experience. If you are unable to visit, these materials can give you an idea of what this museum is like and the subjects it explores.

Please select the activities that are most appropriate for your students (see the suggestion below). The worksheets integrate many disciplines: language arts, geography, history, and math. Some of these materials are for student use (ready for photocopying).

This symbol indicates instructions for the teacher.

The National Postal Museum is part of the Smithsonian Institution. It is located in the former Washington City Post Office building next to Union Station in Washington, DC. Six galleries, films, and learning activities tell the story of America’s postal history.

Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
<th>For Grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STAMPS</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a Stamp Museum in Your Classroom</td>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>2-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Your Own Commemorative Stamps</td>
<td>6-7</td>
<td>K-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why Were Stamps Invented?</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>K-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LETTERS/DELIVERY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can You Decode the Barcode?</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help Deliver the Letter</td>
<td>10-11</td>
<td>K-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envelope Etiquette</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HISTORY/GEOGRAPHY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonial Mail</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postal Transportation Time Line</td>
<td>14-17</td>
<td>4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post by Pony: Mapping the Mail</td>
<td>18-19</td>
<td>4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding History in Letters</td>
<td>20-21</td>
<td>5-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help Owney Get Home</td>
<td>22-23</td>
<td>K-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACHER RESOURCES:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects and Books</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Create a Stamp Museum in Your Classroom

I. COLLECTION

Begin by having students save and collect used stamps from their homes. Parents might be asked to help out on this part. Students should select one stamp from the ones they have collected and bring it to school.

Have students research the subject on their stamp. On an index card, students should write a few sentences based on their research and their own feelings about the stamp. Pre-readers can dictate key words or ideas pertaining to their stamp. The index card will serve as the stamp’s label.

II. BUILDING A MUSEUM

Next, divide the class into four groups. Each group will represent jobs performed by people in a museum. Each group has a special job to do to get the collection ready for exhibition.

Group 1:
Conservation and Collection – After students have selected their stamp, the collections care team will remove it from the envelope and prepare it for exhibition.

Instructions are on page 4 of this Postal Pack.

A NOTE FOR

Creating their own stamp museum will let your students develop a wide range of skills such as sorting, researching, writing, designing, public speaking, and small motor coordination. Use the stamp information on page 5 as an introduction to stamps for your class and/or as introductory information panels in your new museum.

FOLLOW THE STEPS BELOW TO CREATE YOUR MUSEUM.
Group 2:
Curators and Educators will organize the individual stamps with their labels into groups of related themes (such as sports, architecture, or living underwater). Then they will write an introductory paragraph that explains each theme to help visitors understand the different subjects of the collection. You may want to use the text panels on page 5 of this Postal Pack.

Group 3:
Designers create exhibit panels of the collection. They must decide how to arrange the different thematic "stamps on cards" to make a complete exhibit.

Group 4:
Public Relations team members should create promotional posters to let the school community know about the museum.

III. EXHIBITION OPENING
When the exhibition is complete, invite other classes to visit the museum. The educator team should introduce the themes. Then, visiting students can walk through the museum. You may want to have visitors vote on their favorite stamps at the end of the tour.

Encourage students to continue collecting stamps throughout the year so that the museum can be updated and changes made later in the year. You may want to try creating a different exhibit, such as one based on international geography. Stamps could be interpreted based on where they came from or how far they traveled to arrive in the United States.
INSTRUCTIONS FOR GROUP 1: CONSERVATION AND COLLECTIONS

Use these directions to remove stamps from envelopes and mount them on index cards

1  Cut off the upper righthand corner of the envelope. Be careful not to cut too close to the stamp.

2  Place stamps and paper backing in a bowl of cool water.

3  Let the stamps soak for about 10 minutes or until they easily slide off the paper.

4  Carefully remove stamps from the water and place them between two paper towels. Place a heavy object such as a book on top of the paper towels. Give the stamps 24 hours to dry completely.

5  Mounting hinges are the best way to mount stamps. Hinges are small folded pieces of gummed paper. Look for pre-made hinges in any hobby or stamp shop. Attach the small end of the hinge to the stamp and the long end to the index card.
WHAT IS A STAMP MADE OF?

Stamps may look very thin, but they are made up of four layers!

The top layer is the ink for printing the picture.

A special coating that glows is the second layer.

The third layer is paper.

We've all tasted the bottom layer - it's the glue!

WHAT DOES A STAMP DO?

Little postage stamps have many big jobs.

A stamp is a receipt - it shows that someone has paid for a letter to be delivered.

Some stamps have a special coating that helps machines process the mail. Under special lights the coating appears to glow, which helps the machine find the stamp to cancel it.

Many people collect stamps for their beauty.

Stamps also preserve history by honoring special events, places, or people.
Design Your Own Commemorative Stamp

Some special stamps celebrate or honor:

- people
- places
- special events
- or, important issues.

These stamps are called commemorative stamps. Only a limited number are printed.

HOW ARE STAMP DESIGNS CHOSEN?

Americans throughout the country suggest ideas for new stamp designs. They send their suggestions to the U. S. Postal Service's Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee made up of artists, historians, business people and stamp collectors. The committee selects the subjects they think most Americans would really enjoy. The Postmaster General makes the final decision.

If you were going to design a stamp, what subject would you choose? You might write a letter to the committee explaining why your subject should be chosen.

You can send your suggestions to:

Citizens Stamp Advisory Committee
Stamp Development Branch,
U. S. Postal Service
Washington, DC 20260
DESIGN A COMMEMORATIVE STAMP OF YOUR OWN

YOU MAY CHOOSE TO HONOR...
A PERSON, such as your favorite person or a character from the past.
A PLACE, such as your school or a beautiful place you have visited or imagined.
A SPECIAL EVENT, such as the anniversary of an important invention, a special event in your community, or your birthday.
AN IMPORTANT ISSUE, something that is important to you or to our world.
Dear Teacher,

This cartoon reduces postal and stamp history into 5 historic moments! In your discussion, you might highlight the role of the stamp as a receipt. Although Ben Franklin, our first Postmaster General, is portrayed on dozens of American stamps, in fact, stamps had not yet been invented during his lifetime.

More than 2,000 years ago, the ancient Romans had mail relay stations connecting all parts of the empire. But this delivery system was only for official government letters.

Even in the Middle Ages the mails weren’t for public use. Private carriers had chain-link metal bags called chain mail, which is how we got the word “mail”.

In the 1700s, England started a postal service for everyone. People paid for a letter when it arrived.

The system did not always work. The receiver could reject the letter, refuse to pay, yet all the work had been done!

Finally, in 1840, the Penny Post, a gummed stamp, was invented. By buying a stamp, people paid for the delivery of a letter in advance. The stamp was the receipt.

Next time you mail a letter, remember the big history of the tiny stamp.

Illustration courtesy: Walt Taylor
The United States Postal Service uses a special code that machines can read. The barcode stands for the numbers in a ZIP Code. Here’s how you can translate the barcode into a ZIP Code.

1. The barcode is made up of tall lines and short lines. First, ignore the beginning and ending lines of the barcode—they don’t count. Then divide the lines into groups of five. In barcode, each line within the group of five stands for a certain number—

   The first line always stands for 7.
   The second line always stands for 4.
   The third line always stands for 2.
   The fourth line always stands for 1.
   The fifth line always stands for 0.

Here’s an example (we’ve done the first group to get you started):

   2
   _______ _______ _______ _______

2. Each group of five lines represents one number in a ZIP Code. To begin cracking the code, look at the first group of five lines in the barcode. Add up the numbers assigned to the two tall lines in this group. Ignore the short lines.

Write the sum of the two numbers here: _______ .

3. Before you can finish cracking the code, here’s something else you need to know: In barcode, the sum of the numbers 7 and 4 doesn’t stand for 11. Instead it stands for zero! Now figure out the rest of the ZIP Code in the same way you figured out the first number. (Remember, in barcode, 7+4=0.) Write the answer in the blanks under the barcode at the top of the page.

Next, try writing your home or school ZIP Code in barcode.


   Answer: 20560, the ZIP Code of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC.
Help Deliver the Letter

SORTING CENTER -  
a building where letters are separated by large machines according to their ZIP Codes

CANCELLATION MARK -  
wavy lines placed over the stamp so that it cannot be reused.

POSTMARK -  
a mark that shows when and from where the letter was mailed.

BARCODE -  
lines that are read by 'electronic eyes'; each barcode stands for the numbers in a ZIP Code; each ZIP Code represents an area in the United States.

Listen to the story. At each numbered sentence select the picture that best connects to that part of the story. Write that number in the circle found in each drawing. Cut along the dotted line and then place the pictures in the correct order.

Maria mails a letter to her friend John.  
Maria's letter carrier picks up the mail and delivers it to a sorting center. Here, all the town's mail is gathered.  
Clerks send each letter through a machine that places a cancellation mark on the stamp and a postmark and barcode on the envelope. By reading the barcode, the machines can separate the letters according to where they are going. Maria's letter joins all the other letters that are going to John's city;  
That city's mail is put on a truck and begins its journey. When the mail truck arrives in John's city, the mail is once again read and separated by machines. The next morning John's letter carrier is given all the mail to be delivered in John's neighborhood.  
The letter carrier puts the mail in her truck and delivers Maria's letter to John's house.  
John is so excited to get a letter. What do you think Maria's letter says?
learning how to address envelopes is a complex task. Use the activity below to teach students how to address an envelope. Instruct students to cut along the dotted lines. Mix up the pieces and try to reassemble the puzzle.

earn this space is left blank for the return address. Write your address here.

earn this space is left blank for the postmark. A mark that tells where and when the letter was mailed.

A NOTE FOR TEACHER

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The barcode are lines that machines can read. It stands for the ZIP code.

*This space is left blank for the barcode.

*The barcode are lines that machines can read. It stands for the ZIP code.
How did colonists get the latest news?

Most news traveled in letters. The British appointed Benjamin Franklin to be their Deputy Postmaster General of the colonies. He regulated the mail by basing the cost of a letter on how far it was traveling and how much it weighed. Letters would be folded and then sealed with wax.

**ACTIVITY 1:**
Imagine that you are a colonist. Write a letter to a relative describing an event from the colonies. Some topics are British taxes, local trades, or ideas for a new constitution. Write the letter and seal it.

**POSTMASTERS AND PUBLISHERS**

Many newspaper publishers, like Benjamin Franklin, were also postmasters. Paper was scarce and very expensive in the colonies. The earliest newspapers in the colonies were printed on only one side, so that they could be posted on a wall and more people could read them. These early papers were called broadsides.

Where did these publishers get their news? From the mail! The postmaster was the first to get newspapers from other areas and also hear the news from letters. That meant he or she could be the first to share the news by printing it in his or her newspaper.

**ACTIVITY 2:**
Exchange the letter from the first activity with a classmate. Based on the information found in the letter you receive, write a broadside article. Use the masthead at the top of this page for your broadside. Articles should be written in columns and, if possible, answer the questions: who, what, where, when, and why.

So why were newspapers so important? They carried the news and informed the people. The government recognized the importance of newspapers and agreed to deliver them through the mail at a very low rate. Today, because early newspapers were carried in the mail, many newspaper titles contain the word “post.” Can you think of any?
These stamps celebrate the changing technology for transporting the mail. This four-page activity guides the students to figure out the chronology and work with a timeline.

1. Create your own stamp design for the transportation of the mail in the future by sketching in the final blank stamp frame.
2. Cut out the stamps on page 14. Glue them into the correct description boxes on page 15.
3. Then cut each description box.
4. Arrange them on the timeline found on page 16 and 17. Read the date on the stamps or in the description boxes to be sure that it is placed correctly on the timeline.
Today, the United States Postal Service assists in delivering mail around the world. American airplanes help deliver 60 percent of the world’s mail at the speed of 580 miles per hour.

Many Americans had never seen a plane fly overhead until the new airmail service began. Early airmail planes were previously used in World War I.

Pony Express riders had to be strong and fast and welcome adventure. They crossed the country in just 10 days! (1860s)

The second railroad car after the engine was often the mail car. While trains rushed by, mail would be picked up and dropped off, often without the train even slowing down. Mail clerks sorted letters on the speeding train.

Steam ships carried most of the international mail at the beginning of the 1900s. Mail clerks on these ships sorted the mail.

Gold!!! Thousands of people rushed west. But there were no roads and no overland mail service. To connect East and West, slow ships traveled all the way around South America to California.

Finally, the United States Post Office developed a better way to get mail across the nation. Butterfield’s Overland Express, a relay of stagecoaches, could cross the country in just three weeks.

Since the 1890s to the present, trucks have been used to transport the mail through towns and across America’s highways.

The delivery method at the beginning of the 21st century will be...
Post by Pony: Mapping the Mail

By 1860, the disagreements between northern and southern states were threatening the unity of the nation. The federal government was afraid that when the southern states separated they would try to pull California onto their side - along with all the state’s gold. At the time, the only land mail route connecting East and West ran through southern states. Congress encouraged freight businessmen to create a faster mail line that would stay out of the South.

Known as the Central Route, the new path stretched from St. Joseph, Missouri, to San Francisco, California, and crossed through Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Nevada. Using young riders and swift ponies along this route, the mail traveled more than 1,950 miles in under 10 days. The first trip was made April 3, 1860. The riders would carry the mail between stations that were 10 miles apart. At each station the rider would switch to a fresh horse and every 30 miles a new rider would take over.

Because speed was so important, letters had to be short and light. It was very expensive to send letters by Pony Express. By October 1861, the transcontinental telegraph was in place and messages could be sent even faster. The telegraph put the Pony Express out of business only 18 months after it started!
USE THE INFORMATION AND THE MAP ABOVE TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS.

1. How many riders and station houses were necessary to complete a one way trip?

2. Use a research map to label and color in the states that the Pony Express route passed through. Draw the obstacles riders encountered such as the Rocky Mountains, the Nevada desert, and the Missouri River.
Frederick Douglass was an abolitionist and statesman of the 1800s. He was born a slave but escaped when he was 19. He traveled, lectured and wrote letters to end slavery; He was honored on a postage stamp in 1967. Because the Douglass family saved their letters, we can learn a lot about their lives.

What does Frederick Douglass write that African Americans of 1886 desired?

...It is very difficult to condense in a single line the wants of a people situated as the seven millions of the colored people of the United States now are, but I will answer your question. Their wants are in no respect different from the wants of other men....They want precisely the same rights at the ballot box, jury box, cartridge box....They want nothing special and distinct apart from other classes. Let them have the protection of the law, honest wages for honest work, and equal chance in the race of life and if then they do not survive and flourish let them fail and fall.

Respectfully
Frederick Douglass
Annie Douglass wrote her letter to her father while he was traveling and lecturing.

I received your letter on Thursday last and felt proud of it. I am very sorry to hear that your boots hurt your feet....I spoke my dialogge yesterday and the teacher said that I did it very well....Rosa says that she has written two letters to you and Freddy has written one to you. ...Rosa wants me to write more but I have not any more to say.

Mother sends her love.

From your affectionate Daughter
Annie Douglass

DOES YOUR FAMILY SAVE LETTERS? LETTERS SAVE HISTORY.

ACTIVITY 1:

Become a family correspondent. Write to an older family member and ask about the first members of your family to come to America. Where did they come from? When? How many generations have lived here? Use pins and a world map to locate and mark the area your ancestors came from. Native Americans should mark the places inside the United States where their families originated. Think about the different family backgrounds of the members of your class. Ask a relative to describe an important event in one of your ancestors' lives.

ACTIVITY 2:

Imagine arriving in America or moving to a new place. Write a letter back to someone in your homeland describing your first year.
THE STORY OF OWNEY

About 100 years ago, a little dog wandered into a post office and made himself at home among the mailbags. He loved traveling with the mail. Once, when a mailbag accidently fell off a cart, Owney stayed with the bag to protect it until the postal clerks came back to fetch it. Owney became a famous dog. Owney jumped onto mail trains whenever he liked. The clerks loved having him along because he was a good luck charm. There was never a railroad accident when Owney was aboard. Wherever he went, postal clerks made a dog tag for him, so others would know where he had traveled. The National Postal Museum has more than 1,000 Owney tags that show all the places Owney visited.
Above is a maze of a railway map and a few of Owney’s tags, showing where he had traveled.

Help Owney find his way back home to Albany, New York.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Draw a line from each of the places where Owney traveled, (shown by the dog tags), back to his home in Albany.
Teacher Resources: Projects and Books

Postal History is a rich resource for your language arts, social studies, and even math curriculum.

Try the following activities and source materials:

PROJECTS

Letter-Writing Projects

*Fan mail* - There are several books available promoting the writing of letters to stars as well as issue-oriented mail. Students might write to their favorite sports figure, their congressperson, or their favorite author. (Addresses are available in books listed on this page.)

*Group letter writing game* - Use this activity to teach the parts of a letter and their order. Divide up the parts of a letter, and have each child write one sentence or one line of the letter. Then put the letter parts in the proper order. Use these parts as guidelines: return address, greeting, introduction, body, summary, closing, signature, and post script. When all the parts are put together, read the silly letter aloud to the class.

*“Wee Deliver”* In-school Postal Service - Set up a postal system in your school and promote literacy, teamwork skills, and a sense of community. A starter kit for the program includes: a videotape, teacher's manual, cancellation and "return to sender" stamps, poster, distribution case, and carrier bag. To obtain a free starter kit, send the index card to: Literacy Initiatives, Corporate Relations, U.S. Postal Service, Room 10541, 475 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Washington, DC 20260-3100. Please allow 6-8 weeks for delivery. Limit one kit per school.

Mail Delivery Projects

*Mail-sorting Activity* (a graphing activity) - Students sort their home mail for one week, into the following categories: advertising mail, personal mail, bills, magazines, and catalogs. A total number of mail items in each group should be recorded and graphed.

Stamp-Related Projects

Stamps are miniature works of art. Each stamp tells a story about the history, geography, or natural resources of the country from which it comes. Collecting stamps is like collecting endless stories. You can find stamps that illustrate almost any subject.

*Find stamps that commemorate a national movement, such as conservation, and research the history of that movement. Find stamps that celebrate scientific innovations and have students research those inventions. Find a stamp with a leader on it. Research the heroic accomplishment of his or her life.*

*Foreign stamps are written in their native language, often using an alphabet or names unfamiliar to Americans. Have students match the name of the nation found on a stamp to our English name for that nation. Students can then find that nation on a map.*

*Create a math problem: How many stamps are there? Number in a row? Number of rows? Value of sheet of stamps?*

BOOKS

Postal History and Mail Delivery


The history of mail from early times to the present for very young children.


Follow the story of how mail gets delivered as a girl mails a letter to her cousin.


A history of the Pony Express mail service.


A collection of short articles and puzzles about mail history, delivery, and stamp collecting. Send $2.95 to: Cobblestone, 20 Grove St., Peterborough, NH 03458

Stamps


A colorful how-to book for beginning collectors.


A colorful how-to book for beginning collectors.


Brief biographies of people who have been featured on stamps. Available from: Linn’s / Amos Press, 911 Vandemark Road, Sidney, OH 45365


A full-color guide to all U.S. stamps, including price lists and descriptions; available for sale at most post offices.

Letter-Writing


Addresses for kids to write letters and receive free things in the mail.


A guide for young children on how to write different kinds of letters.


Addresses for kids to write to their favorite people and places.


A detailed guide to letter-writing and its importance.


A comprehensive resource guide to over 100 worldwide pen pal clubs and related activities.

Special teacher offer of $15: *Kindred Spirit Press*. P. O. Box 682560, Park City, Utah 84068-2560
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