

Without adventure and discovery, education will fail to catch the imagination of a high percentage of children. Studies

evaluating learning styles and temperament reveal that many children do not find books very interesting and are at risk for dropping out of school. Are they less intelligent? No. These children learn best not by reading, but by doing.

As a retired speech and language pathologist, I have discovered that in dealing with both normal and dysfunctional children, it is important to maximize the senses such as seeing, hearing, and touching in order to do

the best job. And as a public health educator who seeks to change attitudes and behavior, I have seen that it is important to bring action into the picture because action spells experience, which can lead to satisfaction and fulfillment. Talking is not teaching and listening is not learning. Children love

doing or collecting things. If the collecting involves adventure and discovery that leads to learning, all the better.

Many years ago, I discovered that postal history on stamps and envelopes could be a great tool in working with children. It established a pleasurable mutual interest and lent itself to being incorporated into a number of

different content areas.

For the past 45 years, I have orga-

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Using Stamps to Lick Boredom in the Classroom

BY ROBERT A. ROACH

nized junior stamp clubs in various parts of the U.S. and have worked with perhaps 2,000 children in grades three to eight. I have presented stamps as a method of approaching whatever subject I was presenting. I have done this in church schools and public schools to the delight of teachers and children.

In suggesting that postal history can be an exciting way to approach learning in whatever content area, I do not mean that teachers have to become philatelists, serious collectors. However, when they are introduced to stamp collecting, many young people and their teachers find the subject so fascinating that they choose it as a lifelong hobby.

Every subject taught on the elementary level can be enriched by finding appropriate postage stamps that feature that topic. Projects that work well include the following:

- A one-page report with a stamp as the focal point.
- Scrapbooks on the theme being studied.
- Bulletin boards exhibiting a theme.
- A large world or country map with specific stamps for the areas, etc.
- Bible themes can be created, for example, featuring stamps that illustrate the six days of Creation.

Children love to collect and make things and exhibit their productions. You can have them find cancellations on envelopes featuring major events or commemorations, or locate ones with their birthday and year of birth, or find a First Day cover of a new stamp with their birthday on the cancellation. I have two of these in my collection.

A fourth-grade teacher in a public school where I served as a speech and hearing specialist asked me to do a drug education program, since she knew I had spent many years as a

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health educator. I began by setting up an exhibit of Pitcairn Island's stamps and telling the story of the mutiny on the *Bounty*. I brought to school a large box of used stamps and invited each student to take a handful and start a notebook of faraway places and people. After a couple of sessions with the students and their growing albums, I suggested that we start another notebook of stamps on health themes and subjects illustrated by stamps, including stories and pictures from newspapers or magazines. At the end of six weeks, the parents were invited to visit the classroom and prizes were given for the best notebooks. The city newspaper covered the event.

In evaluating the unit, the teacher wrote, "What is remarkable is that many boys and girls are discussing stamps and the prevention of drug addiction with their parents with an enthusiasm that is contributing to the development of healthy family relations and understanding." When I read that statement, I immediately

thought of Malachi 4:5, 6: "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (NIV).

How to Get Started

Postage stamps and canceled envelopes are documented history and a universal vehicle for communication. As a result, they are everywhere, everyday. So how does a

teacher get started, avoid some pitfalls, and make good use of this tool for educational purposes? The remainder of this article will offer some pointers. You might also talk to a teacher who has successfully used the tool and is enthusiastic about it. He or she can give you some ideas.

Stamps come in two types—new (mint) and used. They can be collected and studied either way but should not be mixed in exhibits. Stamps can be collected by country, topic, or theme. Topical collecting is rapidly become the most popular. Envelopes can be collected and studied because of their cancellations and stamps, or their dates or places of origin. Special envelopes known as First Day Covers have a picture on the left depicting the special event on the stamp, and are canceled on the exact date of issue from a special city.

Then there are the very old envelopes before there were U.S. stamps (pre-1847) with interesting cancellations like October 22, 1844, several of which I have in my collection. The envelopes may include a letter, and thus offer insights into interesting correspondence for that period.

Finding envelopes, covers with special dates or anniversaries of events, or for every state or your own birthday can be fun. Other than obtaining stamps from your own correspon-

dence and that of your friends, stamp dealers can be a good source.

Letting people know that you are collecting can bring support from many sources. In one city, I went to the utility company, which gets an enormous amount of mail from bill payers each month. They were willing to let me have these envelopes, which gave me a large source of stamps for the children with whom I was working.

Pen pals can be a source for exotic stamps and a way to share duplicates. My wife, Evie, began writing to a pen pal in England when she was 10 years old. They still correspond at Christmas time and often share gifts, which provide a number of high value stamps.

New stamps are available continuously throughout the year from local post offices. Back issues for special subjects can be purchased from stamp dealers at a cost above face value. (See references at the close of this article.) I do not recommend buying printed albums with pictures of stamps from various countries. That leads to frustration because of the need to buy new pages each year. Stay with a three-ring notebook and blank pages until you decide to go all-out for a specialty. The one exception would be an album from the U.S. or your own country. Even then, buy a three-ring notebook size.

Do not remove stamps from envelopes until you decide whether you want to save the entire envelope. When removing stamps, always leave at least a half inch around them. Soak in cool water. When stamps come loose, place them face down on paper towels, making sure that all glue is off the back. When almost dry or before they start to curl, place them in stock

pages for storage. Organizing them can be helpful for future usage or trading purposes.

Stamps should be handled with tongs, not tweezers. Used stamps should be mounted on pages with special hinges, not cellophane tape or glue. Many valuable stamps have been destroyed by improper mounting.

How do you learn about stamps and their value? You need a catalogue of stamps from 1847 to the current year. The most comprehensive is the multi-volume set of SCOTT catalogues of all the stamps of the world. Local American post offices should carry the U.S. annual directory for a modest fee. All stamps are shown in color by years of issue.

A number of countries have issued stamps with Seventh-day Adventist institutions on them. In 1967, Mada-

Four criteria that make stamps valuable

- Scarcity • Condition • Supply and demand • Completion (as in sets or topics).

gascar issued a series of three stamps featuring the exemplary architecture of three churches, including one SDA structure. Since then, Pitcairn Island, the Norfolk Islands, Samoa, Papua New Guinea, and Tonga have featured individual Adventists or Adventist institutions. Envelopes have been developed to honor SDA institutions and their anniversary events. Postmarks & Pioneers has produced at least 25 since 1948. A list is available from the writer. This is a promising field that is steadily gaining interest and momentum. Every Adventist institution—whether church, school, or hospital—can produce special envelopes, which create good publicity and public awareness, and thus become a fertile field for children to get excited about the history of their own church. For three stories about some of the events, see *Ministry* magazine (May 1974); *Adventist Heritage*, vol. 6, No. 1 (Summer 1979); and *The*

Adventist Review (December 3, 1981).

U.S. stamps in new condition can be a good investment when carefully preserved in glassine envelopes. When children buy stamps, they are investing rather than spending money for candy, gum, or soft drinks. Collecting can prove to be a valuable lesson with potential for a lifelong hobby. Stamps are always worth their face value for postage, so when you spend your money you can still save it, and they may grow in value over time.

Postal history (stamps and envelopes) can greatly stimulate interest in learning from books because of the hands-on activity. Historical events and faraway places come to life for children as they collect and organize stamps. Collecting, organizing, and sharing can also contribute to cooperative education between peers and parents (see JAE, April-May 1995).

The use of stamps in the classroom can generate interest, provide worthwhile activities, and teach about many areas of the curriculum. ❧

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Resources

- U.S. Post Office for *The Postal Service Guide to U.S. Stamps*.
- *Linn's Stamp News* (a weekly paper), P.O. Box 29, Sidney, OH 45365.
- American Topical Association, *Topical Time*, P.O. Box 65749, Tucson, AZ 85728. An excellent source for special topical booklets.
- Local stamp stores: if there are none in your town, *Linn's Stamp News* will have many ads showing where to order.
- Postmarks & Pioneers, P.O. Box 1177, Loma Linda, CA 92354. Resource for all SDA philately such as special envelopes and SDA stamps mentioned in this article. Beginners or advanced collectors may send a self-addressed, stamped envelope for further guidance and help.
- Voice of Prophecy, P.O. Box 8551, Riverside, CA 92515. Pitcairn Island, U.S., and worldwide stamps.

Basic Tools

- Tongs • Hinges • Stock pages • Glassine envelopes • Ring notebook • Blank pages • A U.S. or world catalogue of stamps.