

Here are some ideas for activities and games for you to use at meetings of your stamp group

They have been divided into three sections:

- 1) activities which can be used at every meeting, as a way of starting or finishing each session;
- 2) learning the basics - helping the children to understand more about the hobby;
- 3) fun and games - ways of adding extra excitement, often a good way to end each session.

Breaking the Ice

You will want your children to feel at ease and to get to know each other. This activity lets them choose a few stamps for themselves, and to say a few words. The children will vary in what they are prepared to say and share, but that is no problem.

Large piles of stamps are placed before the children. They are given ten minutes to choose a few that relate to their own lives, such as places visited, other hobbies or sports, and so on. After they have made their choice, invite each to tell the others how the stamps they have chosen relate to themselves. Some of the stories may be very humorous. They may offer ideas for themes for stamp collections this can lead to a general discussion.

Don't worry if some of the children seem a bit quiet at first, and are reluctant to say much. Hopefully they will soon feel more confident.

On-going activities

It is useful to have a few activities which are on-going, enabling the children to do something at the start of each meeting, while waiting for all to arrive.

Jar of stamps. Have a small jar containing stamps (usually still on the pieces of envelope). The children are asked to guess how many stamps are in the jar. The child closest to the actual total receives a number of points (with say double points if the guess is spot-on).

The number of stamps in the jar (even the size of the jar) will vary from meeting to meeting.

Display of stamps. It is a good idea to try and show a small display of stamps at each meeting (although these have to be prepared in advance). On arrival each child is given a list of fairly easy questions (say five) which can only be answered by looking at the display.

The Dip Tin

This is useful as a way of providing the children with a few stamps at each meeting, and to provide easy prizes when appropriate.

You will need a large, square biscuit tin in which to put a good selection of stamps. Maybe some older collectors may be prepared to donate a quantity of stamps, or you might be able to buy stamps in bulk from a stamp dealer. It is a good idea to try and change the stamps at each meeting.

Challenge sheet. At the start of each term, each child is given a sheet on which there are say 12 to 16 spaces in which stamps can be affixed. Under each space is a heading, such as 'Flag', 'European country', 'Famous person', and so on. At each meeting a large container of stamps is put out, and the children choose a suitable stamp to fill each space on their sheets, If the stamps are varied at each meeting, the children can have the term to complete their sheets,

Always encourage the children to use tweezers when handling the stamps.

There might be an opportunity at the end of each session to invite the children to discuss the stamp(s) they have chosen that day. For example, if a famous person has been chosen, the question can be asked 'Why is that person famous?'. If the answer does not come, suggest it be researched in time for the next meeting,

The Countries Game

Another good way of ending a session, or perhaps when waiting for all to arrive.

Select a child to begin, who has to think of the name of a country, say BERMUDA. The next child has then to think of a country that starts with the last letter of the previously named country, i.e., in this case, starting with A.

If a child gives a wrong answer, or does not come up with an answer in say ten seconds, he or she is eliminated. The child left at the end is the winner.

Note: do be careful of the letter A. It is surprising how many countries that start with A also end with A. Your choice of countries becomes quickly limited. So it is a good idea that the first country named should not start with A. (Clearly BERMUDA is equally not a good choice.)

The tools of the trade

This activity is to help the beginners understand some of the basics of stamp collecting, and become familiar with the 'tools of the trade', It can be used in conjunction with Kim's Game, or perhaps can come first, with Kim's Game following later.

It is not suggested that all these are covered at one meeting: it is best to only deal with one, or say two, at each session.

Naturally, you will want to familiarize yourself with the items before the meeting, or practice such techniques as soaking.

Over the course of the weeks, you might want to show:

- Stamps, including Definitives, Commemorative (Special Issues) and Postage Dues;
- Envelopes, first day covers, postmarks, machine cancellations (with slogans) and handstamps;
- A straightforward catalogue (such as 'Collect British Stamps'); Stamp tweezers and magnifying glass;
- Perforation gauge and finding the watermark;
- Security and technical measures (this can interest some of the older children, and will include such items as the elliptical perforations now found on British stamps, printing ink that changes colour, and the phosphor found on British stamps);
- Stamp albums and stockbooks;
- Soaking (floating) stamps off envelopes (as more stamps are now self adhesive, you may want to refer specifically to such stamps);
- Mounting stamps on a stamp album page using paper stamp hinges, and the 'plastic' stamp mounts.

You will find the 'Understanding the Basics' leaflet in the Resource Pack useful. If you wish to advance further, there is a helpful book called 'Philatelic Terms Illustrated'. If you have established links with a local adult philatelic society, one of the members may be able to help you, but not necessarily to visit your group - an adult collector is likely to be too technical for your young members.

Kim's Game

The idea of this game is to teach the children 'the tools of the trade', and for what each is used. It is also a good test of memory.

A number of items are arranged on a tray. Items that are suitable include:
stamp tweezers

- a paper stamp hinge
- a plastic stamp mount
- a black watermark detector tray
- a perforation gauge
- a definitive stamp
- a commemorative stamp
- a postmark
- a magnifying glass
- a stamp booklet
- a meter mark

The tray can be marked out in numbers. Allow the children to look at the tray for about two minutes.

There are a number of ways you can proceed. At first, you might just ask the children to write down all the items they can remember (if they cannot remember the right names to use, they can make drawings of the items). They can check off their lists as you explain each item in turn. Each item can then be passed round the group, so they have a chance of handling them. A good item to include is often a flat mirror. After this has been passed round, you can show how dirty it has become with finger marks, etc. You can then explain that handling your stamps makes them just as dirty, and so you should always use tweezers.

Another way to proceed is to divide your group into teams. Keep the items covered up. You then ask which item was in square X. The team that answers correctly, wins the points.

Using a stamp catalogue

This is to help the children make proper use of a stamp catalogue, and understand the information included.

It is far better to begin with a straightforward catalogue, and one which lists the stamps to which the children can easily relate.

For this reason, it is strongly recommended that you start with Stanley Gibbons 'Collect British Stamps'. This only lists the stamps of Great Britain, but has the added advantage that all the different designed stamps are shown, and in full colour.

The catalogue will give some useful information, such as when the stamps were issued, the reason they were issued, and how many stamps are in the set.

You can build this into a quiz.

Arrange the children in teams, say of three or four.

Give each team a selection of British stamps, and ask them to use the catalogue to answer some simple questions, such as when was each stamp issued?; how many other stamps are in each set?

You can vary this with an 'odd man out'. You give the children say four stamps, three of which are from one set, one from another set. They have to identify the 'odd man out'.

As the children advance, so you can move to other catalogues, such as 'Stamps of the World', or even the catalogues for particular collecting areas, such as British Commonwealth, France, Germany, and so on. The more advanced the catalogue, the more information that is provided (stamp designer, printer, printing process, watermark, perforation, errors, and so on).

A note about prices. It is worth making clear that the stamp catalogue is basically a dealer's price list. Be careful that the children do not think that because a stamp they own is given as say 50p in the catalogue, that they can sell it for 50p. The prices quoted are what the dealer might charge you for an example of the stamp in perfect condition (and for many lower priced stamps, this really represents a 'handling charge' rather than any intrinsic value). Many dealers charge less than the 'catalogue price', and, of course, when buying in stamps dealers will pay much less than the price quoted in the catalogue.

You might like to have a discussion of values - pointing out that the catalogue prices can be used as a guide when swapping.

Postmarks

The postmark is an important part of any letter. It can show when and where the letter was posted. It can have a design which ties in with the theme of the collection.

Encourage the children to ask their parents/guardians if they can have the envelopes from letters which have arrived at home. It is essential that they keep the entire envelope. They might like to neatly write on the back of each, in pencil, the date on which the letter was delivered.

At a group session, you can look at all the envelopes, in particular the postmarks, and see where each letter was posted when it was posted how long it took to reach its destination is the design of interest in a thematic collection.

You may be surprised at some of the postal markings you find. The letter may have taken an unusual route, and places where the letter has been handled

might be indicated by separate postmarks.

If you feel the children are able, perhaps when they are on holiday, suggest they send a letter back home. Particularly if the holiday is overseas, they will be able to see not only the stamp, but the type of postmark that was used.

Building up knowledge

Here is an activity which can be varied as you progress. It helps the children to become far more familiar with stamps, and the extra enjoyment that can come from the hobby.

Your dip tin will be useful once more - in fact it might be a good idea to have a few tins scattered around the room.

At each stage, you can have a series of cards, on each of which is written one of various headings. Each child takes a card at random (it does not matter if there is some duplication). Each child must then go around the dip tins, finding a selection of stamps (say between six and ten) that fit with the category written on the card.

Here are some ideas:

All have a monarch's head

All from 'Commonwealth' countries All from Europe All are definitives

All have red or blue in their design

All show birds

All are from countries which have changed their name

All the cards can have themes on them (similar to 'Choosing the Theme' activity, except that this is an individual rather than team activity). Ideas are:

Boat	Train	Car
Space ship	Sea	River
Wild animal	Domestic animal	Bird
Insect	Sportsman	Politician
Explorer	Scientist	Entertainer

(This 'themes' can lead to further discussion, as you can talk about the designs of the stamps.)

You can choose more 'philatelic' subjects. but of course you will need to make certain that appropriate stamps are in the Dip Tins. Here are some ideas:

Airmail

Cancelled to Order

Health stamp
Overprint
Postage Due
Perfin

Official stamp
Surcharge
Se-tenant

Choosing the theme

This activity encourages the children to examine the design of the stamps . and can lead to further discussion.

Arrange the children into teams of say two or three.

There are variations as to how this game is played. One is for each to choose a card at random on which is written the name of a popular stamp collecting theme.

Here are some ideas: ANIMALS, BIRDS, SPORT, ROYALTY, FAMOUS PEOPLE, TRANSPORT.

A pile of stamps is placed before the teams, but covered with a cloth. Each team picks a stamp 'unseen' at random. If the stamp turns out to be appropriate for their chosen theme, they keep the stamp, and possibly have another go. If not, it is returned to the pile, and the next team has a go. The team which has acquired the most stamps after a certain time is the winner.

The alternative is for the 'themed' cards to be placed in front of all the teams. The stamps are not covered. Each team in turn selects a stamp from the pile, and has to place it on the appropriate card. If correct, the team keeps the stamp (and possibly has another go). If wrong, the stamp is returned to the pile. Again the winning team is that which has accumulated the most stamps in the given time.

The children must use tweezers at all times. Stamps must not fall on the floor - if a team does drop a stamp, it misses a turn.

After the game, the leader can choose one or two of the stamps, and ask a few questions about them (i.e., such as who is this famous person shown on a stamp?). If the children do not know the answer, encourage them to see what they can find out for the next meeting.

Matchmaker

A similar game to having the names of themes written on cards is to use Continents instead.

For this you could use a map of the world, placed on a table. As the children choose the stamps from the pile, they have to place them on the right part of the

map.

Suggested groupings might be EUROPE, EASTERN EUROPE, FAR EAST, AUSTRALASIA and PACIFIC OCEAN, NORTH AMERICA, SOUTH AMERICA, AFRICA and ATLANTIC OCEAN, INDIAN OCEAN.

Run-around

This game helps the children to learn more about stamps - and uses up some of that excess energy.

The organiser makes a number of statements about stamps, which are either true or false. Here are some examples:

The first adhesive postage stamp was the Penny Red (**false** it was the Penny Black)

The Penny Black was issued in 1840 (**true**)

The Queen's Silver Jubilee was in 1977 (**true**)

Sri Lanka was once known as South Africa (**false** Sri Lanka was previously Ceylon)

One side of the room is for those who thinks the statements are 'True'; the other side for those who think they are 'False'.

You can play this game in two ways:

1) those who go to the correct part of the room are given a point, and at the end of the game, each individual's points are totalled.

2) if a child goes to the wrong part of the room, he or she is then eliminated from the game. Likewise, any child who cannot make up his or her mind is eliminated. The child left at the end is the winner.

Stamp Bingo

Based on the familiar bingo, this helps the children identify stamps.

For this you can either use illustrations of stamps, or the actual stamps provided you have a number of copies of the same stamp.

First, choose a selection of stamps, which represent the 'numbers' on a standard bingo card. If you want to be really ambitious, you could have say 90 different stamps, but this is probably far more than you need.

You might find it useful to have large illustrations of your chosen stamps (you can use the enlarging facility on a photocopier). It is also a good idea to mount these illustrations on pieces of thin card. For your actual bingo game, these cards will be placed in a suitable container, and each drawn out in turn, but at random.

Now, compile the actual bingo cards: you can use postcards or other pieces of thin card. Arrange on each a random selection of say up to ten from your chosen stamps.

If you want, you can simply identify the stamps by their country of issue. In other words, if the first stamp you draw is from France, simply ask the children to see if their bingo card has the stamp from France on it. This is a good way for them to recognise the various country names. It does, however, mean that all the stamps you use should come from different countries.

Alternatively, as you draw out each stamp illustration, hold it up, and let the children see if the identical stamp is on their card.

As each stamp is drawn, so each child covers the respective illustration on the bingo card say with a counter. The child who has first covered up all the stamps on his or her card is the winner.

Party games

Here are more ideas for games, very useful as a fun way of ending each session, or simply to use up a bit of energy.

Posting the letter

Arrange to have say six 'pillar boxes' on each of which is written the name of a country. These boxes can be spaced around the room.

Give each child a selection of letters addressed to towns and cities in each country: they have to post them in the correct boxes. Or, give the children small cards on which is shown a stamp from one of the countries. Again they have to 'post' them in the correct box.

The Post Office Game

This is best played in small groups, say of six children.

Each child is given a name, such as STAMP, LETTER, POSTMAN, POST BOX, ALBUM, HINGE, and so on.

Place a chair about 5 metres from the group of children.

You now tell a story, which can be **varied** each time. Every time you use one of the chosen names, the respective child has to run around the positioned chair and return to the team. You can add variety by stating that every time you use an expression, such as 'POST OFFICE', the whole team has to run round the chair and return to their places.

Put the head on the stamp

A variation of pinning the tail on the donkey.

Take an enlarged illustration of a British stamp, but blank out the Queen's portrait. Have a separate cut-out of the portrait. Blindfolded, the children have to position the Queen's head on the stamp.

The Balloon Game

This game is only suitable if you have the space. Also remember that not all children are happy with the prospect of bursting balloons.

A story is told based on stamps and stamp collecting. Your children are divided into two teams. A number of questions are asked, based on the story. The team which answers each question correctly selects one of its members to choose and burst a balloon.

Inside each balloon is either a match, which counts as one point, or a small piece of paper on which is written a number of points from say 1 to 5.

At the end of the game, the team with the most points wins.
(You could vary this, by having some of the pieces of paper within the balloons with 'forfeits' rather than points.)

Spot the Difference

Use a stamp, and produce two enlarged copies. On one of the copies, make a few (say six to ten) slight differences to the design. Ask the children to see if they can spot the differences.

(With a computer, this task is made much easier. Scan the stamp, and produce the differences on the computer screen.)