Samples from Exploring History Through Primary Sources: My Community Then and Now

- Table of Contents

- Sample Lessons

- Sample Reproducibles

- Document Bases Assessment

Table of Contents

U.S. Mail Then and Now

Standard/Objectives

- Students will identify examples of rights and responsibilities of citizens. (NCSS)
- **Part A:** Students will understand the origins of the postal service and will acknowledge the different modes of transportation the postal service has employed over the years.
- **Part B:** Students will use the facsimile as an example for letter and envelope format. Students will construct letters of their own to a government official. They will also address envelopes and affix stamps in the proper place.

Materials

Postal Service photograph card and facsimile; Copies of the student reproducibles (pages 29–31); Copy of the web frame written on the board (from the back of the photograph card); Copies of the web frame for the students; Writing paper or stationery; Two envelopes per student and two stamps per student if you are having your class write individual letters; Address of a government official (which can be found in the front of a telephone book)

Part A: The Photograph Card

Discussion Questions

To activate prior knowledge, first ask students these questions: What is mail? When does the mail come? How does it come? How does the post office know which mail should go to you?

Now photograph: Looking at the mail truck picture, ask students to tell you what they see.
- What is happening in this picture? What is the boy taking?
- Whose hand is coming from the truck?
- Could any of the mail be for the little boy?

Then photograph: Looking at the pony express picture from the 1860s, ask the following questions.
- Why do you think this picture is on the same card as the mail truck picture?
- Why did the post office use horses instead of trucks?
- Why do you think this mail carrier needed to have a rifle with him?
- Where do you think he keeps the mail? How much mail can he take with him at one time?

Using the Primary Source

1. Have students sit around you on the floor. Share the two photographs with them one at a time asking the questions above. Share information you learned by reading the background information for the teacher, *Deliver the Letter* (page 27).
2. Then, read the background information for the students from the back of the photograph card as the students view the two photographs on the front of the card. If you'd prefer, you can give students copies of *Sending a Letter* (page 29), which has the photographs and the student background information.
3. Talk about what a web is and how each bubble connects to the middle. Write "Ways That We Move Mail" in the center of the web you've copied on the board. Then, give students their own copies of the web and have them copy those words onto their webs.

U.S. Mail Then and Now *(cont.)*

Part A: The Photograph Card *(cont.)*

Using the Primary Source *(cont.)*

4. Referring back to the photograph card, write "by truck" in one of the outer bubbles. Re-reading the middle text, ask students to tell you another way that we move mail. Write the response in a second bubble and allow time for students to write on their individual webs. Students may work in cooperative groups to complete the webs with words, pictures, or both.

5. Ask students to share their finished webs with the class. Possible answers may include trains, cars, airplanes, horses, helicopters, boats, hot air balloons, or wagons.

6. You can assess how well students are able to construct webs with the following document-based assessment: *Grocery Stores* (page 74).

Part B: The Facsimile

Discussion Questions

- Who is this letter to? Who wrote this letter?
- When was this letter written? How do you know?
- Why did Amy write this letter?
- What else do you notice about this letter?
- On what street does Emily live? What is her house number?
- In what city does Emily live? What state? What is her zip code?
- If the post office couldn't give Emily her letter, would they know how to give it back to Amy? What did Amy forget to put in her return address?
- What information can you learn by looking at the cancellation mark?

Using the Primary Source

1. This facsimile is a correspondence between cousins, but the postal service was also created for communication between citizens and the government. Have the students in your class write letters to government officials and include self-addressed (to the school address), stamped envelopes for replies. Or, if you prefer, you can do the following activity with the whole class, creating one group letter using shared writing.

2. Brainstorm a list of possible topics for the letters. These could include requests, complaints, or questions the students want to address. The letters could also be friendly letters describing the class and any recent units of study.

3. Using the letter facsimile as a model, review the five important parts of a letter: date, greeting, body of the letter, closing, and signature.

4. After students write their own letters, have them read their letters to partners. Partners should listen carefully and give suggestions to make the letters better. Does each letter make sense? Is there anything the writer could add to make it better? Is there something that could be reworded to sound better? Is the letter easy to read? Did the writer request a response at the end of the letter?

U.S. Mail Then and Now *(cont.)*

Part B: The Facsimile *(cont.)*

Using the Primary Source *(cont.)*

5. When students are satisfied with their letters, review the envelope part of the facsimile and read *Addressing an Envelope* (page 30) together. You can also share information you learned by reading the background information for the teacher, *Sorting the Mail* (page 28).

6. Give each student two envelopes. On one envelope have each student write his or her name and the school address. This envelope will be for a response from your official, so don't forget to put a stamp on it! Fold this envelope into thirds so it will fit into the second envelope along with the letter. On the second envelope, each student writes the school address as the return address and then the addressee's address.

Part C: Connecting to Primary Sources

Home-School Connection

- Give students copies of the *Post Office Home-School Connection Letter* (page 31). Explain the assignment to the students and answer any questions. Have students fill in their parents' names and the date at the top of the letter. Then, they should sign the bottom. If any students receive replies to their letters, have them share with the class.

Content-Area Connections

- **Art Connection**—Have students create stamps on rectangular pieces of paper. They should color their designs and clearly write the postage amount with the letters USA in the corner. Then, students can send their ideas for new stamps to the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee. Every year this committee recommends 25–40 new subjects for commemorative stamps and it gives ideas for regular stamps to the Postmaster General. (Send to: Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee, Stamp Development, U.S. Postal Service, 1735 North Lynn Street Rm. 5013, Arlington, VA 22209, with written explanations of the students' ideas.)

- **P.E. Connection**—Run "Pony Express" relay races. Divide class into teams of four or five. Stand students apart at various points on the playground. Make a "letter" for students to deliver. Students run to a station where a person from their team is waiting. The student must hand the letter to the next person on the team. That student then takes the letter and runs, passing it on at the next stop. The first team to get the mail to the end of the line wins! To make it even harder, like the route from Missouri to California, create an obstacle course that team members must maneuver through before passing the letter onto the next runner.

Read Aloud Titles

- Braun, Lillian. *The Cat Who Played Post Office.*
- Farrell, Sue. *To the Post Office with Mama.*
- Gibbons, Gail. *The Post Office Book: Mail and How It Moves.*
- Johnston, Marianne. *Let's Visit the Post Office.*

Deliver the Letter

Photograph Background Information for the Teacher

Benjamin Franklin made improvements to the postal system in 1737. These were the beginnings for the system we are familiar with today. He saw to it that mail service was constant by setting delivery times, shortening mail routes, and running mail carriers at night to provide faster service.

One of the first issues the early Continental Congresses addressed was mail. The Constitutional Post was designed to be a system for open communication of information and ideas between citizens and their government. The Crown Post had regularly censored mail, something the new Constitutional Post would not be allowed to do. This new system began in July 1775. The Crown Post was out of business by Christmas day.

In the next century, the country grew very quickly. Getting mail west of Missouri reliably became a challenge many people thought was impossible. Extreme weather conditions and unmapped lands were problems. Then, a man named William Russell built stopping stations, found tough horses from the West, and advertised for brave, young riders. From April 3, 1860, to late October 1861, Russell's Pony Express was in service. It was initially a private business but was taken over by the postal service after proving to be a success.

In many cases the postal service employed methods of transportation years before the general public did. The potential for speedy mail delivery was seen immediately in trains, cars, and airplanes, and budgets were created to help support their development. The postal service also helped develop America, by raising funds for the building of roads, railways, and bridges.

Even with all of the technological advances, there is still one place that continues to use mules to transport the mail. In Arizona, the Havasupai Indian Reservation is located at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. Five days a week mules, carrying 200 pounds (90.7 kg) of cargo, make the four-hour trek down the canyon.

In 1971, the Post Office Department officially became the United States Postal Service (USPS). Through the years the mission has always stayed the same—to bring the country together through the communication of its people. It strives to provide reliable, efficient service to citizens in every part of the country. In doing so, the USPS has helped shape the country.

Sorting the Mail

Facsimile Background Information for the Teacher

Today, the United States Postal Service delivers mail directly to homes and businesses. This wasn't always so. In the past, letters had to be dropped off at a post office and had to be picked up at a post office. Mailboxes were not around until 1858, and even then they were only in large cities.

Paying postage before mailing your letter used to be optional. Stamps made their first appearance in 1847 to encourage pre-payment, but it wasn't until eight years later that the post office made stamps a requirement. In the 1800s, letters staying within city limits were delivered for free. Otherwise, the price for delivering a letter was based on how far it was going and how many sheets of paper were used. By 1863, letters were priced by weight only. Rates became uniform regardless of the distance the letter would travel. That's how it still is today. There is one rate to send a regular size letter anywhere in the United States.

With more letters being processed, transportation getting faster, and the country expanding, the postal service needed a way to sort letters more efficiently. In 1963, the Zoning Improvement Plan (zip code) was created and a five-digit number was given to every address. The five digits in a zip code are as follows: the first digit is the area of the United States, the second two digits are the populated section within that area, and the last two digits identify a specific postal office.

In the past, envelopes were not used. Letters were folded and the address was written on the outside sheet. Now, letters must be placed in envelopes, a stamp must be affixed to the upper, right corner of the envelope, and an address must be written clearly on the front. Letters were sorted by hand until the 1950s, when technology made the process faster. Automatic sorters, cancellers, and address readers were a few of the devices introduced. In 1983, a hyphen and four more digits were added to zip codes to further pinpoint where a letter was headed. These additional four digits mean even less time for sorting.

Today, mail is handled quite differently than it was 100 years ago. Machines can scan an envelope, read the address, and print a barcode along the bottom that allows it to sort about nine letters each second. Stamps are scanned and cancelled. There are even machines now that sort letters in the order they should be delivered. So, mail carriers need only pick up a bundle and begin passing them out.

Advancements such as e-mail substitute for letter writing, but essentially the right to communicate remains the same. All Americans share the right to express their ideas and the responsibility to stay aware of what's happening in the world.

Sending a Letter

Pony Express Rider
Source: The Library of Congress

**USPS Mail Truck Now**
Source: Photodisc

At first, a man named Benjamin Franklin was in charge of the mail. He had many good ideas. He set times to collect mail and to deliver mail. He had more roads built so that mail could get to more places.

Later, the Pony Express was famous for its horse riders. These riders took mail to places that were hard to reach.

Today, we use trains, cars, and planes to move mail. We also use helicopters and boats. In the past, balloons and wagons also moved mail.

We send letters because it is important to share news and ideas. You have the right to know what is going on and to say what you think. You can send a letter to anybody. If you want to, you can even send a letter to the president!

Addressing an Envelope
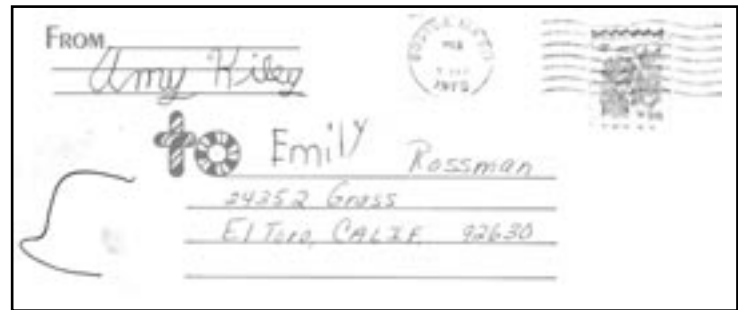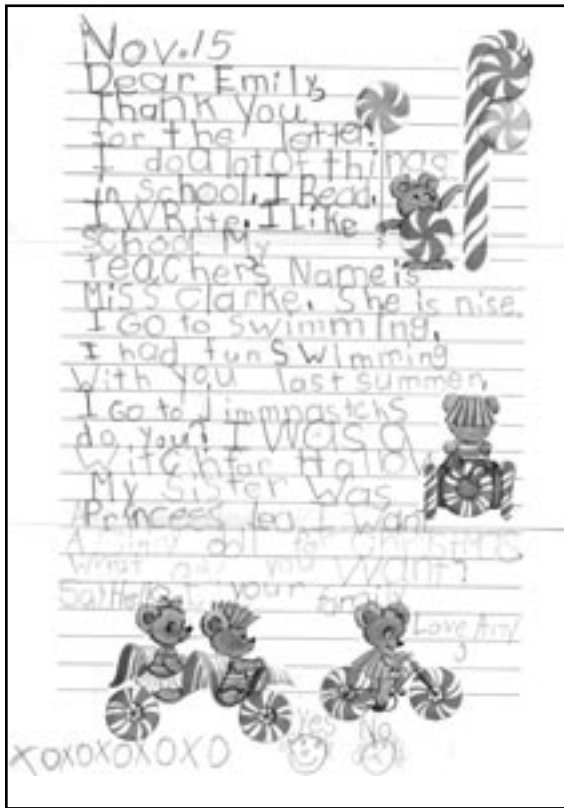
Courtesy of Amy Kiley

To mail a letter you need to pay for a stamp. A stamp shows that you have paid to send the letter. It must be placed in the top, right corner of the envelope.

In the middle of the envelope you need to write three lines. The first line is the name of the person to receive the letter. The second line is the person's house number and street name. The third line is the city and the state where the person lives. On this line, you also need a zip code. Zip codes are set by the post office. The zip codes help postal workers deliver the mail.

People should write their own names and addresses in the top left corner. That way the letter can come back if there is a problem.

In the past, people didn't use envelopes. They folded the letter and wrote on the back. Today, you need to use an envelope.

Post Office Home-School Connection Letter

_____
(date)

Dear _____,

    I am learning about the postal service in school. Today, we talked about the post office and why it was started more than 200 years ago. People sent letters to each other to share news and ideas. In the beginning, letters were carried by people riding horses, but then boats, trains, cars, and planes were used, too. The post office tries to get the mail delivered quickly.

    I also learned how to write a letter and how to address an envelope. It is our responsibility to keep in touch with other people so my teacher would like me to send a letter to a family member or friend. Together we can decide to whom I should write a letter. My letter has to have five things.

1. the date
2. a greeting (that means Dear _____,)
3. the body (that's what I'm going to tell them)
4. a closing (like Love, or From,)
5. my name

    My envelope has to have three things, and they all have to be in the right places.

1. a stamp
2. a return address (that's my name and our address)
3. an address (to whom I'm sending the letter)

    The stamp goes in the top right corner, the return address goes in the top left corner, and the address goes in the middle. We can either go to a mailbox or the post office to mail the letter. My teacher said that if I get a letter back, I should save it and bring it in to show the class.

Love,

_____
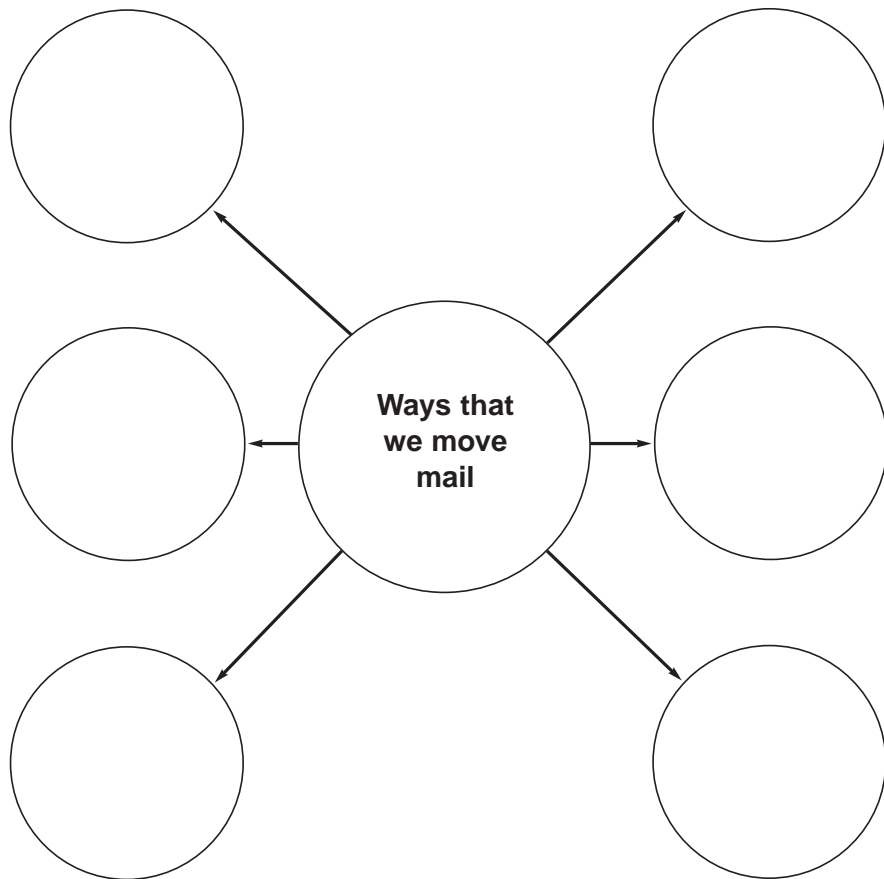
Postal Service

This is a pony express rider in the 1860s.
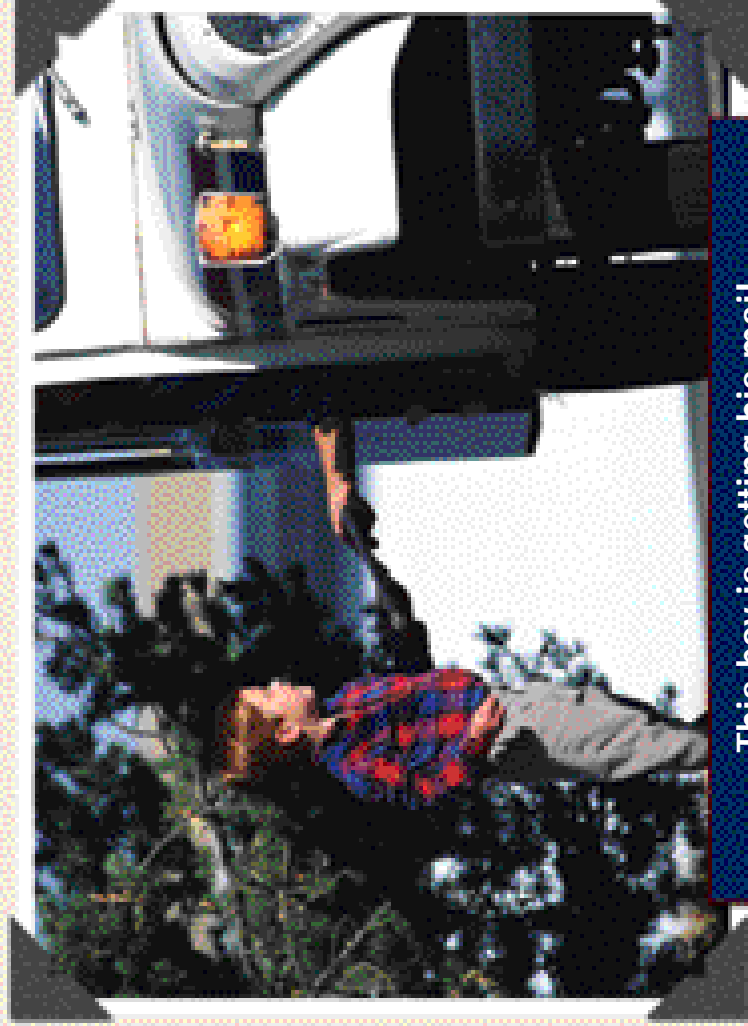
This boy is getting his mail.

Postal Service Then and Now

Showing What You Know

Directions: Fill in this web to show different ways of moving mail from one place to another.

Ways that we move mail

Sending a Letter

At first, a man named Benjamin Franklin was in charge of the mail. He had many good ideas. He set times to collect the mail and to deliver the mail. He had more roads built so that mail could get to more places.

Later, the Pony Express was famous for its horse riders. These riders took mail to places that were hard to reach.

Today, we use trains, cars, and planes to move mail. We also use helicopters and boats. In the past, balloons and wagons also moved mail.

We send letters because it is important to share news and ideas. You have the right to know what is going on and to say what you think. You can send a letter to anybody. If you want to, you can even send a letter to the president!

Challenge

• Dogs can be scary to people who deliver mail. Make a sign that will let your mail carrier know if you have a dog or if you don't have a dog. If you do have a dog, draw a picture of what your dog looks like. If you don't have a dog, create a sign with a short message to your mail carrier, like "Have a Nice Day!" Or, you can draw a picture you think he or she would like to see.

Nov. 15
Dear Emily,
Thank You
for the letter.
I do a lot of things
in school. I Read.
I WRite. I Like
school. My
teachers Name is
MISS clarke. She is nise.
I GO to swimming.
I had fun swimming
with you last summer.
I go to Jimmnastcks
do you? I was a
witch for Hallow
My sister was
Princess lea. I want
A Ginny doll for christmas.
what do you want?
Say Hello to your family
Love Amy

XOXOXOXOXO

Yes   No

FROM

Amy Kiley

BOSTON, MA
PM
3 DEC
1978

to Emily Rossman

24352 Grass

El Toro, CALIF   92630

Name _____

Grocery Stores

Directions: Make a web of the kinds of things you think you might find in each store. Use the clues in the pictures to help you.

Grocery Store from 1940
Source: The Library of Congress

Grocery Store Today
Courtesy of Peter Pulido

Then

Now

What can you find in a grocery store?