

Stamps: Teachers' notes and tips – upper intermediate

1 Pre-reading tasks

- a Quote this line from the text and ask students if they can guess what it might be: *It's regarded as the most valuable man-made object on earth in relation to size, weight and composition.* Let them ask some questions and think about it a little while before telling them it's a stamp.
- b Tell students the theme of the reading is stamps where they'll find more information. Give each student a copy of the task sheet and to answer question 1 in pairs.
- c Feedback: **a** true 24bn items were posted in 2005 of which 20bn were letters costing less than £1 **b** false most letters are sent by businesses but received by domestic customers **c** false the number of letters sent each year increases **d** false the Penny Black **e** true **f** true
- d Put students in small groups to discuss the questions in 2. Let them speak for as long as they're interested in the topic – if you've bought in some local or international stamps, get students to look at these while they're talking. (PS Magyar Posta stamps come from Hungary).
- e Ask for a short feedback about their comments. Does everyone agree?

Tip: use realia

If you can get your hands on some stamps (from letters, postcards sent to you or the other teachers, or from the local post office, or some cheap collections of franked ones) that would be great – it will make students far more interested in the reading!

2 First reading tasks

- a Give each student a copy of the reading. They need to read as quickly as possible and identify the three roles mentioned by Penelope. Students compare their answers with each other.

Tip: provide appropriate first-reading tasks

This task will be easier to do now that they have had an opportunity to think about stamps, and these roles are the main gist of the reading.

- b Feedback: **1** it shows that someone has paid for the postage of a letter **2** it gives information (historical / political etc) about a country **3** it can be a way of investing / saving / making money.

Tip: elicit as much as possible

Make sure that you're getting the answers from the students and not giving them yourself!

3 Second reading tasks

- a (Question 4 of the task sheet) Although the article is written in the first person it was actually written by the journalist. The questions he asked to get the information are not included in the text so students have to read again in more detail and work these out. Questions can be quite specific (*When did you start collecting stamps?*) or more general (*What impact did stamps start to have on society?*) The 10 questions should cover the whole interview.
- b Monitor well and encourage stronger students to ask more general questions

that may have longer answers. Make sure they're only writing the questions though!

Tip: get students to write their own comprehension questions

To write these questions students need to understand the text. Remind students that they can ask a range of wh- questions, as well as yes/no questions.

- c When students have finished they can swap their task sheets. They can make sure that the answers to the questions another student has written can be found in the text.

4 Post-reading tasks – speaking

- a The question writing task leads naturally into an interview scenario. In pairs one student can be the interviewer, the other Penelope, and they can ask and answer the questions about stamp collecting. You can ask a few couples to come to the front of the class and do this as a 'live TV' show.

5 Post-reading tasks – using the Internet

- a Refer back to the sentence in the reading *In such a small image there was a clear message about the people's attitude to their work and country, and politics*. Looking at the Magyar Posta stamp illustrated can the students say what these messages could be? (Perhaps it showed the people thought this kind of work was rewarding, beneficial and important enough to be on a stamp. Perhaps Penelope could see that it was a communist country.)
- b Then, by browsing the Internet, ask students to choose one stamp, or a set of stamps, which they feel reflects their own country, or says something important about their values. This can be shown in the next lesson to everyone.

Tip: remind students this is a UK-based text

It's only in the UK that people couldn't send letters before 1635. This may be very different in other countries or cultures. If students say this is the case encourage them to find out how letters were transported and paid for.

Tip: help students with the Internet

I've suggested eBay simply because there are always pictures of the stamps included. Suggest the students also write in *stamps (country)* in the image section of a search engine too. They can also write in other key words of course if they're looking for something a bit more specific, an event or famous person from the past for example.