

TEACHERS ACTIVITIES



Theme:

Through letter writing, people can communicate with others no matter where they are.

Topics For Discussion:

Before viewing this program, have students brainstorm a list of different types of mail that people receive. Save the list to refer to after viewing so that they can compare their ideas with mail that LeVar receives and mail that they see in other program segments and add to their list.



Discuss the different purposes of letter writing. Have students relate personal experiences with writing and receiving letters as well as the letter writing of their parents and other family members. A **Reading Rainbow** review book for this program, Loreen Leedy's *Messages in the Mailbox: How to Write a Letter* (Holiday House) describes many different types of letters and their functions.



Discuss the persistence of the postal system in trying to deliver John Peck's letter. Why did they never give up? Share with the students the familiar slogan, "Neither rain, nor snow, nor sleet, nor hail, ..." and discuss its relationship to this story. (Students may notice the multiple meanings of the word "hail" in this discussion).



Discuss the style in which the text of *Hail to Mail* is written so children recognize that the story is told in rhyme, instead of the narrative style of most stories that they read.

Curriculum Extension Activities:

Investigate the possibility of participating in "Wee Deliver," a program that involves students in a schoolwide postal system. Contact the Office of Literacy, U. S. Postal Service, 470 L'Enfant Plaza SW, Ste. 4102, Washington, D. C. 20260-3110 for free information.

Obtain a copy of *Hail to Mail* and have the students examine the book jacket illustration. The title, author, translator, and illustrator information is presented in a postmark format. Have students compare postmarks of different pieces of mail. (Also, point out to the students that this story was translated from Russian and discuss what it means to “translate”).



Refer to the story and have students trace the route of John Peck’s letter on a world map. Locate the U.S. cities mentioned in the story on a U.S. map.



Refer to the story and have students identify the many different means of transportation used in the delivery of mail (e.g., airplane, boat, truck, train, etc.).



Using the illustrations in the book, have students note the different ways that each of the mail carriers in the story is dressed. Discuss how the mode of dress relates to where they live.



Invite a stamp collector to the classroom to discuss his/her hobby and show the students a variety of stamps.



After students have had the opportunity to see different types of stamps, have them design their own stamps. Discuss the kinds of information that should be on a stamp.



If possible, take a trip to a post office. *The Post Office Book: Mail and How It Moves* by Gail Gibbons (HarperCollins) and *Here Comes the Mail* by Gloria Skurzynski (Bradbury) are useful books to read before the trip so that students have some information about various jobs people have at a post office. Have them compare what they learned on their trip with the post office segment of the program.



Have students write letters. Authentic letter writing experiences are much more meaningful than “pretend” letters. Arrange an activity where students will actually mail their letters and potentially receive mail in return. Possibilities for letters include writing to friends, family members, businesses, government officials, pen pals in a classroom from another school, favorite authors, and others.

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:

DEAR PETER RABBIT

by Alma Flor Ada, illus. by Leslie Tryon (Atheneum)

DEAR BROTHER

by Asch, Frank and Vladimir Vagin (Scholastic)

DEAREST GRANDMAMA

by Catherine Brighton (Doubleday)

YOUR BEST FRIEND, KATE

by Pat Brisson, illus. by Rick Brown (Bradbury)

DEAR ANNIE

by Judith Caseley (Greenwillow)

WHAT THE MAILMAN BROUGHT

by Carolyn Craven, illus. by Tomie dePaola (Putnam)

THE POST OFFICE BOOK: MAIL AND HOW IT MOVES

by Gail Gibbons (HarperCollins)

DEAR MR. BLUEBERRY

by Simon James (McElderry)

HERE COMES THE MAIL

by Gloria Skurzynski (Bradbury)

Description:

In this feature book the simple act of mailing a letter becomes a trip spanning the entire world as a certified letter finally catches up with its intended recipient. LeVar takes a trip behind the scenes of the postal service where we are introduced to a dedicated staff who sort and deliver the mail. Letter writing is introduced as a basic communication that brings people closer together, and a young collector shares his enthusiasm for stamps.



Social Studies Concepts:

- ◆ communication
- ◆ geography
- ◆ transportation
- ◆ history



Classroom Activities:

Communication

Communication between people and places is often in the form of letters. In the book Hail to Mail a letter is transported around the world to get to its destination – which was the person it was addressed to. Have the class brainstorm a list of jobs that are needed to operate a system like the U.S. Postal Service. As a class, make a plan for setting up a classroom post office – by deciding what to use for student mailboxes, how to operate the sending and receiving of mail, setting up a rotation system for class postal jobs so all students have a chance to “deliver the mail,” etc.

Communication

After setting up the classroom post office in the previous activity, invite students to write letters to one another. (Have them draw classmate names or assign pen pals so that no one is forgotten.) Introduce the process of letter writing appropriate for your grade level, and include instruction on addressing an envelope.

Communication

Sending e-mail is becoming more possible as schools and homes are connected to this global system. Although the system is different, the effectiveness of the message still depends on how well it is written, including punctuation, capitalization, and grammar. If your classroom has access to e-mail, pursue having your students assigned to “keypals” – the electronic version of penpals. Also suggest that students who have computers at home send e-mail to grandparents, family and/or friends. [Connect with a teacher in another town or state and have your classes exchange e-mail.]



Geography

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Display a map of the United States and a map of the world. Have students find their location on both maps and mark these spots. As letters and e-mail get sent, use a specific color pin to mark where the correspondence is going. Once the student receives a response, use a different color pin to record that a response has been received. In this way you can keep track of the correspondence going out and coming back to the classroom.

Geography

Have students use a world map and yarn to plot the route of the letter in Hail To Mail.

Transportation

Because of the many ways the letter in Hail To Mail was transported, the book provides a good foundation for a discussion on the use of cars, trains, airplanes, boats, buses, trams, trolleys, and ships. Invite a postal worker to visit the classroom and talk about how the mail reaches their post office; the options of overnight delivery, priority two-day delivery, and first class postage; how packages are transported to different countries, etc. [If possible, lend them the Hail To Mail book and video so they can watch it before they visit the class.]

History

Invite students (and/or a parent) who have postage stamp collections to bring them to school to show and tell. Discuss the fact that history is a frequent theme of stamps, and that famous people and memorable historical events are often pictured on them. [The local post office may have posters available that advertise new stamp designs.] Invite students to create new designs for postage stamps that commemorate some important event or person from history.

Do-At-Home Activities.

We Got Mail!

Send home a copy of a United States map. Have families work together to color in the map. Ask students to return the map to school to talk about and display the results.

Talking About Mail

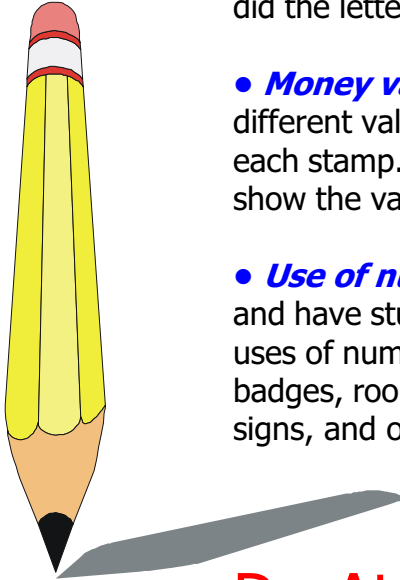
Encourage parents to further explore and discuss with their child the mail they get. Ask them to enlist the help of their child everyday for a week to sort the day's mail into piles: advertising/junk mail, bills, personal letters, etc., and to discuss how the piles compare in size and importance.



- **Calculating distances.** Locate the places that John Peck's letter traveled on a map of the world. Research the distance between the places and make a chart that identifies the two places and the distance (e.g., New York to Boise, Boise to Zurich, etc.). Use the chart to answer such questions as: what was the longest distance the letter traveled between two attempted deliveries, what was the shortest distance, how many miles did the letter travel altogether?

- **Money values.** Prepare a set of 3 x 5 cards with a postage stamp of different value on each card. Have students use coins to show the value of each stamp. Encourage them to use different arrangements of coins to show the value.

- **Use of number in our world.** Obtain a copy of the book, *Hail to Mail*, and have students examine the text and illustrations to locate the many uses of number. For example, there are numbers on the mail carriers' badges, room and apartment numbers, times of day, numbers on street signs, and others.



Do-At-Home Activity

- **Conduct a survey of mail that families receive.** Begin with predictions of how many pieces of each type of mail the family will receive for a week. Then count the number and record it on the survey sheet (see next page). The following categories of mail may be included: personal mail (letters, postcards, greeting cards, etc.); "junk" mail and advertising; newspapers and magazines; parcel post (packages); and business mail (financial statements, bills, etc.). With older students, mail might be "sorted" according to first through fourth class as they learn what types of mail are included in each class.