



a portrait of England

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TEACHERS' NOTES



A Royal Icon - The Machin Stamp

This activity is for KS2 Art & Design, with links to KS2 History 11a) the Victorians

Objectives

Pupils will investigate printing techniques and design their own stamp while learning about the similarities between the Penny Black and the Machin stamp.

Background Information

The world's first postage stamp, the Penny Black, was introduced in May 1840. This was the same year that Uniform Penny Postage was introduced, greatly reducing the cost of sending a letter. As a result, it cost one penny to send a letter weighing less than half an ounce anywhere in the kingdom.

Rowland Hill was the driving force behind this postal reform. He organised a competition, inviting the public to suggest the best way to introduce prepaid postage. Prevention of forgery was a major concern of postal reformers and they decided that the image of a famous person on a stamp, such as the Queen, would be the best way to prevent forgery, as it would be more difficult to forge such a well-known portrait. Other features, such as check letters, watermarks and engine turning were also incorporated into the design to make it more secure. The diagram in the pupil worksheet has more detail about this.

Although the Penny Red replaced the Penny Black in February 1841 due to problems with the ink used to cancel the stamps, the basic design of Victorian stamps remained the same and is still evident in our stamps today.

Check Letters Letters designed to prevent forgery, preventing people from matching up two half stamps

Engine Turning A geometric design, still seen on banknotes today

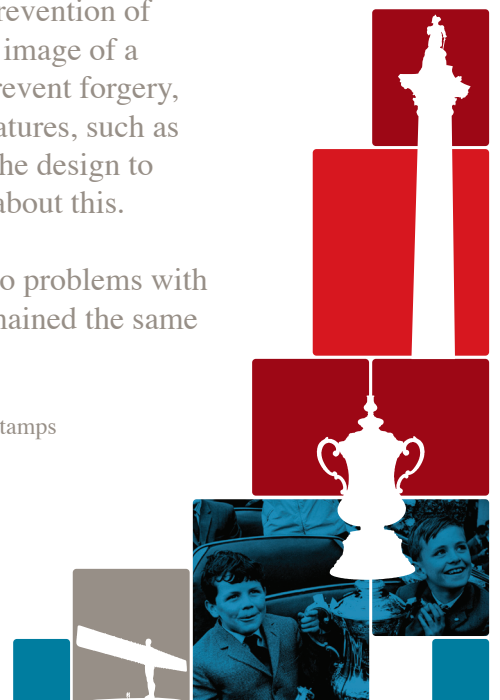
Machin Definitive Queen's head stamp designed by Arnold Machin in 1966

Watermark Translucent design impressed on paper, visible when the paper is held to the light

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The Machin Stamp and the Penny Black - Comparison

The Penny Black was based on an engraving of the young Queen Victoria on the Wyon medal.

The Machin (Queen's head) stamp is based on Arnold Machin's 1966 sculpture of Queen Elizabeth.

Note the similarities between the diadem (crown) on the Penny Black and the Machin and the way that the profiles of both monarchs are facing left.

It is interesting to observe how these iconic portraits are frozen in time, remaining unchanged on postage stamps for decades, representing Britain and the monarchy.

Here is some background on stamp printing techniques with an activity that will enable pupils to investigate different printing techniques and develop their own stamp.



The Wyon City Medal 1837

PRINTING TECHNIQUES

Line Engraving

Manufacturers of the first postage stamps faced the challenge of how to print sufficient quantities to satisfy public demand.

Until 1854 all stamps were printed by line engraving, a process by which lines were cut by hand into a metal plate from which a print was made. Once the sheets were dry they were gummed and the individual stamps were cut by hand.

In the 1850s stamp perforation machines were introduced.

As a result, a different way of printing stamps had to be developed since line engraving made it difficult for stamps to be perforated by machine. During the line printing process, the paper was wetted; as it dried the paper shrank. This made mechanical separation of the stamps difficult because the spacing changed.

Surface Printing

In 1855 the printers, De La Rue, introduced surface printing. This was also known as letterpress printing and was a flat, dry form of printing which was compatible with the perforating machines.

Surface printing was introduced for the higher value stamps first. Penny Red stamps, for example, continued to be printed by line engraving.



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Polystyrene Tile Printing

Polystyrene tile printing is an exciting way to explore types of printing while pupils design their own stamp.

Ask the children to collect different examples of printed materials from home and school. This could include looking at a range of prints by artists such as William Morris or Andy Warhol.

Discuss different types of pattern, images and methods of printing.

Design Your Stamp:

- Look at the different examples of stamps on the British Postal Museum & Archive website: www.postalheritage.org.uk
- Ask the children to bring in a selection of modern stamps that they have collected and discuss the different themes and images they can see.
- Talk through the different stages of designing the stamp and help the children plan their design.
- Encourage them to think about the size of a stamp; this is a crucial factor since the children will need to develop an idea that will look effective at a very small size.

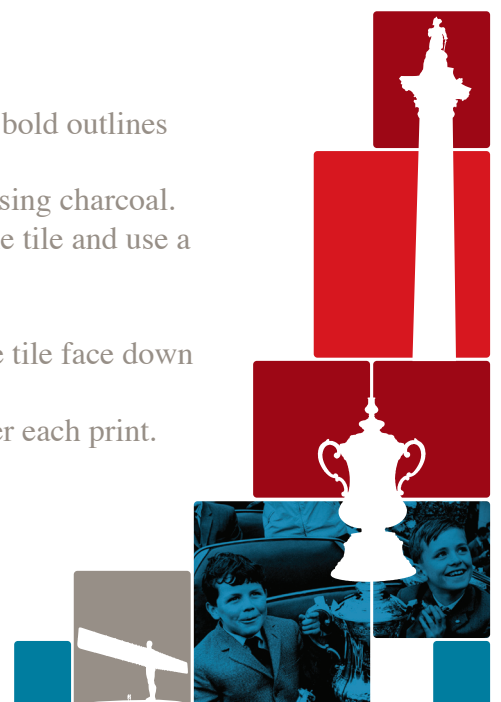
You'll Need:

Polystyrene tiles
Inking rollers and trays
Paints/ water based ink
Charcoal
Paper

- Discuss the types of image that would be effective as a print, such as bold outlines and patterns.
- Develop a rough design and then draw it on a larger piece of paper, using charcoal.
- Place the paper with the charcoal design face down on the polystyrene tile and use a clean roller to transfer the charcoal outline to the tile.
- Use a sharp pencil or biro to etch out the charcoal design in the tile.
- Use the rollers to apply ink to the tile and print the image, placing the tile face down on the paper, pressing it firmly down with a clean roller.
- Different colours can be built up by cutting away more of the tile after each print.

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- Discuss the features of a British stamp. Point out to the children that Britain is the only country in the world that does not have its name on the stamp. This is because Britain introduced the postage stamp. All British stamps have an image of the Queen as part of the design.
- Set the class the task of designing their own postage stamps using polystyrene tile printing techniques.
- These could be printed at A5 size and shrunk to size using a photocopier or by scanning and resizing.

Design Brief to Give Your Class:

Develop a design for a stamp using polystyrene printing. Think about what factors make an effective stamp design.

Choose a theme like Victorian inventions, famous Victorians or another appropriate topic. You could also trace around the enlarged Penny Black stamp in the pupil worksheet to create a template of Queen Victoria's profile and design your own Penny Black.

