
project 1: postage stamp design

One of the ways a culture defines its national identity is from its use of graphic design for government communications. Most people interact with federally sponsored graphic design daily through currency, transportation, signage, and nutrition and health labels, without giving it much thought. However, one form of government-sponsored design that attracts attention is the postage stamp.

The basic purpose of a stamp is to function as currency—a prepaid certificate that can be redeemed for mail delivery services. As a design, it is often an image with a small amount of typography. Stamps are avidly collected and often resemble miniature versions of contemporary posters. Aside from their obvious difference in scale, posters and stamps have much in common. Both are posted or affixed to another surface, and both tend to have an ephemeral existence, although stamp or poster collectors can recycle them. The most effective stamps and posters attract attention by communicating content in a conceptually clear, immediate, and legible manner.

You will design a series of four postage stamps on the subject “A Celebration of Cultural Diversity in America.” Choose one cultural group found in the United States (Irish, Italian, Russian, African, Japanese, Chinese, Indian, etc.) and select four individual aspects of that culture (art, dance, food, drama, sports, politics, religion, etc.) that have been adopted or integrated into the American melting-pot culture.

objectives

To develop a design concept as a framework for four separate but equal components

To communicate the essence of a subject without merely illustrating it

To design with scale issues in mind

specifications

Stamp size: 1.25" x 1.5"

Copy: USA / 34 cents / name of culture (Chinese, Japanese, etc.)

Configuration: Block or row of four stamps

Media: digital illustration using Adobe Illustrator

process

Make your selection based on a culture you wish to explore in depth. Begin researching your culture through various library and Internet sources. Look around at your classmates. Many of them are from different cultures and may be able to offer insight.

In order to create a design series, your stamps must share a consistent visual vocabulary (in terms of form, shape, color, and typography) when imaging the different aspects found in the culture. Consider designing on two levels: first, the design of the individual stamp, and second, how the four stamps come together in a block or row as an integrated whole design. This is a *gestalt* principle, where the whole is more than the sum of its parts; each individual stamp has a meaning, but when all four stamps come together they embody a collective meaning.

The design process begins by reviewing your collected materials and making word lists and thought maps to develop your ideas beyond the obvious that come to mind. Your first ideas may be cultural stereotypes and should be avoided. You must submit at least 1 word list or thought map for grading.

Once you have identified what aspects you will focus on, begin making thumbnail sketches for each stamp. You must create original imagery using the elements and principles of design (line, shape, texture, positive/negative space, value, color, motion, etc.) to reinforce the meaning of each of the aspects chosen. It is important conceptually to push yourself beyond expressing a literal narrative—for example, showing a known painting or sculpture to represent the subject of art. You must submit at least 6 thumbnail sketches per stamp (minimum of 24 sketches total) for grading.

After your ideas have been developed on paper you may create your final compositions in Illustrator. You are required to write a one page-long artist statement that supports your final composition. An artist statement supports your composition and explains your thoughts about it; perhaps how you arrived at the design solution. This is intentionally open-ended so that you can decide what the viewer should know that cannot be gained solely by viewing the work. Remember, you only have one page, so be thoughtful, descriptive and concise.

file submission

1 zipped folder titled 'Firstname Lastname' (example: Monique Rogers) containing:

- 1 Illustrator file with 1 artboard
If your stamps are in a block: artboard 4.5 x 4.5" square (see artboard setup)
If your stamps are in a row: artboard 7.5 x 2.25" landscape (see artboard setup)
Save file as firstnamelastname-art1013-f11-secX-p1.ai (ex: moniquerogers-art1013-f11-sec3-p1.ai)
- Scanned hand drawn sketches (including 1 word list or thought map) saved as lastname-p1-sketchbook-page#.jpg
- 1 page long artist statement, 1" margins, Times, Helvetica, or Calibri 12 pt font, 1.5 or double spaced lines. Include name, class section, project 1 and a title.

grading: 100 points total

Following Requirements: 15 points

- Is there 1 word list or thought map + 24 hand drawn thumbnail sketches + 1 final composition consisting of four stamps + 1 artist statement?
- Is the imagery original and of your own creation?
- Is the file set up correctly?
- Is the project submitted on or before the due date?

Composition + Concept: 60 points

- Are the sketches well thought-out and thoroughly explore the four chosen aspects of the culture? Do they show variety and/or concept progression?
- Are the stamps a successful design series? Do they share a visual vocabulary in terms of form, shape, color, and typography?
- Are the stamps successful compositions individually? Do they create an integrated design when placed in a block or row configuration?
- Do the compositions show a consideration of design elements and principles? Is the small size taken into consideration?
- Do the concepts go beyond a literal narrative?

Craftsmanship: 10 points

- Are the vector graphics created in a proficient/knowledgeable manner?
- Are the stamps placed within the perforated border so that the edges of the stamp and the border are aligned with no overlapping?
- If layers are used, are they descriptively named?

Artist Statement: 15 points

- Does the artist statement support and explain your thoughts about the project, process and final composition?
- Is it well written and concise, about a page long, and use correct punctuation and spelling?

due date

Section 3: completed project is to be printed, mounted on foam core and brought to class on Wednesday, October 26. Digital files due in dropbox on art server by 11:59 pm Wednesday, October 26.

Section 5: completed project is to be printed, mounted on foam core and brought to class on Thursday, October 27. Digital files due in dropbox on art server by 11:59 pm Thursday, October 27.

Adapted from an assignment created by Elizabeth Resnick and Glenn Berger at Massachusetts College of Art in Boston. Details about the original assignment can be found here:

Resnick, Elizabeth. *Design for Communication: Conceptual Graphic Design Basics*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2003.

artboard setup

