



American Philatelic Society

Postage Stamp Token Economy Initiative



A token economy system can be used by classroom teachers to encourage appropriate student behavior through the use of positive reinforcement. The APS Postage Stamp Token Economy Initiative was developed by the Education Department of the *American Philatelic Society* to provide teachers with used postage stamps to utilize as tokens for promoting positive behavior and academic achievement.

Token Economy Systems – Background Information

A well-designed token economy system puts the focus on positive reinforcement for specified behaviors while de-emphasizing negativity and punishment. Embedded in an effective token management system should be the concepts of prevention, instruction, and reinforcement. Prevention is achieved by clearly articulating expectations so that all students are aware of what the teacher expects. Instruction involves teaching and modeling of the desired behaviors. Reinforcement takes place when appropriate behaviors demonstrated by students are rewarded.

In the APS Postage Stamp Token Economy Initiative, used postage stamps are used as tokens distributed to students demonstrating specified behaviors. To provide maximum reinforcement of targeted behaviors, it is important for postage stamp tokens to be awarded immediately after a targeted behavior is demonstrated (when feasible).

Remember – KEEP IT SIMPLE! Any system must be easy for children to understand and easy for the teacher to manage. More importantly, KEEP IT POSITIVE! Any reward earned by a student should never be taken away for misbehavior.

Steps for Implementing a Stamp Token Economy System

Step 1: Select Behaviors to Reward

Begin by choosing two to four behaviors to target (i.e. working quietly, following a classroom procedure properly, turning in homework on time, etc.). Define each behavior in clear, specific, and observable terms, making sure to describe what the student should do, rather than what he or she should not do.

The goal of a token reinforcement program is to increase desired behaviors. Programs targeted at changing disruptive behaviors (i.e. off-task, fidgeting, leaving seat, talking out, etc.) can be successful in changing these behaviors; however, they do not necessarily lead to increased work productivity. Consider targeting the products of academics, as this can lead to increased productivity, as well as improvements in behavior and achievement.

Step 2: Establish a “Stamp Treasure Box”

Create a “Stamp Treasure Box” by decorating a cardboard box with “stamp art” and filling it with used postage stamps. To fill your “Stamp Treasure Box” with postage stamps, solicit donations by: having students ask family and friends, contacting local businesses, placing an article in a local newspaper, posting a request on school website, asking the PTO/PTA for help, or by contacting senior citizens groups, community service organizations, or local stamp clubs.

When requested, the American Philatelic Society will send classroom teachers a box filled with hundreds of stamps to help them get their APS Postage Stamp Token Economy up and running. There is *no cost* for the first shipment when mailed to a school address, however, educators will be asked to pay postage for additional shipments. Complete the electronic request form at stamps.org/Stamps-Teach to register for an APS Postage Stamp Token Economy Initiative shipment of stamps.

When a student “earns” a stamp, the teacher can give one to the child to place in an envelope. Establish the procedure for when a student can go to the “Stamp Treasure Box” and select a specified number of stamps. In the student’s stamp envelope, students can have their own small “stamp album” where they can use a glue stick to paste earned stamps. There are numerous methods that can be used to create an inexpensive stamp album, one suggestion is to fold an 8 ½” by 11” piece of paper into a small book.

Step 3: Designate Rewards

Some token economies permit students to exchange their earned tokens for “higher value” items. If you would like to include additional rewards in your token economy program (instead of limiting yourself to postage stamps), develop a “prize” list and determine the number of stamps that will be needed to obtain each “prize” reward. Students could use their earned stamps to purchase these rewards.

In order for a reward to be motivating, it must be perceived by students as desirable and worth working for. One method for ensuring that the rewards are meaningful is to involve the children in the process of generating a list of potential rewards. Examples of no cost rewards include: additional computer time, opportunities for helping with classroom or instructional tasks, lunch with the teacher, etc.

You may wish to develop a special method for cancelling the stamps students use to purchase rewards. Using a special cancel, such as a unique ink stamp, will permit students to keep their stamp albums as “collectibles”. You will also need to decide how often, when, and where “prize” reward purchases will occur. Remember, keep it simple and manageable!

Step 4: Introduce Program to Students

First, teach and model the targeted behavior(s) identified in Step #1, then inform students of the process for earning stamps (and other rewards).

Make a big production out of sharing the “Stamp Treasure Box”. Demonstrate how you will award postage stamps. For example; tell a child that you liked the way she came into the classroom that morning and started the seatwork assignment right away. Give her a stamp. Tell another student you noticed he walked quietly in the hallway. Give him a stamp.

Permit each student to choose a stamp and place it on the cover of his/her stamp album in preparation for earning stamps. Conduct a few “practice” sessions where all students receive a stamp token.

Step 5: Initiate Program

It is essential for the teacher to reward students displaying targeted behaviors in a consistent and accurate manner. When a student meets established expectations a stamp token or tokens should be awarded.

Stress to students that postage stamps will not be awarded every single time, as this could be disruptive to the learning environment. The teacher is the only person who determines when stamps will be awarded and to whom. (This helps to make the program manageable.)

Step 6: Changing the Program

The program should be “fluid”, it can be changed in a number of ways when desired. The number of stamps required for a “prize” reward can be changed. New behaviors can be introduced, as needed. “Prize” rewards can be introduced at different times of the year. The number of stamp tokens rewarded for specific behaviors can be modified. When making changes to the program, praise students for their successes and explain the changes and expectations. Post basic information for both teacher and students to refer.

APS Postage Stamp Token Economy Suggestions

- Allow time for students to share their favorite stamps during partner, small group, or whole group collaborative conversations.
- Have students choose a favorite stamp to paste on the front of their “stamp album”.
- Change stamp album booklets every week or every month. Students can accumulate stamps according to daily, weekly, or monthly schedule and be exchanged for designated “prize” rewards at the discretion of the teacher.
- Instead of a “stamp album”, use a bingo card, calendar page, or a weekly assignment checklist with spaces for stamps to be pasted.
- “Bonus” stamps may be awarded to students who excel in some way or to reward prosocial behaviors; such as; helping others or sharing. (However, if a student brings his own “good” behavior to your attention, there should be no reward.)
- Providing an envelope, plastic bag, or box as a means for students to store their loose postage stamps will help to prevent them from becoming a possible distraction.
- Students can conduct “stamp investigations” to find out more about the stories behind the stamps in their albums.

The goal of including a token economy as part of a classroom management plan is to not only stop inappropriate behavior from occurring but to improve behavior in the future. The APS Postage Stamp Token Economy will not only motivate your students to develop important social and academic skills but will provide exciting tokens that represent history, social studies, mathematics, literature, art, music, and pop culture. Think of the exciting discussions your students can have as they learn more about the world in which they live through postage stamps!

Stamps Teach Program

The **Stamps Teach** program of the American Philatelic Society provides information and resources to K – 12 educators in a wide variety of content areas. The goal of the **Stamps Teach** program is to develop and share standards-based learning activities that use philatelic artifacts as instructional tools. For more information: stamps.org/Stamps-Teach.



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