



## Olympilex Lesson 9

# Topical Collecting



Skill: *Classifying*

Some philatelists enjoy collecting stamps from as many countries around the world as possible. Others collect only the stamps of one particular country. Still others prefer stamps from around the world that relate to a particular topic—such as animals or the Olympic Games. Not surprisingly, a collection of stamps on a particular subject is called a **topical collection**.

Popular subjects for topical collectors include stamps related to sports, the Olympics, cats, dogs, horses, birds, butterflies, airplanes, trains, and space. But there are hundreds of possible topics you can choose from. No matter what your interest, some country has probably issued a stamp that features that subject.



Often, it's fairly easy to pick out stamps that feature the topic you collect. For example, the stamps shown at right clearly belong in topical collections on cats, airplanes, butterflies, and the Olympics. But, sometimes you may have to look at a stamp closely to see whether it could be used in your topical collection. For example, examine the stamps below and see which (if any) could go into a collection of birds on stamps.



How many did you identify? If you look closely, you'll see that all four stamps have something to do with birds. The first stamp shows a large elephant with a bird standing on its head. The second and fourth stamps show items made from bird feathers (a quill ink pen and an Indian headdress). The third stamp shows an eagle on the large coin.

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When you know your topic well, you can sometimes include a stamp that doesn't show the specific topic you collect. For example, a collection of birds on stamps should include stamps showing eggs, things that birds eat, places famous for birds, and even "bird dogs" used to hunt quail and other game birds. Your topical collection is only limited by your knowledge of the subject and your imagination!

In some cases, a stamp shows an image of a person, animal, plant, or other item—and nothing else. Many times, however, the stamp will show a scene in which several other objects are included. Sometimes, there may be five, ten, or even more objects shown on a single stamp that could be used in different topical collections. For example, see how many different topics you can identify on the stamp shown on the right.



Before making a list, you should first take a look and see if you can tell why this commemorative stamp was issued. There are the dates "1847-1947" and the words, "U.S. Postage Stamp Centenary." "Centenary" is another word for "centennial"—which means 100th anniversary. But, since the dates are given, you probably already figured this out. In this case, what you see is a stamp issued in 1947 to mark the centennial of the first U.S. postage stamps (which were issued in 1847). The first U.S. issue was a pair of stamps—one showing George Washington (the first president of the U.S.) and the other showing Benjamin Franklin (the first U.S. postmaster general). Because of the stamp's subject, the forms of transportation shown illustrate the various ways mail has been moved in the history of the U.S. Shown from left to right are a Pony Express rider (not a cowboy), an early steam locomotive, a diesel locomotive, an ocean liner, and an airplane. This one stamp could be part of at least eight different topical collections: history of postage stamps, history of U.S. mail delivery, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, horses, trains, boats and ships, and airplanes.

Speaking of topical collecting, if you were building a collection on the history of U.S. mail delivery, can you think of any additional ways mail is delivered that are not shown in the stamp above? What about stagecoach, horse-drawn buggy, bicycle, motorcycle, motor vehicles (such as trucks, vans, and cars), and—of course—delivery by foot?

As this example shows, topical collecting gives you a chance to explore in depth any subject that interests you. In fact, you'll find that the research you do preparing a good topical collection can also be used in school for writing a report. Likewise, you may find that a report you have written could become the basis for an interesting topical collection of stamps.