

This Day in History... December 15, 1956

First Student-Designed U.S. Stamp

On December 15, 1956, the US Post Office issued its first stamp designed by a student. The stamp was the result of a nationwide contest encouraging children to get involved in stamp design.

In 1955, the US Post Office launched a national stamp design contest for students. The Post Office was looking for stamps that promoted friendship between children around the world. Students in all the US states and territories were encouraged to participate.

The winning stamp design was created by high school senior Ronald Dias of Hawaii. Dias had a fascination with art from a young age. After seeing Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* when he was six, Dias knew he wanted to be an animator for Disney. By the time he was in high school, Dias was taking night classes at the Honolulu Academy of Arts and correspondence courses through the Famous Artists School of Connecticut.



The shining key in the design represents the "Key of Friendship," used to unlock the "doors to peace."

After submitting his design for the Children of the World stamp, Dias began writing letters to Walt Disney Studios, hoping to get his

foot in the door. After graduating from high school, he took a risk and moved to California, finding an apartment just blocks from Disney's studios. When he took in his portfolio, they said his artwork was "too Disney," and that they wanted to see what else he could do. Dias began working on new illustrations.

Then in the fall of 1956, the postmaster general finally announced the release date of his stamp. Dias got a call from Disney the next day and started work with the company on *Sleeping Beauty* the following week. Though he was let go during a mass-layoff the following year, he would have a 40-year association with the company, illustrating Golden Books and later TV shows, and more. He also worked for Hanna-Barbera, Warner Brothers, and more, with some of his projects including *Yogi Bear*, *the Flintstones*, *The Pink Panther*, *Duck Dodgers*, *Lord of the Rings*, *The Secret of Nimh*, and *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*.

It would be three decades before the USPS hosted another national contest for children to design stamps. In 1982, the USPS announced a contest inviting children to design stamps with subjects of their own choosing. The contest was held in conjunction with National Card and Letter Writing Week. More than 500,000 students participated, and the winning design came from Molly LaRue of Ohio.



Stamp issued in LaRue's hometown of Shaker Heights, Ohio.

She was a senior when she designed the stamp in 1982, but had moved onto college by the time the stamp was issued on October 1, 1984. LaRue's art teacher encouraged her to keep her design simple, to which she thought "what could be simpler than to draw it as a young child would," resulting in the stick figure family. The final stamp design only had very small changes from her original illustration.



LaBocceta said it took him 20 minutes to create this stamp art.

Another entrant in that contest, Danny LaBocceta, had his art featured on that year's Christmas stamp. In third grade at the time of the contest, he produced a crayon drawing of Santa Claus and then forgot about it until he was told he was one of the finalists.

In 1994, the USPS joined with McDonald's to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Earth Day by launching another stamp design contest, asking children to illustrate how to preserve, protect, and restore the environment. The USPS and McDonald's worked together because of their shared pride in their environmental efforts. More than 150,000 children submitted artwork, with winners receiving \$3,000 savings bonds and trips to Washington, DC, for the stamps' unveiling and issue. The stamps also included an interesting feature that stamp artists had long requested for themselves – each



Each stamp includes "Earth Day" in microtype.

student's name was included in the design, as well as their age.

In 2003, the USPS issued another stamp designed by a child, though not as a result of a national contest. The Stop Family Violence Semipostal was originally supposed to picture a young girl erasing an image of domestic violence. The girl that was to be the model for the stamp, six-year-old Monique Bias, made her own drawing of domestic violence during a break, and the art director decided that the powerful image should appear on the stamp instead.



This stamp raised \$3.1 million for women's shelters, counseling services, emergency food and clothing, and prevention programs.

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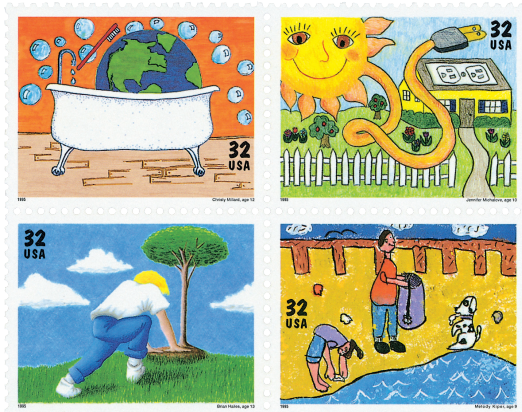
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