

# You Can Run a Youth Club



**What's the secret to running a terrific stamp club for young people?** In this article, Karen Weigt shares the keys to her success in this area. As Youth Coordinator for the Badger Stamp Club in Madison, Wisconsin, Mrs. Weigt started and maintains their junior club, the "Stamp Busters Bunch."

## Publicity



To announce the formation of our new stamp club for young people, a general flyer was distributed to all Madison-area libraries. Also, an official at the Madison Post Office arranged for the flyer to be posted on the bulletin boards at all area stations. Information also was sent to the local headquarters for Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, and 4-H Clubs. This was done in July, to allow the organizations time to include it in their beginning of the school year publicity.

Each of these sources brought in a few members for us. Another good source could be individual schools. Also, in the local newspaper, mention the youth club along with the regular adult stamp club meeting notice.

When our attendance regularly reached 12 to 15 youngsters per meeting, I chose to hold off on further publicity. Being a fledgling club, I wanted to get my own feet wet before the group became very large. Also, the youth themselves began to bring in their friends and parents. Word of mouth is still the best publicity!

## Regular Communication

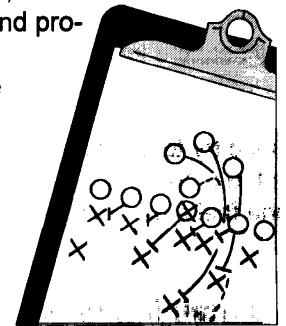
Kids love to receive mail -- especially covers with colorful stamps, stickers, or labels on them. A monthly meeting flyer serves this purpose. It also reminds them that the club is still around and tells them what to expect at the next meeting.



## Advance Preparation

Do your homework before the meeting, as thoroughly as if you were to speak to an adult group. Study the membership list in an attempt to memorize names. Clip the handouts together and label them. Complete your visuals. Lecture notes can be written on 3 x 5" cards. In putting together stamp mixtures, I have found that youngsters are more apt to go through several small containers of mixtures rather than one or two large boxes of stamps. It could be that cigar- or shoebox-sized mixtures are not quite so overwhelming. This also provides opportunity to rotate material.

The night before the meeting, pack a large box with all these items, including name tags, sign-in sheet, cash box, door-prize registration, supplies for the meeting and program, etc. Our club meets on a Saturday afternoon, as we have found this to be more convenient for the children than an evening meeting.



## Structure and Organization

While I don't expect our juniors to be organized, I believe they respect the fact that I am. Most parents also appreciate this effort; therefore, every attempt is made to stick to the schedule. If we are to begin at 2 p.m. and end at 3 p.m., parents know they won't have to wait in the parking lot for half an hour before their child is ready to leave the meeting.

Assure the parents that their child will be supervised by a responsible adult at all times, and follow through. Yes, in a way it is a babysitting job, but I believe parents have the right to feel at ease about dropping their child off for such an activity.

I try to spend at least one hour before the meeting setting up. All tables and chairs are moved to their proper location and materials are laid out -- then I am prepared to give my undivided attention to the first child to arrive.

## Room Set-Up

The meeting room should reflect the fact that this is a stamp collecting club. Colorful posters can be hung on the walls and several small activity centers set up. In our room, two tables hold stacks of free literature; two tables are for the mixtures and buy/sell/trade area; two tables are pushed together for our actual meeting and to provide a place for youngsters to deposit their extra albums and briefcases; one table holds philatelic supplies -- even if they are not used that day, they are on display for reference purposes. At the back of the room, two more tables provide a place for parents and adult helpers to sit and observe. The wall closest to our meeting tables is used to display any visuals used for the program.

## Individual Attention

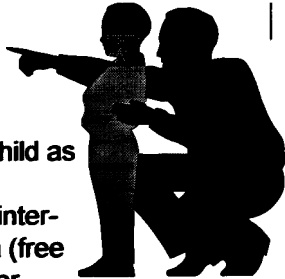
Throughout the meeting, every attempt is made to give each child as much individual attention as possible. If a child appears uninterested in the buy/sell/trade area (free time), he or she is led to another activity area until something catches his or her fancy. If this fails, I invite the child to assist me in some small task, such as checking to make sure everyone has signed in or folding up the door-prize entry slips in some special manner. Hopefully, this extra boost of attention will help the loner type of child to feel more comfortable about joining in with the other members.

I also try to mention as many names as possible in the monthly flyer -- another effort to make each one feel a part of the group.

## Maintaining Interest

The meeting hour is broken up into brief segments. Beginning with buy/sell/trade time, we go into a short business meeting, introduce newcomers, and answer questions about individual collections. Next is our guest collector, who talks about his or her specialty collection. This is followed by a program on a basic technique of collecting with many visuals. We conclude with a related hands-on project. In this manner, things move right along with little chance for boredom.

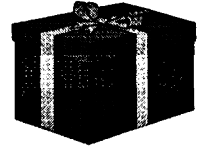
True, it is difficult to relate any in-depth study or technique in short periods of time, but I firmly believe (and keep reminding myself) that most young philatelists are rapid learners, and their brains are not yet as cluttered as those of the adult collectors.



Naturally, all individual questions are answered, but in general, the youth are presented with a challenge and expected to respond to it. I have seen some youngsters turned off by a stamp club with a "spoon-feeding" atmosphere; at the other extreme, some are turned off due to intimidation. It can be a delicate balance!

## Freebies

In addition to the door prize, each youngster leaves the meeting with at least two other items to add to his or her collection. Usually, one of these items comes from our "collector of the month," who is an adult club member who comes in to speak for no longer than 10 minutes on what he or she collects and why. They almost always have enough examples of the related subject to share with the youth. Other handouts are in the form of either prizes won during a game or the materials used during their hands-on project.



## Visuals and Hands-On Participation

A picture is worth a thousand words. To compensate for the lack of lecture time, much effort is put into developing good, effective visuals and demonstrations. For example, stamp cards and games can be used to learn about identifying foreign stamps. For our watermark study, we used a replica of a printing roll; the impressions were rolled into modeling clay. To become familiar with auctions, each youngster was given three lots to thoroughly describe on paper.

This hands-on activity often requires extra helpers, but here is where the children really learn. It also provides the opportunity for adults to be "hooked" into working with juniors. I've had to cry for assistance only a few times before finding an ample supply of willing helpers. Most adult collectors who become involved at a junior meeting find the experience so exhilarating and gratifying that they volunteer to come back again and again. Such tremendous enthusiasm is hard to resist!

## Incentives

A reward is given for completing a hands-on activity, and usually the item relates to the particular program for the day. For instance, after identifying the watermarks on the stamps in their individual packets, the youth were allowed to take them home for their collections. They also carried home the auction lots they labored so hard to describe on paper. Sometimes they simply are allowed to help themselves to the grab bag. We never send a youngster home without a reward.



Also, our adult helpers are coached to not expect perfection. Remember: This is not the school classroom.

## THE IDEA IS TO HAVE FUN!

*(Based on a July 1987 article in the APS Chapter Activities Committee Newsletter)*