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Postal Museum Launches Owney the Dog Curriculum

The Smithsonian’s National Postal Museum has announced the development and release of new curriculum and supporting materials based on the museum’s beloved “Owney the Dog.” The announcement took place at the recent Smithsonian Institution’s annual Teachers’ Night held this year at the National Museum of the American Indian with more than 4,000 teachers in attendance. The 60-page full-color curriculum guide features four different units that use the story of Owney the Dog to meet reading, writing, math, social studies, science and art standards. The lessons are designed to provide inspiring and meaningful interdisciplinary experiences in classrooms from kindergarten through third grade.

Owney was a scruffy mutt who became a regular fixture at the Albany, N.Y., post office in 1888. He loved the mail and began to ride with the mailbags on Railway Post Office train cars across the state and then the country. In 1895, Owney even made an around-the-world trip, traveling with mailbags on trains and steamships to Asia and across Europe. The RPO clerks adopted Owney as their unofficial mascot, marking his travels by placing medals and tags from his stops on his collar. He has been preserved and is on display at the National Postal Museum in Washington, D.C.

The curriculum guide features four themed interdisciplinary units on mapping, autobiography, jobs and primary sources. Targeted towards second grade learning standards, these lessons combine to illustrate the life and legacy of Owney the Postal Dog. The curriculum is developed in tandem with Owney-themed technology tools, including an e-book and an augmented reality postage stamp. Also accompanying the curriculum are worksheets, rubrics and companion lessons for students with special education needs.

“Owney stands iconic at the Postal Museum because he is such an engaging entry point to U.S. history” said K. Allison Wickens, director of education at the museum. “In this curriculum, we linked his adventurous story to a myriad of elementary school topics to better serve teachers in the areas of

social studies, reading, math, writing, science and the arts. Many teachers have already discovered his powerful presence in their classrooms and with their guidance, we are confident these new lessons will find a place in many more.”

“Kids connect with Owney because dogs are still around nowadays, whereas other aspects of history have changed and advanced over the years—they ‘get’ him,” said Alexandra Roosenburg, learning and technology coordinator for the Primary Campus/Washington International School. “Having a mascot like Owney for the students to interact and identify with when learning about U.S. history and geography makes learning more fun, and thereby worth their while!”

A special online microsite has been created for the Owney curriculum (www.npm.si.edu/owneycurriculum) and resides on the museum’s main website. The site features a downloadable curriculum guide for teachers, which includes units on maps, jobs, tags and stories. Worksheets, rubrics and other resources are also available on the site. The museum makes other teacher resources available on the museum’s recently redesigned website for educators at www.npm.si.edu/educators.

The National Postal Museum is devoted to presenting the colorful and engaging history of the nation’s mail service and showcasing one of the largest and most comprehensive collections of stamps and philatelic material in the world. It is located at 2 Massachusetts Avenue N.E., Washington, D.C., across from Union Station. The museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. (closed Dec. 25). For more information about the Smithsonian, please call (202) 633-1000 or visit the museum website at www.postalmuseum.si.edu.

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