
Creative Correspondence with Courtney Cerruti

Chapter 1 - Creative Correspondence

Overview

(playful music) - The first time I realized that mail could be fun was probably when I was about eight. I met a friend at summer camp and we continued our friendship through the mail by sending postcards back and forth. And this is a tradition I've carried on into adulthood. I love sending and receiving fun mail. Hi, I'm Courtney, I'm an artist, and author, and an avid postal correspondent. In this class, I'm gonna share some of my favorite materials and techniques for making really interesting mail. I'll talk about envelope sizes and postage requirements. I'll show you some interesting ways to create envelopes on your own, as well as make your postcards nice and arty. I'll talk about my favorite pens, and mark-making tools, and a whole lot of other things because I just love this topic and I feel like I can't stop.

Materials

- You can create mail out of almost anything. I've rounded up some basic supplies that I use often to go through with you. I like using Strathmore writing paper to compose letters if I'm gonna send a long letter instead of a postcard. You can get this with lines on it or without. These are blank. You can also use a nice quality printer paper, like this Hammermill digital copy paper. It's really smooth and fun to write on. There are so many choices for envelopes. I like to pick things up at stationary stores, estate sales, or just your standard stationery shop. So I've got a variety here. We'll talk a lot about postage stamps. Here are some of my favorites by a local artist Ruth Asawa. I'll show you how to make your own lettering guide using a manila folder, cutting mat, an X-Acto, and a ruler. We'll talk about postcards, both store-bought and making your own using cardstock. For making fun graphic envelopes, we'll use paint markers. These are Permapaque. I often make my own postcards using craft paint and a scraper or spreader. If you like to work on black envelopes, you can use metallic pens or white pens like these Gelly Rolls. I'll be showing you how to work with wax and wax seals. Of course, washi tape is always your friend for any kind of creative correspondence. And we could talk about pens for five days straight. I've rounded up some of my favorites here that we'll talk through. I'll demo how to use rubber stamps to create postcards and envelopes. We'll even use some stickers. Almost anything can be used in making fun and creative mail.

Postcards

- Postcards are the kind of mail I send most often. I usually keep a stack in my bag, and then when I'm waiting for a friend, getting coffee, or for my food to come at a restaurant, I'll just pull out a postcard, write a quick note, and then pop it in the mail when I pass a mailbox. It's really that easy. I love this image. This is, I don't know if it's really, but roughly 10,000 postcards that Marimekko designer, Katsuji Wakisaka, sent over his lifetime to his wife. I think it was roughly a postcard a day over 30 years. And I keep this as a reminder at what a little action every day can really build up to, I find it so inspiring. It's good to know what is a postcard. So I have this little guide that'll be in your PDF about the minimum and size and thickness that the USPS requires for a postcard. So the minimum mailing size is 3 1/2 by 5 inches. The largest for a postcard rate is 4 1/4 by 6 inches. And then you have your minimum and maximum thicknesses here, which are small fractions of an inch. There's actually a special stamp and rate for postcards, and a lot of people don't know this. You can

go to your local post office and ask for a postcard stamp. So this is the maximum and minimum sizes for a postcard rate. So our maximum is 4 1/4 by 6 inches. You can certainly send something larger as a postcard, but you'll have to use a regular first class letter stamp. If you're sending a postcard to anybody in an other country, like I have this one to my friend, Alicia, you'll have to just use your international stamp, which is its own standard postage rate. This is a larger postcard, so it had to be sent at a first class rate, and my friend Molly made this, and you can see it's a bit of collage, plus some painting. You can find postcards in lots of different places, museums, bookstores, stationary shops, even places that you might not expect. This was from a home goods shop in New York, so a smaller sized postcard, but still within the limits. A lot of art projects or museums will also have free postcards you can pick up. These ones are from a local museum and they are really fun and have these cool printed graphics on the back. You can also make your own post cards. This is some of my original art that I used an online site to create my own postcard. Often, brands and clothing shops will have postcards that might have a little blurb about them, but then you can send those in the mail, but you can also make your own postcards from scratch. I recommend using something like card stock or something sturdy, you can use a cereal box if you want. I like to use just regular card stock, these happen to be flat cards from Paper Source. This is an A6 size, which is pretty close to a 4 by 6. And if you take a little bit of craft paint, I'm gonna show you a couple ways to make an easy postcard. Lay out your paints in a row, whatever colors you're using is fine, you can have more than this if you like. And then with a library card, a bowl scraper, or some kind of flexible, rigid, flexible and rigid device, you're gonna just pick up some of the paint. So you can see that some are thin, and this one's a little thick, that's okay. This is not precious. Let's start with just, let's do a rainbow. So we're gonna just press, and sort of swirl in our shape. So our yellow probably could be touching a little bit more. You can kinda guide your paint like that. Try to line this up again to create our rainbow. So I'm just pressing and dragging the paint and it's a really thin amount of paint I'm adding here. Okay, easy peasy, post card one. Let's add another color, just for fun. I love this for a vermilion red color. We'll just squeeze out a little bit at the end of our line of paint blobs. You could clean this off, but you don't have to. Just shimmy your card or squeegee into the new line of paint, and let's just do a stripe. I am holding down this card, because I don't want it to shift too much. I could probably use a little bit more paint on there. And you're gonna get some color mixing, which is actually what I love about this technique. So you get this cool, strata earth look, in neon, however. You can also do something larger. So I have a larger, flexible rib, if you were thinking about a ceramics tool. You can find this kinda stuff at any art supply store. Let's add some more colors, since this is larger. Put this peach color, maybe this ochre color. I like these muddy tones next to these vibrant tones. They sort of clash, and that's what makes them work and vibrate. All right, we'll clean that up with a baby wipe. We use a much larger rib here. And you can also, if you're working with something bigger, if you wanted to use this as an art technique, you could make these blobs right on your canvas or on your postcard. But I find that that can waste a lot of paint, so I often just put it right on my wax paper or my palette. I'm just gonna draw this down. And you can also angle it closer to you, closer to the paper, if you're not getting all your paint off. Let's try one more, where I actually put the paint directly on the card, just so you can see what that looks like. So a little blob, you don't need a big blob, because you're really scraping a small amount of paint. I'm just gonna put them all on a row. If your squeegeeing device is not the full width of your card, you can also do them in sections. You can wipe off the paint scraper. You can pick that up and make more postcards with what's left over. And I'm just gonna do an arc here. I've still got some on my rib or paint scraper, let's go the opposite direction. Gently wipe away that extra, so it matches. There.

You'll wanna set those aside and let them dry before you write on them. I also wanna show you how to turn a found postcard, like a vintage postcard, into a new art piece, by adding a rubber stamp image. This idea comes from "Rubber Stamping" by Stephen Fowler. I've done a lot of collaging on found postcards, but I've never created my own stamp to stamp in. And I love this idea of these ghost postcards, where he's taken these found interior churches in this case, and then created this spooky ghost figure, I thought that was so fun. We're gonna do our own version using found postcards. I pick these up anywhere I see them, could be thrift stores, estate sales, antique shops, you can get them for a couple for a dollar, and then just some graphic rubber stamps. You can carve your own, these ones happen to be from the Tampographe Sardon in Paris, I just love these images. They come in these little boxes, because they don't have the image on the back. You'll also want some kind of ink that's gonna work on a coated surface, like a found postcard or a photograph, so something that works on a glossy surface. That could be a rubber stamp pad that works on many surfaces or on metal. I like using the Yellow Owl Workshop inks, but you can also use something like StaZon. So let's see. Let's do, I think maybe we could do this big bug in the sky on the beach. Depending on which is your dominant hand, you can do this either way, but the best way to ink up a rubber stamp is to do lots of little pats instead of pressing really hard, because that's how you get irregular lines. You just wanna make sure that your rubber stamp looks glossy and that means you've got ink everywhere. And then some postcards can be sort of slick or slippery, that's why we're using a multi-surface ink. So just be careful when you press down, you don't slide around. It's one firm press. And you could have multiples, you can also use a technique called masking, where maybe these bugs are coming off the horizon, so I just have a scratch postcard here where I'm gonna cover up where I don't want the stamp to be, and press again. Oop! So this is pretty thick, so let's actually eek this down a little bit. The thickness of the stamp is causing that gap in the image. Press firmly. It's pretty effective. You can do one more here. Re-ink your stamp every time you use it. And maybe this one's at an angle, or slightly more out. Firm pressure, since I'm using that card. There we go. We've got this weird, creepy invasion of mosquitoes or whatever these are. I feel like I want more in here so it feels like a swarm. And here, you just need scratch papers, you're going off the edge. So that one, I moved a little and it's a bit blurry, but that's okay. This is way more fun now that it has this image than it was to begin with. That's one interpretation. Could also do a donkey in the living room setting, 'cause that seems a little unusual. In the other case, I was patting this way, you can pat this way, so you're patting the ink pad directly onto the stamp. But same thing, lots of little pats until you have good coverage. Yeah, everything looks pretty glossy there. Use scratch paper if you're gonna go off the edge. Now this postcard, it's probably hard to tell, but it has a lot of texture on it, we'll see you how this stamp works. I'm gonna press a little bit harder to try to get a clearer image. Anything with texture is gonna result in a more grainy image. Yeah, it's quite a bit of texture there. But you can also use this as a guide, so I could go back in with my Sharpie and make the donkey a little more obvious in this interior. Instead, I can use the stamp as a guide for drawing. If you're working on found photos or found postcards to make new art out of, you are going to have to do some troubleshooting, so this is a good way to do it. Like I said, this is just a Sharpie so it'll be permanent. Now there's a donkey in the formal sitting room. This is another example where I had a black and white postcard, which means the black ink would not be that impactful, so I used a pink ink and embossed it, which means I put a little bit of this embossing powder and heated it up and it creates a textural, permanent surface, and you get this big, pink octopus coming out of the lake with swans. For writing the contents of your postcard, just like any letter, it could be about your daily life, thoughts that are on your mind at the time, something you wanna share with a friend. I

also like to pull things out of books I'm reading or quotes. I have this book called, "Japanese Death Poems", which sounds very morbid, but it's actually really beautiful. There are lots of poems and haikus. Here's one I really like. "Reality is flower-like. Cold clouds sinking through the dusk." So that might be something I could easily add to a postcard, and then pop in the mail for a friend.

Letters and envelopes

- In the postal hierarchy after postcards you have first class letters. And a letter is defined by the USPS as something minimum in size of three and a half by six inches, maximum of six and one eighth by 11 and a half inches. So that's like your first class letter rate. And there are lots of envelopes that fall into that size. And one of my favorite handy dandy guides for this is actually something that Paper Source puts out for free. On the front of this handout is all of their colors that they have in their paper stock. And then on the back is this great reference chart. At the top you have the name of the size and this is standard for all US stationery companies. So if you were to go anywhere to look for an A2 envelope that would be a standard size. This one starts with a #1 baby which is an enclosure card. The card that fits inside is a business size card in most places. And this one's the one that can be a little bit non-standard. This is not a mailable size. So this is something that you might put on a gift that you're gonna drop off, or you know tucked inside a bouquet of flowers, but it's not something that you're gonna mail. The smallest mailable size is three and a half by five. And a 4-Bar is closest to that size. Here's the envelope, a folded card, a flat card. And then Paper Source has some other shaped cards that other stationery companies might not have. But I wanted to show you what this looked like. This is a patterned envelope in a 4-Bar size and a flat card. The flat card on its own is not quite the five inches so this is not mailable but when it's in its envelope it is a mailable size. So that's your smallest mailable size. Then the next size up you have is an A2. Here's the envelope and here's the flat card. And if we look at our sheet, the envelope we know is four and three eighths inch by five and three quarters inch. So these are all regular first class postage rate stamps for the US. A6 his is gonna be the thing closest to a four by six. So if you were gonna throw a four by six printed photo into something it would be an A6 envelope loop. The flat card is four and a half by six and a quarter. The next size up is an A7. So the flat card is an actual five by seven. And then the envelope's a little larger, five and a quarter by seven and a quarter. And then an A9. What fits inside is half of an eight and a half by 11. So that as a flat card would be five and a half by eight and a half or a piece of eight and a half by 11 paper folded in half fits inside in A9. I don't use this size that often. I mostly use my A6 and my A7 size. There are also square cards and envelopes. These are a little less standard amongst stationers but anything square because it has no orientation, right, because all of the sides are the same, it needs and requires extra postage. And so currently right now I think the extra stamp required is 17 cents. So be aware of that if you're purchasing and sending a square card or envelope. There's also what's called the number 10, and this is the same as a business envelope, but it just looks so much more fancy because the opening is on the end as opposed to just a standard business envelope. This one closes with this little figure eight twine and tab. You can also fold an eight and a half by 11 into thirds and put that into a business envelope. And then you'll see on the Paper Source guide there's also something called a presentation and this is something you put a certificate in. You probably wouldn't mail it because it would be large and floppy and probably get damaged in the mail. If we look at our USPS guide here there's also the large envelope size which a presentation would fit into. And this tells you the minimum and maximum that are required for larger envelopes. I don't send these as much. If I am gonna do something that large and I want it to be well protected, I usually drop something into a

flat rate envelope which is made out of card stock. One thing we haven't addressed as much is the thickness of whatever you're gonna mail. There are requirements for USPS as to how thick things can be or how rigid. Things that are very rigid, like if you were to send a piece of plastic addressed in the mail, that would require an extra postage stamp because again it can't run through the machine for canceling, it has to be hand-cancelled. I bought this little device on Etsy, it's 3D printed and it actually has these thickness measurements where you can slide your finished card through the mail slot here, the pretend mail slot, just to make sure that it'll fit and doesn't require any extra surcharge. This could come in handy if you're gonna be posting a lot of things that have puffy contents, maybe some handmade elements that you're putting into an envelope, or if you're gonna be using a wax seal which we'll talk about a little bit later. Anything thicker than what fits through this guide or what is outlined on this chart means that you're gonna need to add a surcharge for hand-canceling. Another kind of envelope if you will, are these plastic or clear sleeves. You can purchase these new, but you can also use the packaging that your envelopes come in or a card that you purchase comes in. And they actually make really fun envelopes. Here's a piece of mail that a friend sent me all the way from France actually. And it traveled really well across those countries. And it's in the little clear mailer with a label for my name and address, and then some stamps. And then here's what I'm planning on sending. This is like a little folded piece of paper I just wrote a note on. I threw some confetti in here and then I put a label on it so I will address it and then send it off to my friend. So it's fun to get something like this in the mail 'cause it's a little bit more unexpected. And it's a nice way to up-cycle or recycle some of those little plastic mailers that come around individual greeting cards or other packaging that you might have laying around the house already.

Addressing and postage

- When it comes to addressing an envelope, there are a few tricks that you can use to make it look very pristine, although, this is very traditional, so I'm gonna show you some alternatives to this as well. Now, you can use just a ruler to help you address things with a straight line. You can also purchase these really fun letter writing envelope guides. I found this set of three on Etsy. I also love this one by Lettermate, which comes in this beautiful letter press little sleeve. I've included in the PDF this guide that I made myself where I just sort of put in the sizing that I thought would be good for the address and the return address. If you are dropping things off with the post office, the return address is required. Instead of having to cut this out and trace it onto something heavier to make a template, I like to use this file folder for this. I'm gonna show you this little trick using a push pin. At every corner or intersection of two lines, you're going to press down with your push pin to create a little hole into the paper and then into the file folder. And that's where you're going to cut your lines. So I'm pressing hard so that I can get through both layers and I also have a cutting mat underneath me while I'm pressing and I will keep it there while I'm cutting everything with my X-ACTO. And I drew this out on a five by seven, which is for an A7 envelope. Those are all good. And then I do wanna do the outside 'cause I'll cut it down to size. You can use it for smaller envelopes as well. Carefully remove to make sure you have all your holes punched. They look pretty good. Yup. I think I have everything there. You can draw your lines in, but you don't have to. You can just go straight to cutting. So, it's whatever is more comfortable for you. I'm gonna start with the outer edge so I'm not working with this massive file holder. So using my straight edge, I'm lining up my two outermost holes. And it makes sense to cut just beyond the hole. It's great to have a sharp blade. And you'll wanna do multiple drags of your blade as opposed to like stabbing it in and dragging it really hard. It's better to do cuts on top of one another. So one, two. Actually, let's do it this way. So I'm cutting

my outer line, lining up these little holes. And just carefully. Oops. I didn't get it there. So that's my return address area, this is my main address area. So line up my holes. And this one, you wanna be a little more precise on because it's your actual openings for where you're gonna write. And then I like to do the two parallel lines and then come back and do the sides, the short sides. So just go slowly. And you can use that to pull it up. So that would be your first opening. And then I've got one here that I finished. And I actually put some packing tape here because these little ribs are thinner. and if this gets handled a lot, they can be more vulnerable. So you would just put packing tape, take your X-ACTO and cut these little areas out. So let's use this. I'm using my Pilot P-500 extra fine, which is my current favorite pen. And I wanna show you sort of the way that these are meant to be used and actually the way I like to use them, which is a bit different. And you can choose to do this please deliver to in your first opening, which is I think something that I've been saying more recently, I think that's a nice way to indicate who it's going to, but you can also do things where you put the name of the recipient here, the address, the city and state, and then you have just the zip code on the final line and you can do some interesting lettering there if you want to. Let's just do please deliver to. And then, normally, you would write here, but you can see that the spacing is quite large and I think that it's a little bit too much gap. So what I like to do is, instead, cover the line of text I just wrote with the in between space, and you can see, even with a guide, my handwriting is very slanted, which is just how I write. So I'm lining it up on the sides. I'm not worried about where these are falling, really. And then I'm gonna write the recipient. And then I'm gonna use that line to cover up the majority of what I just wrote. And then the address. And then shimmy this up so this spacing line is covering what I just wrote. And so that's much more close together, which I actually prefer. It just is totally up to you. And you don't even have to use a guide if you feel confident in the way that you write. I normally don't use one, but I think these are super fun to have if you find them useful. And there are a lot of varieties, either the kind that you make yourself or one that you can purchase from a small shop. Do remember that you are required to put your return address if you are dropping this off in the mail. Postcards don't require it, so that's fine, but anything that's in a letter or envelope needs it, and often, people do it here in the upper-left corner. I actually prefer to do it on what's called the lapel of the envelope, so that's what this little flap is called. Usually, just do my first initial and my last name. And then an address. This one is not where I live. And then, if I'm running out of room here, I'll just drop this down like that. So I prefer it that way. You can, of course, do it here. And I'll share some fun, more arty envelope treatments of the way to address and do return address later. You have lots of options for the postage stamp and this is where things can get really fun. So this is just a very small amount of my stamp collection. And I wanna go through these with you. It's really important to check with your local post office or online at USPS because the postal rates are changing often. That's great if you have forever stamps because a forever stamp will last for forever regardless of the current rate and a lot of stamps today are forever stamps. So these Ruth Asawa ones, they say on them forever USA, and that means that I can put this on a letter rate envelope in 50 years and it'll be enough postage because it's a forever stamp. Sort of like an investment in your future creative correspondence. I also have these global stamps. So these are for anything outside of the United States. They are also forever stamps. They are the same for both postcard and letters, so you don't get a discount on sending a postcard to a friend in another country. It's just something to keep in mind. Here's another forever stamp. I love these. They come out every Lunar New Year and they have these cool metallic elements. So, I've bought them for the last two years. There's so many amazing stamps. I love this one also because it has this thank you lettering. They're great for thank you cards and it's also metallic. These are all forever stamps, so these will be good for forever

or for the lifetime of the post office. The postcard rate stamps, you should definitely check to make sure that you have the right postcard rate 'cause those do also increase. When you go to the post office or if you're purchasing stamps online, you can also buy smaller denominations, like a one cent, a two cent, a three cent. So if you have outdated postcard stamps or outdated letter rate stamps that are not forever stamps, you can always add an extra stamp to make up that additional postage. I bought these because they had rabbits on them. They're so cute. They're actually for an additional ounce, so I can use this if my letter happens to be heavier than the maximum weight, but you can also use these if you know their denomination to make up a normal postage rate. So you could put several of them on an envelope just because you like the way they look, which is something I often do. And then another really fun thing to do is to use vintage postage stamps. You can purchase these in stamp stores if you can find one near you, you can purchase them online on places like Etsy. What you're looking for is something that's not canceled, right? So it's uncanceled, it's not already on an envelope and gone through the mail, and it also has to be for the US. There are a lot of vintage or antique stamps out there that are from other countries. Those are really fun for art making, for collage, but you cannot use them to post mail in this country. You'll see that these rates are much lower than the current rate and that just means I'm gonna need to use multiple ones so that I can make up the current postage rate. So check with your post office. I will often put several stamps onto an envelope and then just to be sure, I'll take it in the post office and just make sure that I've got all my math right and I have enough stamps on there. I really like using the vintage ones because you can get some interesting graphics. You can fill up a large portion of the envelope with these kinds of cool stamps and using fun vintage posted stamps is an easy solution to creating an artful envelope.

Artful envelopes

- There are lots of ways to dress up your envelope. I'm gonna show you some of my favorite ways. Let's start with the easiest. I've got just a white envelope here and some very quick drying water-based markers. They're actually paint pens. They're called Permapaque. There is like a fat chisel tip and then a skinny bullet point. And I like using them. You're just kinda scribbling some color, and they're fun to overlap. Don't forget about your lapel. I've got some scratch paper here. I like things that go off the page or off the envelope because it looks like it was printed that way. Let's add some red in there. So you could do some squiggles. Yeah, just scribble. Who doesn't like to scribble? Then you can address that. It's light enough that you can still see. If you use a nice black marker, you can still see the address and the recipient. So very easy to do. You can also use stickers and rubber stamps. I like rubber stamps that are more abstract or can be combined with other motifs. This is a set by Yellow Owl Workshop that has a lot of great shapes and two little ink pads. You can actually even use an ink pad. Let me grab that. This is in our color palette. You can use an ink pad itself to make marks. So that's something else you can do. Yeah, let's just pull some of these out and play with them. I think the idea for this set is that you can make all your own cards with these common greetings, but I love all these shapes. I've got a larger neon pink pad here. Woo, I love it. Again, working on scratch paper so that I can go right off the edge. You'll wanna clean your stamps with a baby wipe or a wet paper towel if you switch colors or when you're done using your stamp, so keep that in mind. Let's do some layering. Woo! These two are Yellow Owl ink pads as well, and I think this one's Hero Arts, yeah. Oh, that one didn't get cleaned very well. (laughs) So might get some residual pink on there, and let's do one more motif. We could do rainbows. Let's do the rainbow shape for this arch. Looks like this gray is gonna be sort of light. Let's just try it. Oh

yeah, that's really pretty. Can play with where you place something like this. And this is something you can do if you're just sitting, listening to a podcast or your favorite album, or watching a television show. You can just get out a bunch of blank envelopes and then stamp them so they're ready to go when you are ready to send something in the mail. All right, let's close those up. Clean your stamps when you're done. Another thing you can do is use your postage stamps as the starter for an image. So you could do a rabbit. Let me move him over here. Now I know I'm gonna need to add more postage because he is not a full first-class letter stamp. But let's say, gonna make them sit here, and then there's a little rabbit tunnel. Let's color that in. This is gonna be my address. Maybe there are little plants or maybe there are some carrots. You can use markers or other things to help you draw your image. And I would probably add some green around here. I don't have a green marker right now but maybe some plants and then of course add the addressee here. So your stamps can be part of the image or inspire the image that you decide to draw on your envelope. If you're working on a dark envelope, like a dark gray, a metallic envelope, a black envelope like this one, you can use a label and that can be really nice but you can also use a metallic pen or a white pen to both decorate and address your envelope. So something that's really easy to do is just little stars. You can also do little moons. These are the gelly roll metallic pens. You can do little dots coming out. I really love wonky stars. So just drawing them, they always wind up looking a little funny, and I think they're very charming that way 'cause they're disproportionate. You're essentially just doodling using a metallic marker. You can, like I said, also use the white marker. And they make the white marker actually in a lot of different thicknesses for the tip, so you can get both really fine detail and bolder lines depending on which thickness you choose. And I just left a little spot for where we're gonna address it, so. Please deliver to, and now this is ready for its address. I wanted to share some other envelopes. I often will save postage when it comes to me that I like. So I saved this envelope because I loved all the stamps on it. This is obviously vintage. It's from the International Philatelic Society, and philatelic means the interest in postage stamps. These are envelopes that somebody made and sent to me using found paper, ledger paper. They're stitched, so they're like a business envelope, and then just using double-sided tape or a glue stick to keep them closed. And this, you'd probably wanna use a label so the writing wasn't confusing for the postal worker. And just some different ideas for lettering. Here is just my first name sort of drawn out over the width of my address. This is an old address. Here using a brush marker, and then some interesting treatment of the type there. Just messy paint splotch. This is so old. This is from when I was in high school, but this has a Dr. Seuss postage stamp and then some stickers, and then these kinda like water blobs. I like this little moon and the stars. The front of this wasn't that interesting but the back, this is Rebecca Green, the artist. She drew this little figure on the back. This is from a friend that I met in my study abroad in college, and it just is an interesting treatment of the handwriting and the type. Again, I of course love the postage stamps. This one, the lettering is not particularly special, but I saved it because of the stamps. This one I love because how often do you get fighting sumo wrestlers on your mail? And then one of my favorite things to do is to draw blind contours. This isn't a blind contour, but it has a similar line quality and I love just that these are overlapping cups. So I saved that. Creative correspondence has inspired many artists and you can find a handful of books, both art books and fiction or nonfiction books that include some really interesting treatments of letters and envelopes, and I wanted to share some with you. This is a book called "Postal Seance" by Henrik Drescher. Had this book for probably 15 years, maybe longer actually. And I don't know, I don't have a copy of "The Jolly Postman," but that was a book from my childhood that was all letters and postcards to fairy book characters. This is the adult version. These are to famous people

from this artist Henrik Drescher, and these kind of wild collages and letters that open and postcards. It's a lot of inspiring imagery, colors. Slightly more subversive topics than "The Jolly Postman." To Mr. William Blake. And these are fictional because the people that he's writing to are no longer alive, but they're sort of like heroes in their fields. Use of a lot of found labels and collage and then using the postage stamp but then drawing on top of it. I love this book. Here's another series. This is by Nick Bantock. I think this came out when I was in high school and it was unlike anything I had ever seen. The first one was "Griffin and Sabine," and it's a friendship and sort of love story told through letters. It's a bit of a mystery also. So you can see the front of the postcard, the back of the postcard in this fictional tale. And then some of the pages include letters as well. And you can find this book at the library in some cases. And so if you're feeling stuck or you need a little bit of inspiration or just to see how other artists treat the postcard shape or the envelope, these are always fun to reference. There's a whole series of these. I think "Sabine's Notebook," was the second, and it's more of the same postcards and letters between these two fictional characters. And then the last one I wanna show you is this book called "Floating Worlds, the Letters of Edward Gorey & Peter Neumeyer." And Edward Gorey is one of my favorite illustrators, artists. He does these sort of gothic figures. I remember my first encounter with his work was the intro to the mystery on channel nine on PBS mystery show that I used to watch with my dad. But he's written hundreds of books. Let me find, so you can see his envelopes are all very clever use of image and text combined, and that's why I thought this book was interesting just looking at the envelopes. So one of his little characters running. Some figures standing in a row with a black label and white type. So some use of collage. This is sort of the classic Edward Gorey style of illustration. This is cute. Character's scarf is flowing in the wind and creates a field for the text to go. It could be hair, it could be water, it could be land, it could be a boat and a sail. You have a lot of opportunities for playing with the image. We'll end on that one there. These are sort of the best and brightest examples of an artful envelope, but if you're not feeling inspired to draw, you can use something as easy as stickers and washi tape to make your envelope super special and colorful.

Wax seals

- One of the ways that you can finish off a letter is with a wax seal, and this is a very traditional way to seal a letter. There are many options now, and I've got some of them to share with you here. The first thing you wanna select is the wax seal stamp itself, and they're made out of metal and have an image or a letter engraved into them. You can find lots of variations online. I feel like a lot of stationary stores, there aren't many places that sell these in person or have a lot of options in person. You can often find like a small kit at a craft store, or sometimes an art supply store. But online, there are lots and lots of sellers. This one is a monogram. So you have a variety of styles, shapes, artworks to select. And then of course, there's the wax. Traditionally, you'd find a stick like this. Sometimes it has a candle wick at the end and you would just light the stick itself, let it melt, and the wax would drip on to pool on your envelope. This kind, without a wick, you would hold over a taper candle, you rotate it while it melts, and then you'd press it down to make your wax. We're gonna use a different version, where there are these wax pellets, or little bits of wax that we're gonna put into this holder and spoon, metal spoon, that has a little tealight burning underneath it. So that's been lit and it's hot. Before I put any wax in there, I wanna show you a few of these options. And Etsy, or a place like that can be your friend. This is wax that somebody hand makes actually and then cuts into these gemstones. So Etsy it can be your friend for finding alternative wax options. These are like little chocolate bars of wax, and you can just break them up, or cut them with

scissors or a knife, and then put them into the middle spoon that's cooking, or will cook your wax down. So usually just one or two. And like I said, this is already warm, because I lit the tealight already. These are little translucent wax pellets. We can try those too in a minute. And if you've never done this before, I would recommend doing some practice before you move onto your envelope. So here's just a card. We're gonna let the wax melt. You can use like a little toothpick to move that around if you need to. Definitely be careful, this is not for kids, 'cause there's like a open flame below this and this gets very hot because it's metal. You can also find wax that you put, it's not actual wax, but you put into a glue gun. I've not used that one as much. I like this more traditional method. It's almost all melted. Okay. Just gonna pour that and then pick up one of our seals and press down as evenly as possible. You can see it's a little asymmetrical because part of the wax is squished out there, but not on the side. And I usually just let it sit there for a few seconds until it's set. Maybe another few seconds. It's easier to release when it's cool. Yeah. And then you get your impression. I think I used it with a dark wax previously, so you can see a little bit of residue there. Let's add another two pellets while this is melting, and I can show you what some of these other ones look like. If you do choose to seal your envelope with a wax seal, you'll need to pay extra postage for hand canceling, because if this runs through the machine, it'll break. When I say machine, I mean the automatic postal sorting machine. Here's more. I usually, I think I wind up using about 1 1/2 of these little pellets, because so much coats the inside. Let's do, I haven't tried this one yet. This is is long, so actually, if I were gonna do something that was long like that, I would try to make my wax more similar to the shape of my seal. So this is not ideal, but let's see if we can get this one to work. It's gonna be a real blob. I got a lot of wax. Okay, and I can feel how it or melted that is, so I'm gonna really let that sit for a second. If you wanna switch colors, be careful because this is hot. I would set this aside and let it cool, and then once it's cool, you can just wipe out the wax with a baby wipe. Any residue wax that you get onto this little kind of burning stand, wait till everything cools. This is copper, so it's also very hot, and then you can wipe it off with a baby wipe too. Let's see. I think that needs like another few seconds. We'll let this cool. Yeah. So that's a lot of wax for that one, but it makes a very pretty impression. Tulip. And you can see, even with that fine detail, the wax doesn't stick. You can't just use candle wax, you have to make sure that you're using a sealing wax that's designed for this. While we're waiting for that spoon to cool, why don't we try this guy? So ideally, I would do is a taper candle, but I have this little tealight here. Now, the one thing you have to be careful of is if you really hold this over the flame, you will burn your wax and that sort of sediment, or char, will wind up in the pool of wax as you make your stamp seal. I mean, as a beginner, or someone who's just trying this for the first time, it's sort of inevitable that you'll get some of that char in there, and I think it's fine. But you can also practice until you've got it. Sort of hold it more like an inch away from your flame. And you just wanna rotate it. You don't want the wax to drip like that. Okay, that might be good. Oh, just on one side I'm smushing it down like a tube lipstick or something. I'm gonna rotate it to get that last little wax string off. You can set that aside on some wax paper, and because it's not a ton of wax, we can use one of our smaller stamps here. And I think it might have dried already. Let's just see. Oh, that worked. It was starting to harden, but I still was able to get an impression. And all of these are acceptable. You know, if you were to receive something in the mail that had a wax seal on it, it would feel pretty special. You wouldn't be nitpicking on its, whoop, symmetry. Definitely avoid that. If it's dripping like that, I would just drip off onto a scratch piece of paper. Here, we can actually use this. You can see some of that little char is in there. Let's use our tiniest seal. That's not ideal. You wanna avoid getting the wax right into the candle. It is what it is, but you just wanna make sure that, wax can actually catch

on fire, so you just wanna be safe with everything. All right, let's see if this guy's ready. Yeah. It's a little eye. There's so many more options than from when I was like a teenager and first started using this. I think there was just basically monograms and that was all you could get, maybe a few motifs. I think this is cool enough. Just gonna take a baby wipe. Just peeling out this extra wax. You can put this in the freezer and it would come out a little bit easier. I don't recommend wiping it out when it's piping hot, because you could burn yourself. And you don't have to clean it out if you're gonna stay with the same color, but I wanna move on to the clear one. All right. I would normally put this in the freezer to get those last little remnants out. But let me just show you what the clear looks like. It's gonna marble a little bit with this blue, and we're just gonna be okay with that. This clear sealing wax, I'm not really sure what it's made out of. I mean, it might be some kind of wax. This is something that's kind of newer, or I have just recently found out about. Sometimes it's called mermaid's tears, and you can get it in like more amber tones, or more translucent like this versus this kind of amber color. Let's throw one of those in there too. It's gonna melt with our blue a little bit, 'cause I didn't clean that out fully. Let's bring our sample card back. And we have to let it heat up because the spoon was sort of cold because I was trying to get the blue wax out. All right, it's starting to melt. You wanna remember that this is designed for this, this little stand that I purchased online with the tealight. If your wax or the resin for these clear drops is starting to smoke, it is too hot, at could catch on fire. And probably also, you shouldn't be breathing that smoke, so you need to change your setup. I really recommend using only what it is sanctioned for this process. It's interesting, it looks like the clear ones melt faster than the amber ones. Okay, let's see if that's ready to pour. This looks like honey when it's melted and you can see we've got a little bit of the blue marbling in there. You can definitely mix your waxes and play with the marbling effect. I think it looks really cool. It just sometimes might obscure the image of your impression from the stamp if it's really detailed and you have some really contrasty swirls happening, but this is very subtle, so I think we'll be fine. Let's do this fern. Let's see how that looks. Just let it sit there for a second. All right. You can see it's sort of like a, it's almost like a translucent yellowy color. A little bit of the blue marbled, and then just very delicately that fern on top. This is very like chunky and old school, antique-looking. These ones are more contemporary. This one for sure, with the little eye. What I liked the best were the blue ones. We're gonna melt these and we'll use this to seal our envelope. I like also making these little practice cards because I think they're fun, and then you can see, you can try out different wax combinations with your seals. There's also a lot of metallic that you can play with in these waxes. I think I wanna do the C. This is the only one we haven't done yet. It's our largest one, so I'm gonna use more pellets. It's looking pretty melted. You would probably want to fully seal your envelope and then do the wax as the final touch. I'm gonna use a lot of this, because we're gonna be using our largest seal. So this is our C. I just wanna make sure it's oriented the right way around. And you can feel that it's like really slippery, and that's fine. You're not making an impression until you leave it, you're just kind of moving the wax around. So you can use that to your advantage to try to get it as symmetrical, if that's what you're looking for. We're gonna let that sit there until it's ready. And I would say the contemporary waxes, they're much more bendable than they used to be. Originally, the wax was much more like a candle wax and it would be very fragile and brittle, but you still want to have this hand canceled so that it stays on your letter when you go to post it, and so you'll need to do the additional postage for that. There we go. C. We've talked a lot about how to dress up an envelope or how to make fun art to post into the mail, but we haven't talked too much about our prompts, and that's very personal. You know, we talked about maybe using poetry, or just writing what you're doing in the moment to send to a friend. But I found this

book called "Write Back Soon" that I found that was really helpful for postcard-sized prompts. And I think there are something like 100 different prompts in here that are pretty fun, especially if you're gonna do this for a sustainable amount of time with like a PenPal, or you wanna get a kid involved in doing it, it's always nice to have something to like nudge you in the right direction. The one thing I wanted to leave you with that will set you up for success is creating a little box of all the things that you need to keep your creative correspondence going. This little wooden box is like my writing kit, my postcard correspondence Pandora's Box of wonders. I splurge on this little handmade box. It's made by some woodworkers in Istanbul. And inside are all my little treasures and treats that get me inspired and excited to write mail. I have some specialty stationary sets. I love this artist, Aiko Fukawa, it's a Japanese illustrator, a card or two, in case I need to send a card to a friend. I like Japanese stationary stores because they have interesting envelopes, so you'll find things like that. Writing paper pads, there are lots of European and Japanese stationers who make these. Postcards, addresses of friends that I write often, bigger envelopes, more postcards. I love postcards. Like I said, I just love paper. So I thought these were really pretty. I can't mail these on their own, but I could write something on them and then slip them into an envelope. More Aiko Fukawa. I just love her little figures and characters. Washi tape. This is more specialty washi tape to put on an envelope. It's thicker and has like a scene on it. So easy to dress up, or even just to create a postcard using washi tape. Put that in there. Another washi tape. Stickers, I love stickers. So you can put those on an envelope. More stationary postcards. And then a lot of stamps. My forever stamps. Non-machinable surcharge, so this is the stamp you would use. if you had something very rigid, very puffy, or with a wax seal or a square envelope. I always buy extra stamps if I really like them. So I think these flowers are really pretty. Postcard stamps. Then my coveted Andrew Wyeth stamps, I only have one left. Just tuck those in. And then a selection of writing pens and pencils that I like. This is constantly changing because my favorite pen is always changing. And you just have to tuck everything back in, just so. And there's something about keeping a kit that, one, makes you ready, but two, creates a little bit of ceremony around writing your correspondence. And I like the ritual that you can create around writing a postcard or a piece of mail. It's a nice way to stay in touch with friends, both near and far. Just because someone lives down the block from you does not mean you can't send them a postcard. In fact, you should send them a postcard, because when you become an adult, your mailbox is filled with bills and things that are not fun to open, and how delightful to receive something that was made by a friend that was lettered and has a special wax seal. That is priceless.