

THE MONEY

3 GET SMART

Ever hear of stamps worth more than a half million dollars? Try one of the most famous printing mistakes in U.S. Postal Service history: The 1918 inverted Curtiss Jenny (nicknamed Flying Jenny, Scott No. C3a.) A block of 4 stamps with the airplane printed upside down would now sell for that amount! (original price: 96 cents.)

An 1847 George Washington 10-cent stamp in mint condition is worth about \$26,000.

TIP: The more centered the image on a stamp, the better.

TIP: The color of the stamp should be bright.

WHAT MAKES A STAMP VALUABLE?

An uncommon stamp is more valuable than an ordinary one. The stamp may be uncommon because it was printed with an error, or because it is old and there are not many left.

A stamp's condition affects its value. Usually, a new stamp that has never been used and is in "mint" condition is more valuable than the same stamp that has been used. Keep your stamps in a condition as close to "mint" as possible.

The Color. The color of the stamp should be bright. Fading can be caused by sunlight, dirt, pollution, chemicals, and finger grime.

The Cancellation. For a used stamp, the lighter the cancellation, the better. The cancellation mark should not blot or cover the stamp design (unless you choose to collect bull's-eye cancels).

Centering. This term refers to the stamp design relative to its surrounding borders (sometimes called margins) and perforated edges. On a perfectly centered stamp, the margins should be equal at least on the sides; ideally top and bottom margins are equal or there is more space in the bottom of the stamp margin. Stamps may be downgraded for poor design centering, but if perforation holes cut into a stamp's design, it is considered a defect with a definite impact on value.

The Paper. The stamp should not be torn or damaged. All perforations should be complete. The stamp should not be creased or wrinkled.

The Gum. The gum, or dry adhesive on the back of the stamp, should be as perfect as possible. Hinges mark the back of the stamp. Light hinging is good; heavy hinging (too much licking and sticking) is bad.

DID YOU KNOW?

Occasionally, an old, used stamp on an envelope with a special cancellation is worth more than the same stamp unused.