

# Mail Call Educator Guide

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The Sonoma County Museum



*Mail Call is a National Postal Museum exhibition organized and circulated by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. The Smithsonian Community Grant program funded by MetLife Foundation is a proud sponsor of these public programs.*



## **Mail Call Educator Guide**

**For Preschool, Kindergarten, 1<sup>st</sup> grade-** Please email [cconway@sonomacountymuseum.org](mailto:cconway@sonomacountymuseum.org)

**Elementary Grades 2-5: Pages 3-10**

**Middle and High School Grades 6-12-: Pages 11-15**

**High-School Only:** <http://postalmuseum.si.edu/educators/we.pdf>

**The Sonoma County Museum gratefully acknowledges the Smithsonian National Postal Museum as a resource for the educational plans included below. The focus of the activities is the era of World War II and V-Mail (Victory Mail) delivered during this time period; but may be adjusted to utilize the varieties of mail and letters used within a time period of your choosing.**

### **Introduction to Classroom Materials about V-Mail**

These activities provide a creative way to teach writing skills - letter writing for elementary and middle school - and about World War II (WWII) as well as writing for high school students. In conjunction with the Sonoma County Museum's *Mail Call* exhibition along with textbooks and other resources already in use in the classroom, these materials will help students understand aspects of patriotism during wartime, and the significance of personal correspondence by focusing on the efforts made by civilians on the home front during the war. Students will likely find learning about V-Mail an interesting way to engage in writing and social studies lessons.

### **Background Information for Teachers**

Nothing in America went unchanged by WWII. Those that remained at home found themselves taking on the responsibilities of civilians in wartime at every turn of their daily lives. Decisions that were once only personal – what to buy, what to eat, how to spend free time – now had global consequences. Even writing a letter and choosing a particular method for its delivery was promoted as an act of patriotism.

V-Mail, or Victory mail, was a valuable tool for the military during WWII. The process, which originated in England, involved the microfilming of specially designed letter sheets. Instead of using valuable cargo space to ship whole letters overseas, microfilmed copies were sent in their stead and then enlarged at an overseas destination before being delivered to military personnel.

Thus, by using V-Mail or Victory mail civilians on the home front could assist in the potentially successful outcomes (Victory) of the war.

V-Mail ensured that thousands of tons of shipping space could be reserved for war materials. The 37 mail bags required to carry 150,000 ordinary, one-page letters could be replaced by a single mail sack of V-Mail microfilm with the same number of letters. The weight was reduced dramatically from 2,575 pounds to a mere 45.

The system of microfilming letters was based on the use of special V-Mail letter-sheets, which were a combination of letter and envelope. The 8 1/2" by 11" letter-sheets were created to fold and seal into a distinctively identifiable envelope that conformed to the required size and shape for processing. The user wrote the message in the limited space provided (7 7/8" wide by 7 3/8" high), added the name and address of the recipient, folded the form, affixed postage, if necessary, and mailed the letter. V-Mail correspondence was then reduced to thumb-nail size on microfilm. The rolls of film were sent to prescribed destinations for developing at a receiving station near the addressee. Finally, individual facsimiles of the letter-sheets were reproduced about one-quarter the original size (4 1/2" x 5 1/2") and the miniature mail was then delivered to the addressee.

Writers using V-Mail were encouraged through marketing campaigns and promotions to send brief notes regarding daily life, if a writer used a typewriter, the V-Mail form could still only accommodate 400-700 words. Contents might include the new roles and responsibilities the war imposed on the lives of civilians living at home in particular the effects how the United States mobilized its economic and military resources, the impact of the industrial boom on employment especially of women and minorities, the effects of WWII on gender roles and the American family, and the war's impact on science, medicine, technology. V-Mail to and from soldiers often used pre-printed messages and cartoons with familiar and funny sentiments.



**Scroll down PDF to pages 4 and 5 for larger models and V-Mail forms for class activities**

**Classroom Activities: Elementary Grades 2-5:**

## Part I

### *Introductory Activity:*

- Distribute a copy of the V-Mail stationery to each student.
- Allow time for the students to examine the stationery.
- Engage students in discussion about what they think these sheets may have been used for.
- Allow students to try to fold the stationery according to the printed direction on the stationery.
- Next give a brief introduction to Victory Mail (as per Background Information provided at the beginning of these materials) and show them the illustration of the relative sizes of each stage of the V-Mail process (page 4).

### *Letters Today:*

Using a copy of the downloadable V-Mail stationery, (page 5 and 6) have students write and send a letter (100-300 words) to a US service person currently living overseas. Letters must be written legibly, in black ink. Letters must include details of daily life. (A folded sheet can be mailed at regular first class rates if it measures at least 3 1/2”w x 5”h and is sealed on two sides with tape or glue (no staples).. For information about contacting troops see:

[www.usps.com/supportingourtroops/otherways.htm](http://www.usps.com/supportingourtroops/otherways.htm) or  
[www.americasupportsyou.mil/AmericaSupportsYou/letters\\_messages.html](http://www.americasupportsyou.mil/AmericaSupportsYou/letters_messages.html)

Note: the Standards of Learning for which the suggested activities are aligned include National Standards for Language Arts and History.

National Council for Teachers of English

- NL-ENG.K-12.4 – Students adjust their use of spoken, written and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- NL-ENG.K-12.5 – Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

Relative sizes of each step in the V-Mail process. Left to right: pre-printed letter sheet, 16 mm microfilm, photographic reprint of original letter.

Print the complete address in plain letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided on the right. Use typewriter, dark ink, or dark pencil. Faint or small writing is not suitable for photographing.

TO: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

FROM: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

(CENSOR'S STAMP) SEE INSTRUCTION NO. 2 (Sender's complete address above)

HOLD TOP AND BOTTOM IN, THEN HOLD IN CENTER AND SEAL  
 NO OTHER ENVELOPE SHOULD BE USED

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP? **REPLY BY V-MAIL** HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP?

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT PERMIT NO. 18

Rev. Floyd Leach  
 56 Irving Church  
 Post Road  
 Northvale, Conn. N.J.

Postmark: Oct 27 1944

Somewhere in France

Dear Sir  
 Am okay, and hope you and Mrs. Leach  
 are the same. seeing a little action over here  
 I have been looking for the church letter  
 as I only receive one since I left the  
 States, I hope you all have a nice thank  
 giving, and also wish you all a Merry Xmas  
 and a happy New Year, and we all hope  
 that the New Year will bring peace to the  
 world. Everything is going along okay, as  
 far as I hope it is the same with all  
 the boys from our town; Everything seems  
 to be well at home, according to Mom's  
 letters; I'll close now. Hoping to hear  
 from you. Bob. Leach

REPLY BY V-MAIL



Print the complete address in plain letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided on the right. Use typewriter, dark ink, or dark pencil. Faint or small writing is not suitable for photographing.



(CENSOR'S STAMP)

TO:

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SEE INSTRUCTION NO. 2

FROM

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(Sender's complete address above)

FOLD TOP AND BOTTOM IN, THEN FOLD IN CENTER AND SEAL  
NO OTHER ENVELOPE SHOULD BE USED

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE  
ADDRESS AT TOP?

REPLY BY  
**V...-MAIL**

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE  
ADDRESS AT TOP?

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT PERMIT NO. 38

FROM: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

SEE  
INSTRUCTION  
NO. 5

V...- MAIL

TO:

FOLD

HERE

FOLD

HERE

V-Mail service provides a most rapid means of communication. If addressed to a place where photographing service is not available the original letter will be dispatched by the most expeditious means.

#### INSTRUCTIONS

- (1) Write the entire message plainly on the other side within marginal lines.
- (2) Print the name and address in the two spaces provided. Addresses of members of the Armed Forces should show full name, complete military or naval address, including grade or rank, serial number, unit to which assigned or attached and army post office in care of the appropriate postmaster or appropriate fleet post office.
- (3) Fold, seal, and deposit in any post office letter drop or street letter box.
- (4) Enclosures must not be placed in this envelope.
- (5) V-Mail letters may be sent free of postage by members of the Armed Forces. When sent by others postage must be prepaid at domestic rates (3c ordinary mail, 6c if domestic air mail service is desired when mailed in the U. S.)

POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT FORM NO. 16

## **Classroom Activities: Elementary Grades 2-5:**

### **Part II**

#### *Visual Communication:*

Using the same introduction provided in Part I, proceed with the activity as follows:

- Present the students with example of preprinted, cartoon versions of V-Mail stationery. (Larger versions are found on the following pages 8,9 and 10.)



- Explain that information and ideas can be conveyed using drawing or other visual methods.
- Have the students use the designated space for messages to make a drawing for the recipient to tell them about a person, place, thing or activity that they most enjoy.

NOTE: In depth discussion about V-Mail and its importance during WWII may not be appropriate for elementary school students. However, presenting an abbreviated description about the unique mailing process can be used as an introduction to letter writing activities. Students will most likely find writing on the specialized V-Mail stationery fun and useful motivation for the lesson.

Likewise, a discussion about WWII or any U.S. conflict is not applicable to the Standards of Learning for the elementary level. Therefore, a simple discussion about the meaning of patriotism and how different means of support to U.S. military service people can qualify as a patriotic act would be sufficient.



Preprinted, Cartoon Version of V-Mail Stationery

Print the complete address in plain letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided on the right. Use typewriter, dark ink, or dark pencil. Faint or small writing is not suitable for photographing.

**TO:** J. H. Spiegelberg, Sic  
C.B. M.W. 1610  
Fleet Post Office  
San Francisco Cal

**FROM:** FRANK J. ZELTMANN  
A. S. N. 1232380  
10th BOMB SQUADRON M  
A. P. O.  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF.  
1945

(CENSOR'S STAMP) SEE INSTRUCTION No. 2 (Sender's complete address above)

FROM THE ARCTIC  
TO THE TROPICS  
WHEREVER I MAY  
ROAM

I SEND THIS CARD TO TELL YOU  
I'M THINKING OF YOU BACK HOME!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!

HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP? **REPLY BY V-MAIL** HAVE YOU FILLED IN COMPLETE ADDRESS AT TOP? POST OFFICE DEPT. PERMIT NO. 93

E. D. 5115



Preprinted, Cartoon Version of V-Mail Stationery


Use typewriter, dark ink, or dark pencil. Faint or small writing is not suitable for photographing.

TO:

FROM

Naval Construction  
c/o Fleet Post Office  
San Francisco, Calif.

(CENSOR'S STAMP)



**LEARNIN' A TRADE!**

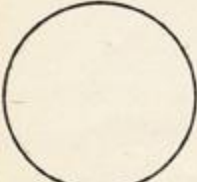
A. J. ANDERSEN  
4<sup>TH</sup> NCB

**SEABEES**

H. A. B. PRINT SHOP


Preprinted, Cartoon Version of V-Mail Stationery

Print the complete address in plain letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided on the right. Use typewriter, dark ink, or dark pencil. Faint or small writing is not suitable for photographing.

 (CENSOR'S STAMP)	TO: RUTH M. SPIEGELBERG	FROM: J. H. SPIEGELBERG, Y3c
	2007 DAVIDSON AVENUE	Naval ConstructionBMU 610
	BRONX	c/o Fleet Post Office
	NEW YORK CITY 53, NEW YORK	San Francisco, Calif.

(Sender's complete address above)

**A** THE COMFORTS OF HOME.



**YES!** WE HAVE RUNNING WATER!

J. ANDERSEN  
4TH N.C.B.

SEABEES



## Classroom Activities: Middle and High School Grades 6-12

### *Vocabulary:*

Distribute a single index card labeled with one of the following vocabulary words to each student. Have the students write their own definitions of the word they have been given. Collect the cards and sort them according to the word. Read and discuss the definitions generated by the students and then create a class definition of each. (Standard definitions from Webster's online dictionary have been provided for reference.)

**Civilian** - one not on active duty in the armed services or not on a police or firefighting force

**Citizenship** - membership in a community

**Civic Responsibility** – responsibilities related to citizenship, or community affairs

**Home front** - the sphere of civilian activity in war

**Patriotism** - love for or devotion to one's country

**Victory** – success in a struggle against difficulties or an obstacle

### *Introductory Activity:*

1) To ensure students have a foundation for understanding about life on the home front during World War II, read aloud to the class [\*Coming On Home Soon\*](#) by Jaqueline Woodson. This is a beautifully illustrated book and touching story about a little girl whose father is away fighting the war and whose mother has to move away to work in one of the factories supporting the war industry.

2) After reading *Coming On Home Soon* the teacher will stimulate and assess prior knowledge about WWII home front activities by using the K-W- L (What I **K**now, What I **W**ant to know, What I have **L**earned) strategy as follows:

Prompt: What were people on the home front doing to contribute to the war effort during WWII?

Step 1 - As a class, discuss what students already know about the subject. Write students' remarks on chart paper for later comparison with what has been learned in the final step.

Step 2 - On another piece of chart paper list all the students' questions about civilian support at home during the war.

Step 3 - Distribute a copy of [\*World War II on the Home Front: Civic Responsibility\*](#) to the students for independent investigation.

Step 4 - After students have had ample time to explore the curriculum guide, students should be gathered in small groups to share and compare what they have learned regarding the questions generated in Step 2. A designated recorder for the group writes down what the group has learned. One person from each group reports to class what they have learned and findings are recorded on



chart paper to be compared with their initial knowledge and questions.

Step 5 - After learning about some of the ways civilians helped the war effort; present the Background Information about V-Mail. As a class, consider how letter writing and the use of V-Mail in particular could be defined as an act of patriotism.

“The Post Office, War, and Navy Departments realize fully that frequent and rapid communication with parents, associates and other loved ones strengthens fortitude, enlivens patriotism, makes loneliness endurable, and inspires to even greater devotion in the men and women who are carrying on our fight far from home and friends. We know that the good effect of expeditious mail service on those of us at home is immeasurable”

(Annual Report to the Postmaster General, 1942.)



### *Historical “Role Play” Letters:*

#### Version 1:

Have the students imagine themselves as a young person living in the United States during WWII. Then, using the [type-able V-Mail form](#), students will write a letter to a WWII service person telling the service person about the economic impact of the wartime industrial boom on life on the home front – giving specific examples including the role of women and changes in the American family structure and advances in technology ([National Standards for History, grades 5-12](#)) The V-Mail process could be explained as one of the many new technological developments.

#### Version 2:

Using the activity described in Version 1, assign or have students choose a city in the US and a date between 1942 and 1945 and report in their letter, specifically, about what is happening in their assigned or chosen city. Research could be done through the cities’ historical societies or [National Archives website for Teachers and students](#). [Ken Burns’s film and website](#) feature the nature of daily life in Mobile, AL; Sacramento, CA; Waterbury, CN; and Luverne, MN during WWII.

Version 3:

Using the activity described in Version 1, have the students read one of the following books and write a letter from the perspective of one of the characters in the book.

Buchac, Joseph. *Code Talkers: A Novel about the Navajo Marines of World War Two*. New York: Dial Books. 2005.

After being taught in a boarding school run by whites that Navajo is a useless language, Ned Begay is recruited by the Marines to become a Code Talker, sending urgent messages during WWII in his native tongue. (Fiction) Grades 6-9

Elliott, Laura. *Under a War-Torn Sky*. New York: Hyperion Paperbacks. 2001.

Henry Forester is a 19 year old American pilot shot down over occupied France during WWII. Follow his dangerous journey through the channels of the French Resistance across war torn Europe and learn about life in the United States as he reflects the lives of his family and friends at home. (Fiction) Grades 8-12

Giff, Patricia R. *Lily's Crossing*. New York: Yearling Books. 1997.

Set during the summer of 1944 in a coastal town on the Atlantic Ocean, Lily's best friend Margaret moves with her family to a wartime factory town, Lily befriends Albert, a Hungarian refugee who has lost most of his family in the war in Europe. Lily and Albert share secrets and lies - some that could be dangerous. (Fiction) Grades 6-12

Giff, Patricia R. *Willow Run*. New York: Random House Children's Books. 2007

Meggie Dillon's life has been turned upside down by World War II. Meggie's father has announced that they must help the war effort and move to Willow Run, Michigan, where he'll work nights in a factory building planes that will help fight the enemy in Europe. (Fiction) Grades 6 - 9

Green, Bette. *The Summer of My German Soldier*. New York: Dial Press. 1973.

A 12 year old Jewish girl in Arkansas shelters an escaped German POW. (Fiction) Grades 6-9

Hahn, Mary D. *Stepping on the Cracks*. New York: Clarion Books. 1991.

In 1944, while her brother is fighting in WWII, 11 year old Margaret gets a new view of the class bully when she finds that he's hiding his brother, an Army deserter. (Fiction) Grades 5-8

Klages, Ellen. *The Green Glass Sea*. New York: Viking Juvenile. 2006.

In 1943, 11 year old Dewey is being sent to join her father in New Mexico where she learns of his top secret project. (Fiction) Grades 6-9

Mazer, Harry. *A Boy No More*. New York: Simon & Schuster Publishers. 2006.

After his father is killed in the attack on Pearl Harbor, Adam, his mother, and sister are evacuated from Hawaii to California, where he must deal with his feelings about the war, Japanese internment camps, his father, and his own identity (Fiction) Grades 6-9

Zindel, Paul. *The Gadget*. New York: Harper & Collins. 2001.

It is 1945 and Stephen has moved to the top-secret military base at Los Alamos, New Mexico, to join his father, a famous physicist, who is working on a project he is forbidden to discuss. Stephen is determined to find out the true nature of “the gadget.” (Fiction) Grades 6-9

### **Standards of Learning for Middle and High School Activities:**

National Standards ([National Council for Teachers of English](#))

- NL-ENG.K-12.4 – Students adjust their use of spoken, written and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- NL-ENG.K-12.5 – Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

### **Teachers’ Reference**

#### **Booklist:**

*Coming On Home Soon* by Jaqueline Woodson

*The Greatest Generation Speaks: Letters and Reflections* by Tom Brokaw

*Selected Chaff: The Wartime Columns of Al McIntosh, 1941-1945* by Al McIntosh

*Since You Went Away: World War II Letters from American Women on the Home Front* edited by Judy Barrett Litoff and David C. Smith

*War Letters: Extraordinary Correspondence from American Wars* by Andrew Carroll

#### **Useful Links:**

*We Were There: Letters From the Battle Front* [Teacher’s Guide \(National Postal Museum\)](#)  
(Appropriate for high school students.)

[The Legacy Project](#)

[The War, a film by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick \(PBS\)](#)

[American Experience: War Letters \(PBS\)](#)

[Veteran’s History Project \(The Library of Congress\)](#)

[Other Ways to Support Our Troops \(United States Postal Service\)](#)

[List of Agencies for the Support of U.S. Troops \(U.S. Department of Defense\)](#)

[Military Postal Service Agency on how mail currently moves to US armed forces](#)

*On the Homefront: America During World War I and World War II*  
[\(The Library of Congress\)](#)

*Price of Freedom* [Online Exhibit](#) and [Teacher's Manual](#)  
(National Museum of American History)