

Welcome back. Welcome to 2021. I have a feeling that this is going to be a good year. Although, I said that at the start of 2020 as well, so maybe you shouldn't trust¹ what I say. Ha ha. Did you have a good vacation? I hope you were able to rest and refresh, ready for the new year. Did you get to go skiing? I took my daughter up a few times. She is still using the snowplow², but she is getting so fast. I have trouble keeping up with her now. I'm sure that she will be better than me after a few more trips. I have a feeling that I am raising an Olympic skier.

Something Interesting (Stamps)

1. Paid postage³ was invented in 1680 in England. Before then, people would pay for letters when they arrived. However, many people couldn't or didn't pay. The letters and parcels were stamped with an ink stamp⁴. This is where the word "stamp" comes from.
2. The first stick on stamp was invented in 1840. It was called the Penny Black.
3. The number of stamps sold worldwide peaked⁵ in about 2000 and has been declining⁶ ever since. The most obvious reason is that people email and message instead of writing letters.
4. The most expensive single stamp in the world is the British Guiana 1cent magenta. It was made in 1856 and was last sold in 2014 for \$9,480,000.

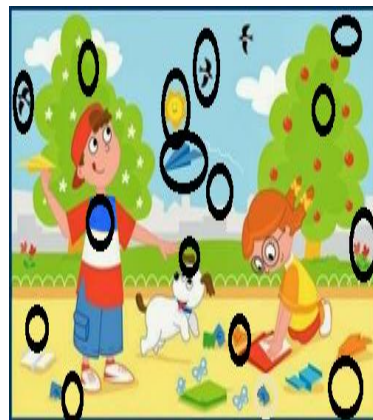


There is only one copy left in the world.



Can you find the differences? There are 10 this week. Some are hard.

Last week's answer

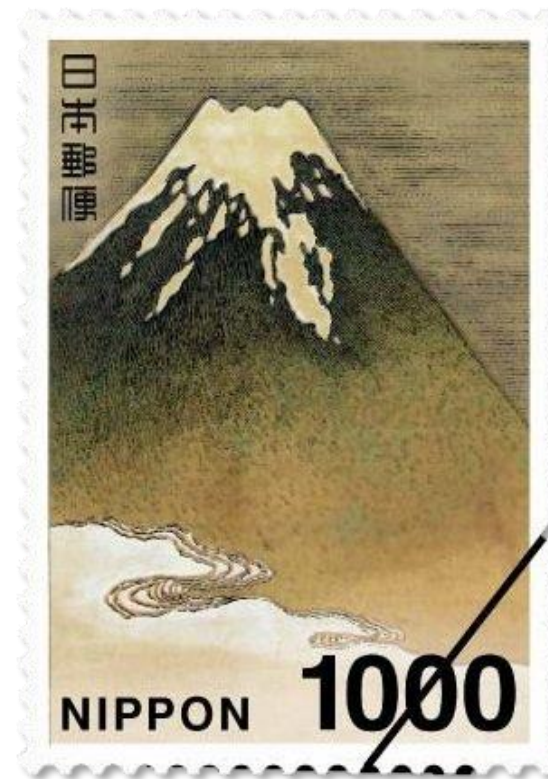


Stamp Stealer

This story comes from the end of last year, but I thought it was great and wanted to use it. The branch manager⁷ at Naka ward in Sakai City, Osaka, was arrested and sacked⁸ for stealing 130 million yen in stamps. He stole 1,000 yen stamps and posted them to a shop that buys and sells things like stamps, coupons or tickets. They don't pay full price for the things they buy, but he probably earned over 100 million yen. He carried on for about a year.



He sent 17 parcels of stamps to be sold before he was caught. He was caught when the Post Office audited⁹ his branch in July last year. They discovered the missing stamps and called the police. The manager, Mr. Kawasaki, had thought he would never be caught because he was stealing stamps that had already been sold. When a company posts a large number of letters, they buy the stamps, but the stamps are not stuck to the letter. The Post Office just uses an ink stamp to say that they have paid. The real stamps are then destroyed¹⁰. I don't know why they need to do this. It seems like a waste of time and money, but they do. Anyway, Mr. Kawasaki realized that he could take the stamps before they were destroyed and sell them. He managed to get away with it for a long time, before the Post Office discovered that the stamps hadn't been destroyed. I wonder how they found out. This only goes to show that crime doesn't pay in the end. And that the Post Office should rethink its methods.



1.Trust 信頼 2.Snowplow ポーゲン 3.Postage 通信費 4.Stamp 印 5.Peak 一番多くなった
6.Decline 減る 7.Branch manager 支店長 8.Sacked 首になった 9.Audit 会計検査
10.Destroy 使えないように崩す



World Records

Do you like bees? I don't mind them, but I'd rather not touch them. That's an attitude¹ I'm going to have to overcome² if I want to break this world record. Ruan Liangmin of China spent 53 minutes covered in 62.1kg of bees. An average bee weighs 0.1g, so that means he was covered in 621,000 bees! That's crazy! To get that many bees to land on him, he had to trap the queen bee somewhere on his body. The queen bee release pheromones³ and all the other bees follow them. He said that he wasn't stung during the experience. He says that as long as you don't move and you stay calm, the bees won't sting you. I'm still not going to do it.



Take care of your body. It is the only place you have to live.

Something interesting

This is something I learned from Joe the other day. We write every day. In fact, I am writing (typing) right now and you are (I hope) reading the words that I am writing. So where did writing come from and where did the alphabet come from? Writing started independently⁴ in four different ancient civilizations⁵: Mesopotamia (roughly where Iraq is today), Egypt, China, and South America. Each civilization came up with its own system, but they all had the same start. So, who do you think came up with writing? Authors? Poets? Romantics? No, it was accountants⁶. The first writing systems were a way of keeping track of⁷ how many things the country had. The accountants used clay tablets⁸ and they used pictures to represent the things (animals, or wheat) and they used marks to show how many they had. And this was the beginning of writing.



The Greek alphabet

The idea of an alphabet started in Egypt. Egypt used hieroglyphs⁹, which are pictorial, like kanji. They are good, but you have to learn thousands. The Egyptians came up with a system of characters that could be used to write any word. This alphabet was taken up by different civilizations until the Greeks and then the Romans started to use it. They changed it to fit their language. To start with, the Romans only used CAPITAL LETTERS, but as they wrote in cursive¹⁰, these letters started to become the lowercase letters¹¹, which are faster to write. The alphabet went through more changes until the invention of printing in about 1450, which standardized¹² it.

1. Attitude 心がけ 2. Overcome 乗り越える 3. Pheromones フェロモン 4. Independently 単独で
5. Ancient civilization 古代文明 6. Accountant 会計士 7. Keep track of 記録する 8. Clay tablet 粘土板
9. Hieroglyph ヒエログリフ 10. Cursive 崩し書き 11. Lowercase letters 小文字 12. Standardize 同一にする