

MTA's new "Metro Manners" collectible trading cards are designed for kids with messages about bus and rail safety and consideration of others.



MTA Trading Cards Bear Safety, Manners Messages for Kids

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Aug. 14, 2003) Kids love trading cards – Pokemon, baseball cards, you name it – and now MTA is offering kids a new set of trading cards with messages about bus and rail safety and consideration for others.

Titled "Metro Manners," the innovative trading cards were conceived by Metro Art to appeal to youngsters from the elementary grades through middle school. Project Manager Alan Nakagawa shepherded the cards from conception through production.

The collectible cards, designed by local arts group "The Meat Collective," have original and whimsical cartoon characters, a simple card game and puzzle-matching features that should appeal to youngsters from the elementary grades through middle school.



Michael Lejeune of MTA Design Studio, left, and Alan Nakagawa of Metro Art play a game of War using the new "Metro Manners" trading cards that will be distributed to kids beginning later this month.

MTA's Community Relations Department will begin distributing the cards later this month to kids at approved community events, during school safety presentations and to youngsters who visit the "Metro Experience" mobile theater. The agency purchased a total of 150,000 foil-wrapped, five-card packs.

"The characters have a unique charm. It's a very creative way to appeal to youngsters while delivering important information about safety and desirable behavior," says Lynda Bybee, deputy executive officer, Community Relations. "We love having such wonderful material to share with the youngsters we meet through our safety program."

Appealing to kids

Metro Art's Nakagawa worked closely with MTA's Design Studio during development of the trading cards project. The effort involved lengthy discussions of effective ways to make messages about transit safety and good manners appeal to kids.

"At the time, my kids were very much into trading cards," says Nakagawa. "I thought it would be fun to do a trading card project. Everyone liked the idea."

MTA issued a national call for illustrators and graphic artists and received almost 100 entries. A review committee narrowed the list to five finalists and then selected The Meat Collective, located in LA's Chinatown, to create the trading cards.

Illustrator Robert Gooden and graphic artist Diana Aspillera created a cast of off-beat characters to demonstrate the safety and manners messages.

The team also developed a simple card game in which higher numbers trump lower numbers – except when two wild cards are played. Backgrounds in varying designs and a complete-the-picture feature provide other graphic elements kids can experiment with.

'Kids are really creative'

"We really don't know how kids are going to play with the cards," says Creative Services Manager Michael Lejeune, who worked with Nakagawa on the project. "But, kids are really creative and they can think of variations that are well beyond our feeble adult minds."

Characters appearing on the cards include the Blab Sisters, who talk to loudly on the train or bus; the Snacker, whose food and drinks make a mess; and Edgy Eddie, who creates a hazard by standing too close to the edges of sidewalk curbs and train platforms.

Messages include, "You must always have a ticket or pass;" "Keep your feet off a Metro seat;" "Other passengers don't want to hear your cellphone calls;" "Rushing to catch a bus or train isn't safe;" and "Writing, spraypainting or scratching trains, buses and stations makes them ugly. And it's against the law."

On the back of each card is an unnamed superhero of sorts with a wide smile on his face and a Metro logo emblazoned on his chest.

Who is that guy?

"We don't know. Meat Collective decided not to name him," says Nakagawa. "But, all the characters on the game side of the cards show what not to do on the Metro system. We thought we should have one character who was the 'Superman,' the good guy."

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