

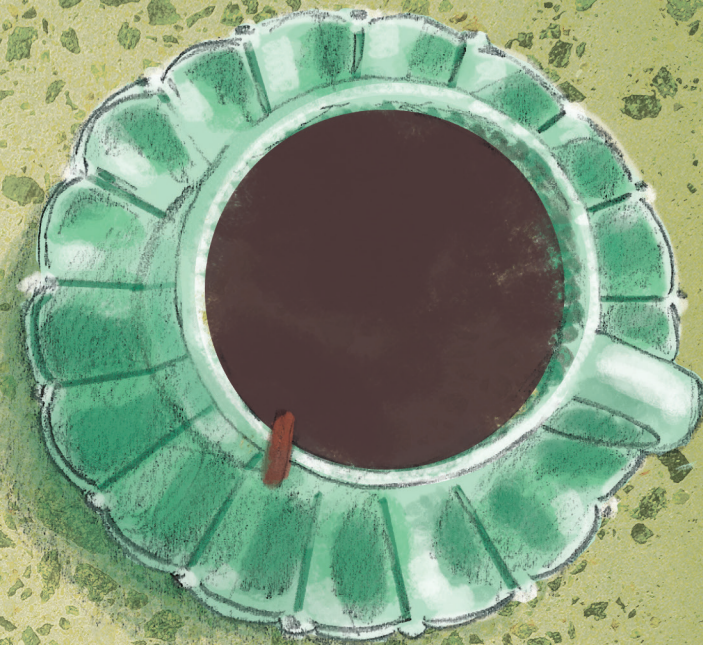
Hey, you got this!

Make Dr. appt.

Tell grandad he's great

Choose novel for book club

Message Claire



Power of the Post-it

It was half a century ago when the humble sticky note took the world by storm. Yet, despite the rise in digital communication, the sight of a cheery yellow square peeking from the corner of a book still has the power to lift spirits in ways unrealised by technology

No one could have foreseen the overnight success of the sticky note, not least its inventors, whose conception of the unassuming square, with its revolutionary adhesive strip, came about entirely by accident. When scientist Spencer Silver was working on different grades of adhesive for manufacturing company 3M, he discovered a light yet sticky adhesive that could be removed from surfaces without causing damage.

But it wasn't until years later, when fellow 3M scientist and chorister Arthur Fry found a use for the discovery – bookmarks for his hymn book – that the sticky note, under the eponymous Post-it brand, was born. According to the company's website, Arthur realised the note's potential at once, remarking that it was a 'whole new way to communicate', after trialling the notes among colleagues. Its iconic yellow colour was also something of a fluke, since it was the only paper available in the laboratory.

Little pieces of joy

Nowadays sticky notes come in all colours, shapes and sizes, but their true versatility lies in the imaginations of office workers, families and doodlers the world over. They inspire amusing anecdotes, impromptu creativity, encouraging words, mindful pauses and an appreciation of the little things. They are also tools at lovers' disposal – prompting romantic spontaneity, or capturing a rush of affection or a skipped heartbeat in the wake of an absent significant other.

US-based writer and creativity advocate Joni Sensel says leaving small notes on mirrors and in coat pockets kept the relationship with her partner sharp: 'We could discover them when parted by work or other commitments. As a romantic connection that erupted in the midst of mundane life, they were a reminder of priorities and what really mattered. Our love notes proved that we were thinking of each other and making the effort to show it. They constantly refreshed our love and gratitude for each other.' Joni further describes sticky notes as a low-intensity opening for those struggling to bring up an awkward topic or express how they feel.

That said, sticky notes can provide an insight into the darker side of the human psyche – a paper trail exposing naked truths and hidden resentments. Author and design lecturer at London's Central Saint Martins, Oonagh O'Hagan, knows all about that. A self-professed sticky-note enthusiast, Oonagh was inspired to explore their legacy after compiling the notes

she had collected over five years for a book series. She explains that the idea behind the first one, *I Lick my Cheese*, was triggered by a prolific note-writing flatmate: 'She wrote a few notes a day and seemed to be in a constant conflict with herself. Sometimes she would be upbeat and other times she would seem angry over something really small, like leaving a wooden spoon in a washing-up bowl. I got to know through notes that she wasn't happy. The sheer volume of them became a physical display of her inner dialogue.'

Oonagh's second instalment, *I Love You with Custard on Top*, named after one of the more 'memorable' notes she collected, explores the amorous side of sticky-note lore. 'Leaving notes can be really romantic and it's so much better when you have something tangible to keep rather than a message on your phone,' she says. 'A note takes that little bit more effort, and seeing the person's writing feels much more intimate. It's something they touched and did. Saying [I love you with custard on top] is kind of cute, but embarrassing. It's a statement that can only really exist as a note, so I liked the reveal. I think that's what my books were about – revealing how we interact.'

Of course, sticky notes have their practical uses, too, appearing as they do in their more regular guises as shopping and to-do lists, phone-call messages and, like their fabled inception, as bookmarks and margin-style notes.

Dutch artist Ingrid Vermeer had a practical yet more creative use for sticky notes – as an unlikely medium for her pint-sized portraits. In 2017, Ingrid vowed to doodle a portrait every day, for 100 days, to improve her drawing skills. After sticking to the task in hand, and surprising herself into the bargain, her '365 days of Post-it people' project was born.

She says: 'I didn't know if I would make 100 days, but I had so much fun, and after I got to 100, I kept going and did a whole year of drawing portraits every day. It was fun to experiment within the limits of the sticky note and the subject. It's my go-to when I want to draw a portrait quickly and when I want it to be easy. Sticky notes are small and cheap, so there's no pressure to make a good drawing – they're not as intimidating as canvas. Now, I'm happy to draw in my sketchbook and on paper again, and I'm trying to evolve to working a bit bigger.'

Other artists harness the power of sticky notes to create three-dimensional mosaics, or doodle collages capturing spontaneous bursts of creativity – like a patchwork of dreams

Get creative. Here are some fun and uplifting uses for sticky notes

For a hard day

If a colleague is facing a difficult day, tack an encouraging note to a mug with a teabag in it, so they know that someone cares.

For a child

If your child is feeling down, pop a note in their school bag to remind them of something to look forward to – an upcoming holiday or chips for tea.

For your love

Hide notes in pockets, lunch boxes or bags – they can be romantic, an in-joke or a funny or random thought.

For you

Note down moments or scenes that have made you smile and leave them around the house as happy reminders.

For friends and family

Exchange mini challenges – 'Make someone smile' or 'Learn a new word', for example. You can compare notes later.

adrift in the subconscious. Some projects, such as the Peckham Peace Wall, in south London, have utilised the raw, unscripted thoughts of strangers to create giant art installations. The Peace Wall evolved when, following riots in the area, people began leaving positive messages, tacked in sticky-note fashion, on the window of a Poundland shop. The emotional outpouring of love and respect for the community was preserved thanks to a painstaking project, where 4,000 original notes were digitally hand-traced and added to the installation in Peckham Square.

Freedom of expression

Similarly, Subway Therapy, a movement spearheaded by New York street artist Matthew Chavez, provides an anonymous platform to promote free speech and encourage communities to express ideas, worries and personal reflections in earnest. Matthew, who also goes by Levee, used sticky notes to evolve the project, which began when he invited people to sit down with him and share their worries in a New York subway. He explains: 'I'd only be able to talk to four to 10 people in a four-hour activation of Subway Therapy. Now, on average, around 3,000 people write on sticky notes in major transit stations over three days.'

'When people started filling up the subway stations in NYC with mosaics of human emotion, it turned into something novel, and important. That transformation, which really, I could never have imagined, is what made the project so successful. And what was written was so incredible. Words of encouragement, support and love made up almost 80 per cent of the sticky-note wall. While some of the messages were

touching, tragic and serious, the coloured notes softened the edge in many ways and allowed readers to absorb what would ordinarily be difficult or impossible to listen to.'

Today, Matthew invites people from around the world to send their messages to him digitally, after which they are written on a sticky note to become part of the project, without judgment, prejudice or expectancy. In that respect, it's the antithesis of certain social media platforms.

'People generally enjoy sharing a piece of themselves with others. It's cathartic and there aren't many physical venues for this type of interaction,' says Matthew.

Whatever they are used for, it's clear that sticky notes are, and always have been, here to stay. Whether it's an uplifting word of encouragement, a love note or a smiley face, the power of the sticky note remains undefeated in a world where digital communication increasingly dominates, and where social media and screens turn a precious few moments of being into 'unbeing'. While undoubtedly practical, and sometimes a deflating reminder of household chores or an unagreeable flatmate, these notes have the potential to draw out our innermost thoughts, and, like colourful punctuation, allow us to stay connected to those around us, bringing us back to the moment and to what – and who – matters most.

Words: Cat Thompson

For the sake of the planet, it's important to use and dispose of sticky notes responsibly. Information about recycling can be found at: post-it.com/3M/en_US/post-it/contact-us/FAQs/

ILLUSTRATIONS: KAREN DREYFUS

