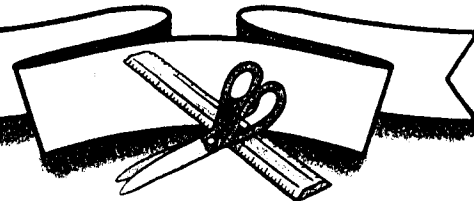


# Hands-On History Lab Activity 5



## Quill Pen and Ink

From the 1500s until the 1800s, most people wrote documents using quill pens, made from the large feathers of geese or swans. Try to make a quill pen and natural inks, and you can write and draw as our ancestors did.

### BACKGROUND

Beautiful handwriting was important in the 1800s. Letters were more than just a means of communication. They were an expression of special regard for the people who received them. The more detailed the handwriting the better. Children and adults often wrote in diaries called monitors. They recorded the weather or daily activities, but rarely revealed their thoughts and feelings. Ink was not always available so writers made it from such things as walnut shells or berries. Because these inks faded over time, original documents are often hard to find and read. Pens, too, were homemade.

#### CRANBERRY INK RECIPE

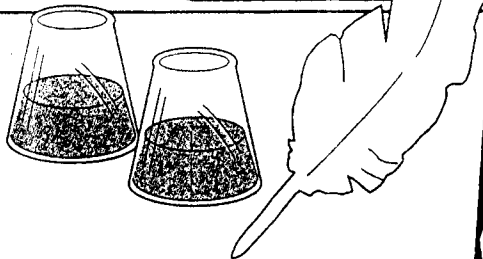
- 1 cup fresh cranberries
- 2 tablespoons water
- medium saucepan
- metal spoon
- cheesecloth
- clean container with lid

#### WALNUT SHELL INK RECIPE

- 4 empty walnut shells
- 1 cup water
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon vinegar
- paper bag
- hammer
- saucepan
- cheesecloth
- clean container with lid

#### MATERIALS

- ink recipes
- stove
- writing paper



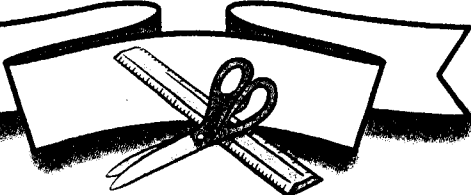
#### Quill Pen:

- 8–10" feather (available at most craft stores)
- small craft knife or scissors
- warm, soapy water
- small piece of felt
- straight pin

#### FASCINATING FACTS

The first ballpoint pen was made by John H. Loud in 1888. Today, about 2 billion ballpoint pens are manufactured in the United States each year.

# Hands-On History Lab Activity 5



## WHAT TO DO

- A. To make cranberry ink** Place the cranberries and water in a saucepan. Bring the mixture to a boil. (*SAFETY NOTE: Handle hot materials carefully to avoid burns.*) Crush the cranberries with the spoon to release their color. Allow the mixture to cool. Place a piece of cheesecloth over the container. Carefully pour the mixture into the container. The cheesecloth will strain out the crushed cranberries. Seal with a lid.
- B. To make walnut shell ink** Place the shells in a paper bag and crush them with the hammer. Put the crushed shells in the saucepan and add the water. Bring the mixture to a boil. Add the salt and vinegar to set the ink. Turn down the heat and allow the mixture to simmer for 30 minutes. Cool. Strain the ink through the cheesecloth into the container. Keep the mixture tightly covered and avoid getting it on your clothes or hands. It stains.
- C. To make a quill pen** Soak the feather in warm soapy water for 15 minutes. Trim about 2" of feathers off along the shaft at the bottom end of the feather. Cut off the end of the feather's shaft at an angle to form the nib, or point, of the pen. (*SAFETY NOTE: Cut on heavy cardboard and handle sharp tools with care to avoid cuts.*) Use a straight pin to clean out the inside of the quill. Be careful not to crack the nib. Cut a small slit in the center of the nib to help control the ink flow. Dip the nib into ink, blot on a small piece of felt, and you are ready to write.
- D.** Practice with your quill pen and homemade inks on a sheet of writing paper.

**LAB ACTIVITY REPORT**

1. What color ink did the walnut shells make? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Which kind of ink worked the best in your tests? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you think it would take you much longer to do your homework if you had to use quill pens and homemade inks? Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Was your handwriting neater or messier with the quill pen and homemade inks? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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