

Lessons at Locust Grove: Ink Making

The history of ink begins many centuries ago. From a rudimentary form of ink using regional fruits, vegetables, and minerals smeared on the sides of caves, to 1200 BC China, to the ink in our pens today, ink has a long and complex history from humble (arguably simple) beginnings. Around 1200 BC, an inventor from China named Tien-Lcheu created a black ink from pine tree soot and lamp oil. Adding gelatin to the mixture created a writing ink that became very popular in China and surrounding countries.

Egyptians had also created their own form of ink around 2500 BC by blending carbon and gum Arabic. Once mixed, it was dried in the shape of sticks which were then dipped in water and used on papyrus paper. Around the 4th century, “masi ink” emerged in India. Created from charred bones and tar, this ink is still popular today in India, China, and Japan, as well as with artists who

How Ink Was Made in the 17th & 18th Centuries

The foundational make up of ink is separated into three ingredients: **Pigment**, **Binder**, and **Preservative**. The pigment (color) was traditionally made from organic ingredients such as regional berries, vegetables, and minerals. The binder was typically vinegar, and “binds” the color to the page and prevents fading. The preservative was salt, and this would help prevent the ink from molding.

Making ink was fairly straightforward. Berry ink was very popular, particularly pokeberry and blackberry ink. Pokeberries were poisonous, so as they could not be eaten, they found another way to utilize the berries in a safe way. The Declaration of Independence was actually written in pokeberry ink!

Berries would be harvested and pushed through a very fine mesh strainer to obtain a juice without seeds. Once enough juice was collected, vinegar and salt would be added until the desired consistency was obtained! Please see our video and “How to Make Berry Ink” sheet for more information!

ACTIVITIES

Try your hand at making your own ink, and then use your ink to write your future self a message. This could be a message on what you are experiencing in your current daily life, a poem, a short story, you name it!

See the prompts below for some inspiration:

- Write a short poem about social distancing and what that means to you
- List 6 true sentences that begin with the words “I’ll never forget...”
- List 10 places in the world that you would most like to visit, 10 places you’ve been, and 10 places you would never want to go
- Write about your first name—why you were given it, what associations or stories are attached to it, what you think or know it means.
- What name would you give yourself other than the one you actually have. Why?
- What do you think it would be like to live in the 19th century? What would your daily life look like?

You can also use the ink as a paint and create some artwork that inspires you.

Share what you’ve created with us using our hashtag #LocustGroveLessons!

