



What did people write with before they had pens?

Fact

- Thousands of years ago, before pens had been invented, people started writing things by scratching pictures and symbols on the walls of caves.
- Then they used bits of metal to scratch out markings on clay tablets (not medicine tablets, but slabs of clay about the size of a large placemat)
- When ink was invented the Romans made a strange kind of pen out of a thin piece of bamboo. They filled it full of ink but it was pretty messy.
- Then people discovered that a quill (made from a feather) was a good writing instrument. They sharpened the end of the quill and dipped it in the ink.

Do you know

- The first real pen that was invented was the Fountain Pen. It worked a lot like the quill only you didn't dip it in ink you filled it with ink.
- The ink that is used in a fountain pen is very runny and you can make a huge mess with very easily.
- Then in 1940 they invented the ballpoint pen. The ballpoint uses a tiny ball to transfer the ink onto paper.
- The ink in a ballpoint pen is much thicker and doesn't seem to make the same amount of mess (unless you leave it in a shirt pocket with the pen ready to write!)
- The pencil was invented hundreds of years after the first pens.

Experiments you can do

Get to the point of a ballpoint

Have a close up look at the ball on a ballpoint pen. Use a magnifying glass if you need to and see if you can see the tiny little ball at the end of the pen. Get a scrap piece of paper and watch how the pen leaves a trail of ink on the paper as you write. You won't be able to see it very well but get down close and find out how much you can see.

Other Investigations

Use some more scraps of paper and investigate how other pens work. Do your felt tips have ballpoints on the tip of them? How do they work then?

Investigate fountain pens and quills. You might have to do to a museum to see examples of these or have a look for books in your library about them. Maybe your great-great grandparents used fountain pens and inkwells at school. Ask them and see.

Jokes

What do you do if your cat swallows your pencil? Use a pen!

From Maigan