

Write with a Quill Pen

Many of the world's most important historical documents were written with quill pens. Show your child how to make his own quill pen, and then have him experiment writing with it—just like Washington and Jefferson.

The Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, the Magna Carta, and many other vital documents were written and signed with quill pens. In fact, the word "pen" comes from the Latin word "penna", which means feather.

Help your child step into Franklin, Paine, and other forefathers' footsteps, by teaching him to make his own quill pen. By the time students have mastered the skills of penmanship they can begin to appreciate ways to make writing unique. Every quill writes differently and your child can see how his penmanship changes with unusual tools.

Find your own feathers during a nature walk, or take a trip to a craft store to buy a package. Throughout history, quill pens were made from the flight feathers (preferably the largest wing feathers) of large birds. Here's how your child can make his own!

What You Need:

- Large wing feathers (A pack of plain turkey quill feathers can be bought for under \$3). Try to find feathers that are about 12 inches long or more, with a thick shaft.
- A knife to cut the correct angle on the feather shaft
- Ink in a bottle - can be purchased at most craft and art supply stores. You might want to start with non-permanent ink until you are experienced.
- Cutting board
- Marker
- Tweezers



What You Do:

1. Select your feather. You need a feather long enough to hold comfortably, with a sturdy shaft (the spine of the feather). Quill pens were most often made from goose feathers, but turkey feathers were also popular. You can leave the feather as is, or trim the sides of the feather for several inches, to leave more room for a better grip.
2. Follow the natural curve of the feather. You want your writing point to aim downward.
3. Take your marker and make a dot at the point where you'd like the writing tip to be. Place your marked feather on a cutting board. With a sharp knife, cut the end of the quill at a slant less than 45 degrees.
4. Take the tweezers and clean out any materials left in the cut shaft.
5. Dip your new quill pen into some non-permanent ink. Give your child a chance to experiment with the quill. How does using it change his penmanship?

Did You Know?

- Feathers evolved from the scales of reptiles and are one of the things that set birds apart from all other animals.
- Feathers have a hollow shaft and can produce a sharper and more flexible tip than metal nibs. The quills described above are easy to make and simple in design, but you can create a more complex nib that is more like metal nibs—it just requires greater cutting skill.