

Civil War Activities

Because telephones, email, and text messaging didn't exist in the 1800s, business was conducted by mail. Letters were written by hand, because computers hadn't been invented yet either. Instead, letter-writers used quills and ink, because ballpoint pens weren't around too!

MATERIALS FOR QUILL PEN: feather, scissors, paper clip.

MATERIALS FOR BERRY INK: 1/2 cup ripe berries, 1/2 teaspoon salt, 1/2 teaspoon vinegar, food strainer, bowl, wooden spoon, small jar with tight-fitting lid.

MATERIALS FOR WRITING: paper, paper towels.

HOW TO MAKE INK: Blueberries, cherries, blackberries, strawberries, or raspberries work well. Fill strainer with berries and hold over bowl. Crush berries against strainer with wooden spoon. When all the juice is out of the berries, throw away the pulp. Add salt and vinegar to juice and stir well. If ink is too thick, add a teaspoon or two of water. Don't add too much, however, or you'll lose the color. Store ink in a small jar with tight-fitting lid. Make only as much as you think you'll use at one time, because it dries up quickly.

HOW TO MAKE PEN: Find a feather. Cut the fat end of the quill on an angle, curving the cut slightly. A good pair of scissors is safer than a knife. Clean the inside of the quill with a paper clip to make ink flow to the point you cut. You may want to cut a center slit in the point. If you press too hard on the pen when you write, however, it may split.

HOW TO WRITE WITH PEN: Dip just the pen's tip in the ink. Keep a paper towel handy to use as a blotter. Experiment by holding the pen at different angles. Most people press too hard or stop too long in one spot.

WHAT TO WRITE WITH PEN: Sign your name. Then sign with a pen or pencil. Compare the results. Imagine what it would be like to do all your writing with a quill.