



A Day in a One-Room Schoolhouse
Marathon County Historical Society Living History Learning Project

Penmanship Lesson

Activity Packet For Virtual Visits



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Mary Forer: Executive Director

Note to Participants

This packet contains information students can use to prepare for an off-site experience of a one-room school. They may be used by classroom teachers to approximate the experience without traveling to the Little Red Schoolhouse. They are available here for students who might be unable to attend in person for any reason. In addition, these materials may be used by anyone interested in remembering or exploring educational experiences from more than a century ago.

The usual lessons at the Little Red Schoolhouse in Marathon Park are taught by retired local school teachers and employees of the Marathon County Historical Society in Wausau, Wisconsin. A full set of lessons has been video-recorded and posted to our YouTube channel, which you can access along with PDFs of accompanying materials through the Little Red Schoolhouse page on our website. These PDFs may be printed for personal or classroom educational purposes only.

- ♦ *If you have any questions, please call the Marathon County Historical Society office at 715-842-5750 and leave a message for Anna or Sandy, or email Sandy at sblock@marathoncountyhistory.org.*

On-Site Schoolhouse Daily Schedule

9:00 am	Arrival Time. If you attended the Schoolhouse in person, the teacher would ring the bell to signal children to line up in two lines, boys and girls, in front of the door. Everyone would recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. Students would then file into school, girls first. They would take their places in rows of desks, girls on one side, boys on the other side.
9:30 am	Reading and Recitation using McGuffey's Eclectic Readers.
10:00 am	Arithmetic problems using lap slates.
10:30 am	Recess with turn-of-the-century games and bathroom break.
11:00 am	Penmanship exercises using dip pens and ink.
11:45 am	Lunch with free play and bathroom break.
12:30 am	Geography and Current Events using a turn-of-the-century map.
1:00 pm	Old-fashioned Spelling Bee.
1:45 pm	Chores including re-stocking of wood stove and general clean-up of the classroom and schoolhouse grounds.
2:00 pm	School Dismissed.

Penmanship

Today's ball-point pens and felt-tip markers were not available yet in 1904. Students learned to write using dip pens and bottle ink. Instructions here are based on the use of dip pens. If they are not available, then feel free to use what you have and emphasize legible, beautiful cursive handwriting.

To prepare, place the bottle of ink on the most level part of the desk. Modern bottles are unlikely to fit into an old-fashioned inkwell. Be sure each student has a paper towel in addition to pen and ink. Left-handed students might appreciate having an extra paper towel on which to rest their writing hand, to reduce the amount of ink on their hands.

Explain to students that these pens do not have the ink already in them, as today's pens do. Instead, the pens must be dipped in ink before they write. The pen nib is split up the center from the tip, ending in a small hold about a half-inch from the tip. This split acts as a reservoir for the ink. It is important to dip only the tip of the nib into the ink. If the pen is dipped too far into the ink, the hold in the nib will fill with ink and cause drips and blobs of ink on the paper. When writing with the pens, students will not need to press hard. A light, but firm, touch works best. A little practice time is appropriate.

Holding the Pens

Students should hold the pens on the black plastic shaft only. If the student touches the silver pen nib, the ink might not stick to it and writing will be difficult. The pen should be held in a relaxed grip between the thumb, forefinger, and middle finger (see Figure 2). The ring finger can be added for more stability. The pinky will serve as a balance for the hand and should rest on the paper, not the pen. The pen should be held at a slight angle in relation to the paper, not straight up and down.

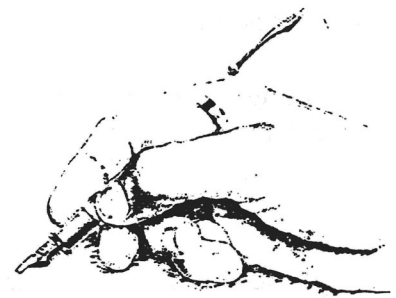


Fig.2. The pen should be held in a relaxed grip between the thumb, fore and middle fingers.

The writing style taught here is the Palmer Method, a smooth, flowing style of penmanship that was popular around 1900. The method uses gentle push-pull strokes to form oval-shaped letters at a slight angle.

Penmanship Exercises

To help students get used to writing with dip pens, try these exercises. You might want to write examples on a chalkboard. You may also write the maxims from this packet on the board.

First, write a row of cursive lower-case e's across the paper. *eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee*

Next, write a row of cursive s's. *ssssssssssssssssssssssssssssss*

Then try a row of m's. *mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm*

Finally, a row of p's. *pppppppppppppppppppppp*

When they are more comfortable using the pens, have students write their name and address, and today's date (remember this is 1904!). Then they may copy the maxims. If there is time, ask students to write about their one-room school experience, or any other free-writing exercise of choice.

When the lesson is finished, put the pens tip down into a container with water in the bottom. Later, the pens should be removed from the water and carefully dried with a towel.

A B C D E F G

H I J K L M

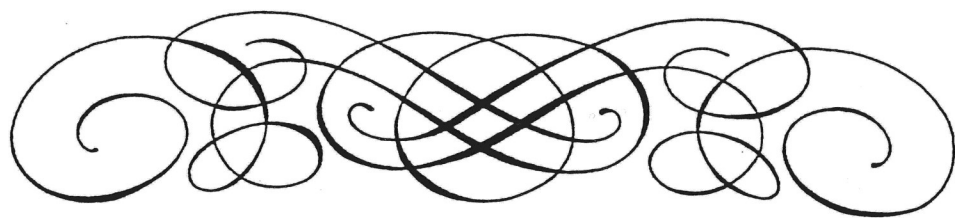
N O P Q R S T

U V W X Y Z

a b c d e f g h i j

k l m n o p q r

s t u v w x y z



Penmanship Practice

Try using a dip pen, if you have one available, and your best cursive handwriting to copy one or more of these wise sayings.

The following maxims are only suggestions. You could also use maxims from the stories in McGuffey's Reader.

- ✓ The truth itself is not believed from one who often has deceived.
- ✓ Falsehood is cowardice; truth is courage.
- ✓ Truth is the most important element of a great character.
- ✓ It is better to give than to receive.
- ✓ Little strokes fell great oaks.
- ✓ The sleeping fox catches no chickens.
- ✓ A little leak will sink a great ship.
- ✓ All temptations attack the idle.
- ✓ Keep your face to the sun and the shadows will fall behind.
- ✓ Working is better than wishing.
- ✓ All that you do
Do with your might
Things done by halves
Are never done right.
- ✓ The biggest trees do not always bear the most fruit.
- ✓ A wise man governs his temper.
- ✓ Every hour brings its task.
- ✓ Step by step the ladder is ascended.
- ✓ Look out for the pennies, and the dollars will take care of themselves.

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THANK YOU TO THE CHIPPEWA VALLEY MUSEUM OF EAU CLAIRE, WISCONSIN,
FOR THEIR ASSISTANCE IN PREPARING OUR ACTIVITY PACKET.