



Birds

# Making quill pens

Age: 7-14

Topic: History

Time: 1 hour



Learning through Landscapes

If you would like to develop your outdoor learning knowledge and skills, take a look at our range of training courses: [ltl.org.uk/outdoor-learning-training](http://ltl.org.uk/outdoor-learning-training)

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## What equipment will I need?

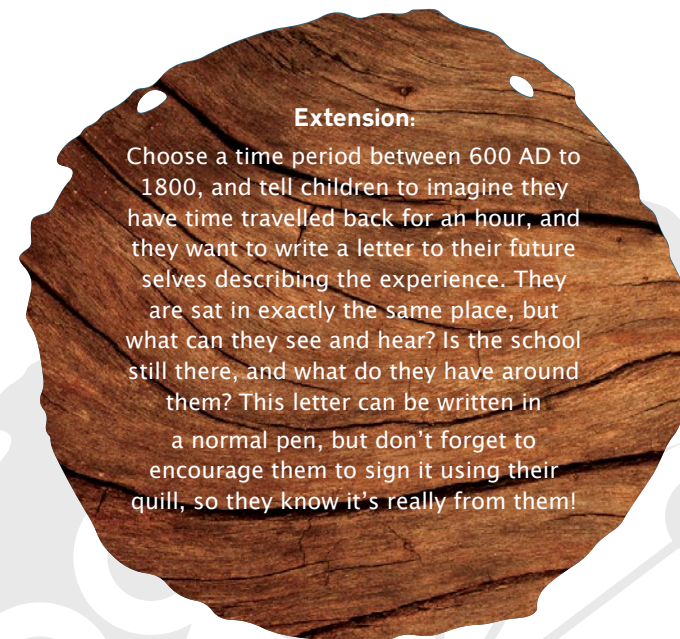
- Large feathers (over 25cm – goose works best)
- Ink (in ink pots, or small bowls. Make sure the ink is washable so that it doesn't stain!)
- Scissors
- Paper
- Newspaper to cover desks

## How will learners explore this?

1. Take the feathers and explain the names of each part of a feather to students (quill, rachis, vane, then on the smaller scale: barbs, barbules, hooklets).
2. Now, to make the quill pen. Take scissors and make three cuts in the quill: 1. One diagonal cut. 2. Another horizontal cut, cutting off the end of the diagonal, making it blunt. 3. A third smaller going upwards along the quill.
3. Picture a fountain pen to do this! It will be best if the practitioner practises this before showing to the children.
4. The small cut made at the bottom of the feather will draw ink into it – now you can write!
5. Now let children attempt writing on paper with the quill, by dipping the end of the quill into ink.
6. This may be slightly messy – you may want to cover desks with newspaper!
7. Get children to write their name, and maybe even attempt drawing with the quill.
8. History learning: It is disputed when quill pens were invented, but they were definitely popular by the 600s in Spain, about 1400 years ago!
9. They have been incredibly popular throughout history – being the writing implement of choice until the 1800s, when metal pens became widely available.

## How can we show the learning?

- Test children's learning by asking them about feather terminology. What part of the feather is the quill? What are the other parts of the feather called?
- If you have done the extension, ask children to describe the time period they visited. What was different about the time period they went back to?
- Why are quills important? Many, many important documents which are fundamental to our world today were written with a quill; from Shakespeare's plays to the Magna Carta!
- Therefore, as well as contemporary uses for feathers, we need to consider how important feathers have been historically as well.



### Extension:

Choose a time period between 600 AD to 1800, and tell children to imagine they have time travelled back for an hour, and they want to write a letter to their future selves describing the experience. They are sat in exactly the same place, but what can they see and hear? Is the school still there, and what do they have around them? This letter can be written in a normal pen, but don't forget to encourage them to sign it using their quill, so they know it's really from them!



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