



Pencil History

Pencils have been used for hundreds of years, but they didn't always look like the ones you use today. In ancient Rome, people used a writing instrument called a stylus. It was a thin metal rod that would leave a light mark on papyrus (an early form of paper).

In 1564, a large amount of graphite was found in Borrowdale, England. Graphite is a fairly common mineral that occurs naturally in the earth. People realized that the graphite would leave a dark mark and could be used for writing. However, it was too soft and brittle to hold, so they used string or sometimes sheepskin to wrap around it. Later, the graphite was put into hollowed out wooden sticks. These looked more like the pencils we use today. American colonists used pencils imported from Europe until after the American Revolution. It is said that a cabinetmaker in Massachusetts named William Munroe made the first American wood pencils in 1812. In 1858, a man named Hymen Lipman had the idea to attach an eraser on the end of a pencil. By the end of the 19th century, over 240,000 pencils were used each day in America.

Have you ever wondered why many pencils are painted yellow? In the late 1800s, the best graphite in the world came from China. In China, the color yellow indicates royalty and respect. People in America who made pencils wanted to show that their pencils were the best, so they painted them yellow. Not all countries use yellow pencils though. In Germany, they are often green, blue, or black. In Australia, many are red with black bands at one end. In India, the most common pencil color is dark red with black lines.

With computers and other technology being used more and more for tasks that used to require pencils and paper, many people thought that pencils would become obsolete, but surprisingly, sales continue to grow. An estimated 15 to 20 billion pencils are made each year!

