

Making Paper with Papyrus

Educational Guide: Activity

Level: 2-8

Time: One to two class periods

Origin: Petra

Key Words: papyrus, script, Nabataean, Aramaic, Hebrew, dialects, consonants

More about this resource:

This project answers the question, "How did Nabataean students of Petra record the information of their day?" Students will gain firsthand experience with the writing of the Nabataeans.

Instructions are included for making papyrus. There is also a copy of the Greek alphabet so that the student can experience writing as the students of Petra did long ago.

Michigan Framework:

Strand 5 Inquiry

Standard 5.2 Conducting Investigations

Students will conduct investigations by formulating a clear statement of a question, gathering and organizing information from a variety of sources, analyzing and interpreting information, formulating and testing hypothesis, reporting results both orally and in writing, and making use of appropriate technology.

Benchmark 5.2.2

Gather and analyze information in order to answer the question posed.

Benchmark 5.2.3

Construct answers to the question posed and support the answer with evidence.

Benchmark 5.2.6

Gather and analyze information, using appropriate information technologies to answer the question posed.

Benchmark 5.2.8

Report the results of their investigation including the procedures followed.

Lesson Site

Petra Lost City of Stone

Educational Guide: Activity

Time required: One to two class periods

Age Level: 2-8

Key Question: How did the people of Petra record information of their day?

The common written language of the Nabataeans was a form of Aramaic, the most widespread language of the ancient Near East. The 22 written characters of the Nabataeans, Hebrews, and Aramaic were the same, but the dialects varied. There is evidence that the Nabataeans wrote on papyrus. Samples of writing on papyrus have been unearthed in the city of Petra.

Students have the opportunity to make papyrus following the instructions included here. By doing this, they can have a hands-on experience, mimicking the Nabataean way of life by modeling the Aramaic print.

How to Make Paper with Papyrus*

1. Soak the strips in a tub of water at room temperature. You will need to put a tray or plate on top of the strips in order to keep the strips submerged.
2. After the strips have been soaked for two or three days, remove them from the water. Use a pastry rolling pin to flatten the strips for the first time on a wood block, tabletop, or counter.
3. Put the strips back into fresh water. After the strips absorb some water, they should sink somewhat.
4. After another two days, remove the strips to roll them a second time and with less pressure than before. Then, re-place the strips in the water (no need to change the water this time) for an additional three days. You should notice that the strips saturate with water and sink in the tub. When the strips reach this stage, they are ready to make them into a sheet of paper. The strips should also start changing color from bright white to cream or darker.
5. To make the sheet of papyrus, lay a small towel (slightly larger than 8 x 12 inches) on your working surface. Place a handkerchief on top of the towel. Take the 12-inch strips, place them parallel to each other, *and* overlap them slightly to leave no gaps. If the strips are slightly trapezoidal, alternate the narrow ends.
6. After making the sheet 8 inches wide, make a second layer with the 8-inch strips, laying them perpendicular to the 12-inch strips and making sure that the strips slightly overlap the others.
7. Place another handkerchief followed by another cloth sheet on the top of the papyrus strips.
8. Take the pastry roller over the cloth to squeeze all remaining water out of the papyrus sheet.
9. Take some old newspapers several layers thick, and fold them to 8 x 12 inches.
10. Remove the cloth sheets (keep the handkerchiefs in place), and insert the papyrus sheet covered by the hankies between the newspapers.
11. Place heavy books on top of the newspapers or place the packet between two sheets of wood and fasten with C clamps. Change the wet newspapers, first after two hours, then 6 hours, then after 24 hours.
12. After a day or so, the sheet will be dry. To ensure that the now-dry (or almost dry) sheet is flat, place the bare papyrus sheet(s) between books for a few days.

*Use an Internet search engine (i.e. www.google.com) to find your nearest source** of papyrus. Use keywords such as "Papyrus Paper Making Kit" to narrow your search.

**These example sources for papyrus have NOT been tested by the author. They are suggestions to help you start your own search process.

Examples include:

King Tut Shop – Raw Papyrus Strips
<http://www.kingtutshop.com/rawstrips/rawstrips.htm>

King Tut Shop – Blank Papyrus Paper
<http://www.kingtutshop.com/Sheets/PSheets.htm>

Wilde-Ideas – Papyrus Paper Making Kit
<http://www.wilde-ideas.com/Vndrs/Yas/PaperKit.html>

Discount Art Supplies – Papyrus Paper Making Kit
<http://www.allartsupplies.com/item.php?articleId=993>

Master Art – YASUTOMO Papyrus 21 Handmade Paper Making Kit
http://www.misterart.com/store/view/005/group_id/7186/Yasutomo-Papyrus-21-Handmade-Paper-Making-Kit.htm

Greek Alphabet

(For use with the Petra Papyrus Scroll Activity)

The papyrus scrolls found near the Byzantine church at Petra were predominately written in the Greek language. One of these Greek scrolls will be on display at the exhibit. The New Testament was also first written in the Greek language. One activity you may wish to do with your students is to copy a portion of the Greek New Testament.

The Greek characters can be found on the Microsoft Word program under 'Insert,' followed by 'symbols.'

A	B	Γ	Δ
Alpha	Beta	Gamma	Delta
E	Z	H	Θ
Epsilon	Zeta	Eta	Theta
I	K	Λ	M
Iota	Kappa	Lambda	Mu
N	Ξ	O	Π
Nu	Xi	Omicron	Pi
P	Σ	T	Υ
Rho	Sigma	Tau	Upsilon
Φ	X	Ψ	Ω
Phi	Chi	Psi	Omega