The Art of Making Paper

Throughout history, mankind has developed many tools for communicating. Of those, paper has continued to be valued and widely used across cultures.

The origins of making paper can be traced back to the earliest civilizations in ancient Egypt and China. Paper got its name from papyrus - a plant that was once abundant in Egypt. The plant produced a thick paper-like material that was used by Egyptians, Greeks and Romans of the time. The style of paper that we are more familiar with today came from China. During the Han Dynasty, raw materials such as bark and cloth were used to create paper fibers. The use of these lighter resources became very popular over the previous method of creating books made of larger pieces of wood or bamboo slips.

The bark from various types of trees (pine, birch, maple, oak, spruce, eucalyptus, mulberry, and fig) are commonly used to make paper. Traditionally, the bark was stripped from the trees and then boiled for long periods until soft. Then, the strips were separated and laid into grid patterns. Artisans used stones or wooden blocks to pound the strips until they were flattened together - forming a sheet. These sheets were then laid in the sun to dry. After drying the sheets would then be cut into smaller sheets of paper for writing and other activities.

Paper was created by local artisans in this manner until the invention of machines. During the Industrial Revolution new methods of manufacturing made the process faster and more efficient. However, in some cultures, such as with the Nahua and Otomi Indians of Mexico, the artisan traditions continue even today. They use the paper to create Amate or bark paintings to illustrate the flora and fauna from their region.
The Art of Making Paper

1. Where did paper originate from?

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2. What types of trees are used to make paper?

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3. Describe the steps used in making paper:

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4. True or False? Today, the Nahua-Otomi Indians of Mexico still make paper in the traditional way. ______________________

5. Why did the process of making paper change?

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ACTIVITY KEY

1. Where did paper originate from? Ancient Egypt and China

2. What types of trees are used to make paper? pine, birch, maple, oak, spruce, eucalyptus, mulberry, and fig

3. Describe the steps used in making paper: Traditionally: bark stripped from trees, boiled for long periods, strips laid into grid pattern, pounded with rocks or wooden blocks to flatten into sheets of paper, laid in sun to dry, later cut into smaller sheets. Today, machines make the process more efficient. Chemicals are added, colors, etc. to get different textures.

4. True or False? Today, the Nahua-Otomi Indians of Mexico still make paper in the traditional way. True

5. Why did the process of making paper change? The Industrial Revolution brought changes as machines made it easier to mass produce paper and other items. The process became more efficient and produced a finer quality of paper for writing and other uses.