



PRESS RELEASE

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Learning to write – then and now: A small school story of pencils, fountain pens & co.

A view into the pencil case reveals a colourful collection of erasers, sharpeners, compasses and, above all, pens and pencils. Whether triangular or hexagonal, with graphite or ink: School pens and pencils characterise how the first letters and characters are created. In the anniversary year of the Noris brand, STAEDTLER is taking a look back into the history of writing worldwide. 2021 is a special year for the Nuremberg-based company: 120 years ago, on 1 April 1901, the Noris brand was signed up for registration. Today, the name is associated with a comprehensive range of school stationery. Its most prominent representative worldwide: the Noris 120 yellow-and-black striped pencil.

Writing and school

First words with pencil, ballpoint pen or fountain pen? Depending on the pen, early writing attempts not only look different, but they also feel different. Over the millennia, early writing attempts have only differed to the extent that the writing tools have changed. Sumerians were already teaching their boys back in about 2100 BC how to read and write the letters of the alphabet, which they etched into clay tablets and similar. ⁽¹⁾ Bamboo, reed, stone or wax: Whatever was available regionally was used. ⁽²⁾ Whether a writing tool was to be made for everyday use or especially for novice writers became an ever more important question in Europe in the early modern era. Since then, a distinction has been made between writing tools for adults and children. ⁽³⁾

Chalk, pencil or fountain pen?

It is not clear when exactly pencils, fountain pens etc. conquered the classrooms of the world. Many writing tools were developed and improved in parallel, as demonstrated by a 2004 dissertation by Gotthard B. Jensen. Over time, they differed in their handling, maintenance and price. ⁽⁴⁾ “We also see in our company archive that different writing tools were offered for school at the same time,” says Britta Olsen, Head of Brand and Communications at STAEDTLER. Towards the end of the 19th century, the company discovered children as its own target group for pens and pencils. An “Illustrated price list” from 1898 contains the entry “Coloured pencils, short, for children”.

Learning to write worldwide

Fonts and writing tools influenced each other. ⁽⁵⁾ For example, German writing developed using the stable quill in the 19th century, as fine and uniform lettering was made possible with the help of the quill. ⁽⁶⁾ Fonts also differed in other countries over the centuries. Thus, the abundance of writing material for pupils around the world differs so they can learn to read and write in a sound manner. While 26 individual letters are taught in languages based on the Latin alphabet, children in China, for example, have a larger system of characters to learn. With around 50,000 characters, the Chinese language is very extensive, and by the fifth grade the children are supposed to master around 10,000 characters. ⁽⁷⁾



The pencil has stood the test of time

No matter which font is learnt: The pencil is regularly used as the first writing tool in primary schools worldwide. While the hardness HB is preferred in Europe, the pupils in Asia mainly use softer pencil tips. Originally developed in England in the 16th century⁽⁸⁾, the pencil – now set in wood – has been a loyal companion in school since the middle of the 19th century, for example in the German language area.⁽⁹⁾ Its success story is also related to the name Staedtler. In 1662, Friedrich Staedtler, an ancestor of the later company founder Johann Sebastian, was mentioned for the first time as a “pencil maker” in Nuremberg.

Since the 20th century, the pencil has been in direct competition with the slate pen in schools, then with the fountain pen.⁽¹⁰⁾ In the middle of all this: the Noris pencil. First with yellow/orange and dark brown stripes in the 1930s, the STAEDTLER pencil from Nuremberg is now known worldwide as a yellow-and-black striped classic. “Since an incorrectly written word can be removed almost without leaving any residue, pencils are very popular at school, especially for novice writers,” says Britta Olsen.

Competition from ink

The further development of the reed pen and goose quill, which were used in German schools until the 19th century, are still a popular writing and calligraphy tool in the modern form of a fountain pen. Another pen has been talked about often since the 1940s:⁽¹¹⁾ The ballpoint pen. Back in the 1950s, it also found itself in STAEDTLER’s Noris range, as did the fibre-tip pen, which is a competitor to the ballpoint pen in everyday life.⁽¹²⁾ “Over time, fibre-tip pens have also become increasingly diverse,” explains Britta Olsen. “The different characteristics in terms of ergonomics, line width and colour diversity are adapted to the individual needs of children, young people and adults in school environments as well as in leisure time”.

The career of a school brand

STAEDTLER develops its own school brand under the name Noris in the first half of the 20th century. The Noris brand was originally signed up for registration at the Imperial Patent Office in Berlin 120 years ago on 1 April 1901. The trademark registration took place on 10 September the same year. “As a catalogue from our archive shows, STAEDTLER was already offering pastel chalks and pocket pens as well as copying pens for everyday school life under the Noris name back in 1919,” explains Britta Olsen. The product range was then adapted to the ergonomic requirements of children’s hands in the coming decades. With Noris junior, today even toddlers can be introduced to painting and writing in an age-appropriate manner. The classic, yellow-and-black striped Noris pencil is also available in a version for the smallest children’s hands and as a stylus version for digital handwriting.

More information on the Noris anniversary at:

www.staedtler.com/noris



Caption:

The Noris brand was signed up for registration at the Imperial Patent Office in Berlin 120 years ago on 1 April 1901. The registration took place on 10 September in the same year. Today, its name is not only found on pencils, such as the world-renowned Noris 120, but also on a variety of products for the pencil case and beyond.

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Caption:

Students around the world use the pencil to get their first writing attempts on paper. Easy handling and the ability to correct errors make the pencil the ideal learning tool.

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Caption:

Noris' product range adapted to the needs of the young writers. Even if this meant developing pencils both for writing on the board and on paper. The illustration shows a product box entitled "Pencil crayons for blackboards and exercise books" from the 1970s.

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Caption:

While other school writing instruments such as the slate pencil gradually disappeared from classrooms, the lead pencil still has a fixed place in pencil cases all over the world. Over time, the appearance of today's famous Noris pencil has changed to yellow and black. A predecessor, Noris 1100, still wore a yellow/orange garment with dark brown stripes.

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Caption:

Today, pencils, fountain pens and coloured pencils are part of a complete school set. The triad already existed in the Federal Republic of Germany in the 1950s.

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Caption:

What does a pencil look like? In a 2017 survey in England, 8 out of 10 passers-by drew it with stripes. A look that the Noris pencil from STAEDTLER has had since the 1930s.

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About STAEDTLER

STAEDTLER is one of Germany's oldest industrial companies. The group ranks among the world's leading manufacturers and suppliers of writing, colouring, drawing and modelling products. With its products, STAEDTLER inspires the creativity of its customers throughout their life: from their first attempts at colouring in early childhood to products for creative work. The writing and creative goods manufacturer offers a wide range of high-quality products for all ages and demands, constantly developing new approaches to connect analogue tradition and digital innovation. STAEDTLER headquarters are located in Nuremberg. It employs 3,000 people in 26 countries worldwide – of which 1,200 work in STAEDTLER'S domestic market. For production the company stays true to its roots and counts on quality "Made in Germany": nearly two-thirds of all STAEDTLER products are manufactured in Germany.

www.staedtler.com

Contact details:

Claudia Förster
Public Relations Manager
STAEDTLER Mars GmbH & Co. KG
Moosaeckerstraße 3
D-90427 Nuremberg
phone: +49 911 9365-132
e-mail: claudia.foerster@staedtler.com



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