

Alphabet Practice Lesson

by Nicole Wellington

1. Project graffito in situ ([CIL IV 10711](#))- most of Latin alphabet from a wall in Herculaneum.
2. Print out copies of the drawn version. Laminate copies if possible.
3. Have students trace over the graffito to see if they can figure out what it is (i.e. someone was practicing writing the alphabet). If using laminated copies, have students trace with an expo marker.
4. Print out copies of the [ancient letter forms](#).
5. If you can, create large pieces of plaster of Paris “wall” that students can practice scratching the different alphabet conventions into with a “stylus.” For a makeshift stylus, you may be able to use a knitting needle or a nail, depending upon the age of your students. If you do not have time or resources to do this-buy some Kraft paper on a roll and get some black sharpies. Have students practice different alphabets from the sheet. If they make a mistake, they should just cross it out, as would have been done in ancient times.
6. Another extension: Make wax tablets for students to practice writing on, as they would in a school. Get unfinished wooden picture frames from a craft store (with no glass front). These are usually about a \$1. Turn the fake picture over so that the plain, white part shows in the front. Put duct tape along the seams on the back, so that no wax seeps through. Melt a mixture of 4 tablespoons beeswax and 1 tablespoon coconut oil in a double boiler. Pour it into the front and let it harden. Use a wooden skewer as a stylus to practice writing.
7. Look at the House of the Grand Portal in the Herculaneum Panoramas. Look at other graffiti found in the house- many gladiator helmets, Roman numerals
8. Further discussion questions: Who would have been practicing the alphabet? Why?