

Arithmetic & Spelling

Introduction

During the 1700s, math (called arithmetic or cyphering) was taught at writing schools. While grammar schools taught reading and composition, writing schools taught handwriting, spelling, and math. While math seems like an odd addition to writing, “scholars” often had to write their math lessons using very careful and fancy handwriting. (They probably worked it out beforehand on a scrap of paper or slate.)

For an example, look at the PDF called “Arithmetic Problems.”

Eighteenth century scholars also learned proper spelling, and instructional books contained lists of words for them to memorize. It may seem strange now, since so many eighteenth century documents show extreme inconsistency of spelling, but there were spelling rules people were supposed to follow!

Both math and spelling lessons can be worked out on the slates, using the slate pencils. You are welcome to use the slates for your own lessons as well. Slate pencils could be made from a number of different soft stones, including slate or soapstone. They make a thinner line than chalk, and you can fit more writing on the slate. The slate pencils in this program are made of slate (the same as the material that they are writing on).

Works Referenced:

Fisher, George. *The American Instructor: Or, Young Man's Best Companion*. Philadelphia, 1758.

Hawkins, John. *Cocker's Arithmetic*. London, 1702.

Lowe, Solomon. *Arithmetic*. London, 1749.

Monaghan, E. Jennifer. *Learning to Read and Write in Colonial America*. University of Massachusetts Press: Amherst and Boston, 2005.

