

Exercises to support reading and writing: Part 1

Painting handwriting

In June of 1921, when the first Waldorf tenth grade was about to begin, Rudolf Steiner gave eight lectures to the teachers of the Waldorf School in Stuttgart (now collected in “Education for Adolescents”). The first six of these provide a wonderful review of Dr. Steiner’s guidance for teaching the elementary grades. In other words, before taking up the topic of teaching adolescents, he went back over with the faculty, what children between 7 and 14 need in order to be well prepared for the next phase of school.

During the fourth lecture, Rudolf Steiner stated: “We really ought to get people to write in a way that is akin to painting. Writing in that way is far more hygienic. ... We should cultivate this painting-like writing. It pushes the actual mechanical activity into the body, and the writer’s connection to the writing is brought to and beyond the surface.”

By this, I believe he was probably indicating a ‘painterly’ style of handwriting – i.e. with a pen or pencil, not the use of a brush per se.

Audrey McAllen, a student of Rudolf Steiner’s work, authored the book titled “The Extra Lesson” and was thereby the founder of Extra Lesson teaching in Waldorf schools throughout the world. In a chapter titled “Reintroduction to Formal Work in Reading and Arithmetic”, Mrs. McAllen stated: “In view of the reading methods which some children have experienced before coming to us, it is essential that a new child of any age should experience the letters as pictures.” Then, under the heading “Writing a Story”, she suggests painting writing—with a brush, in Copperplate style—as a valuable exercise for activating the lifting system, hand and

eye, and recapitulating the Waldorf first grader’s introduction to the beauty of written language.

I have worked with the above indications with Grades 1 through 8 at my school (Aurora Waldorf, near Buffalo) and have found that much can be accomplished and enjoyed, by



progressively working with every grade on the art of painting handwriting. Painting handwriting can be used for its own sake as a whole-class developmental exercise; and as a beautiful enhancement for Main Lesson books. Of course, it can also be used in lessons with individual students.

The following is excerpted from the July 15, 1921 lecture.

“...In handwriting, on the other hand, physical activity plays a predominant part.

“We should really go into details. Let me single out the subject of writing

and show you the role physical activity plays. There are two types of people in regard to writing. (I believe I have already mentioned this to those of you who have attended previous lectures.) There are those who write as though the writing is flowing from their wrists. The forming of the letters is carried out from the wrist. Future business people are actually trained to write in this way. Their writing flows from their wrists, and this is all there is to it. That is one of the two types of people in regard to writing. The other type is disposed to looking at the letters. These people always contemplate what they write, deriving an almost aesthetic pleasure from it. These are the painter type, and they do not so much write from the wrist. Those of the first type do not paint.

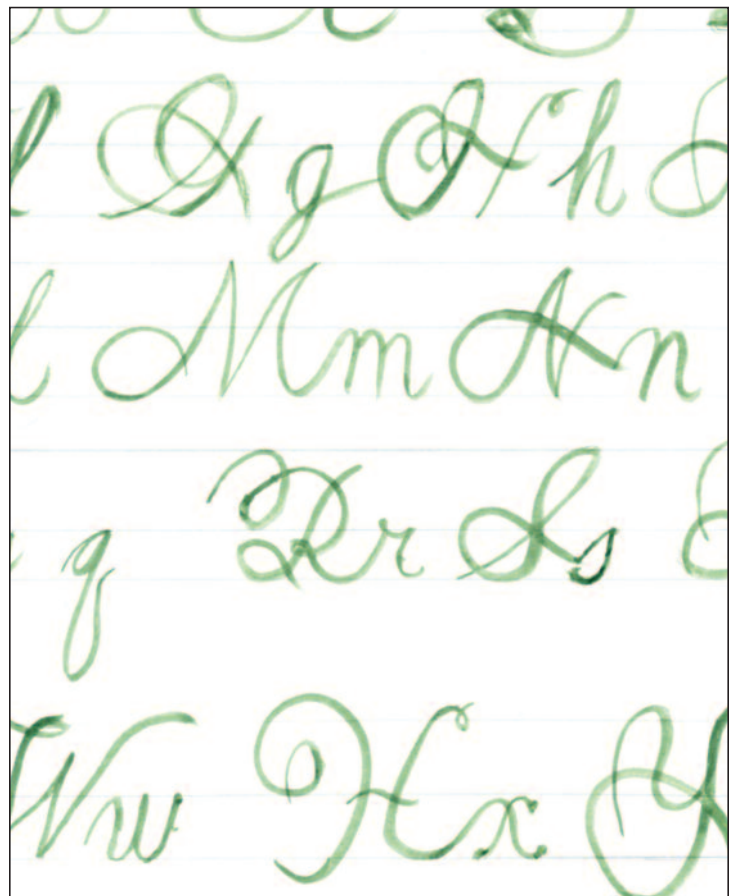
“I actually got to know the special training for people who are prepared for business. They are encouraged to put a kind of flourish to the letters. Their writing is characterized by continuous flourishes emanating from a certain swinging motion of the wrist. Taken to an extreme, this kind of writing will lead to something that is really quite awful. I know people who carry out all sorts of swinging motions with their pens in the air before they begin to write—a quite terrible thing when taken to an extreme.

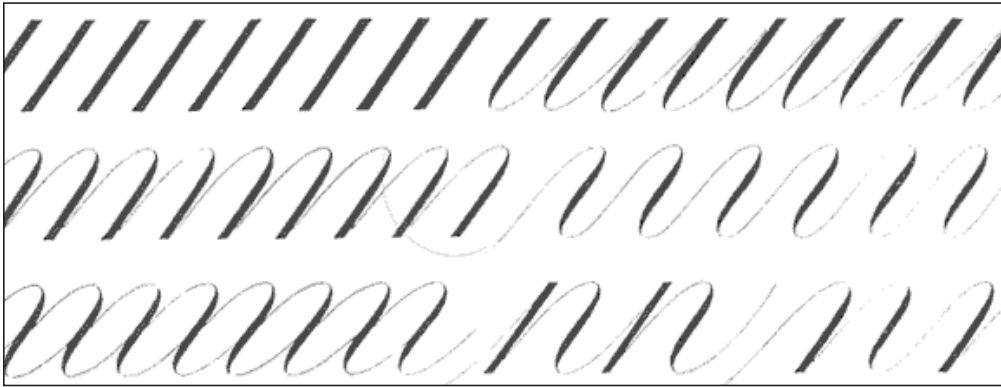
“We really ought to get people to write in a way that is akin to painting. Writing in that way is far more hygienic. When writing is accompanied by an aesthetic pleasure, the mechanical aspect is pushed into the body. It is the inner organism rather than the wrist that is writing. And this is most important, because the mechanical aspect is then diverted from the periphery to the whole of the human being. You will notice that when you teach children to write in this painting way, they will also be able to write with their toes. This would, in fact, constitute a triumph, a success—when a child is able to hold a pencil between the toes and form adequate letters. I do not say that this ability should be developed artistically. But we do have in such an instance a shifting of the mechanical activity to the whole human being. You will agree that in this regard most of us are extremely clumsy. Can you think of anyone who is able to pick up a piece of soap from the floor with his or her toes? To do this at least should be possible. It sounds grotesque, but it points to something of great significance.

“We should cultivate this painting-like writing. It pushes the actual mechanical activity into the body, and the writer’s connection to the writing is brought to and beyond the surface. The human being is imparted into his or her environment. We should really get used to seeing everything we do, rather than doing things thoughtlessly, mechanically. Most people do write mechanically, thoughtlessly. Because writing is thus a many-sided activity, we can, in a certain way, consider it as a significant aspect in our lessons. In arithmetic, on the other hand, the actual writing has a subordinate position, because with that subject it is the thinking that preoccupies the student.”



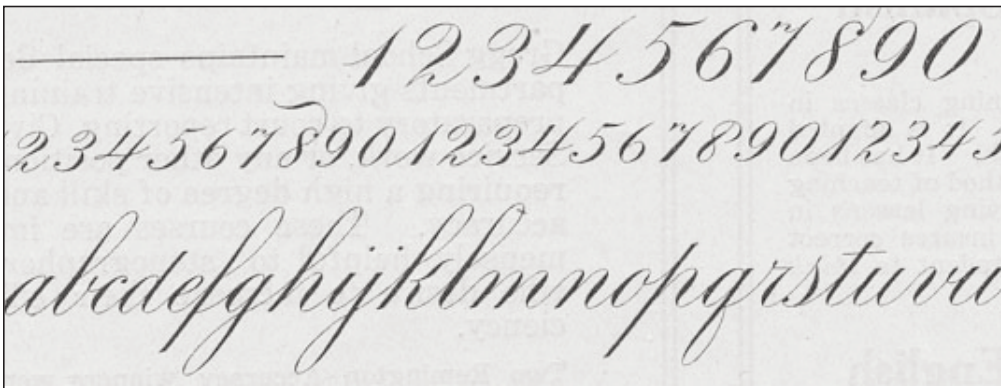
Above: One of many possible sample alphabets in the Roundhand, or Copperplate, style
 Below: Alphabet practice in 7th Grade





Sample from a complete series of exercises and other penmanship resources found at

-> www.zanerian.com



-> Sample from a complete series of exercises and other penmanship resources found at website for the

-> International Association of Master Penmen



A title for a Main Lesson Book in 8th Grade

For painting handwriting in the lower grades, students will need 'helper' guidelines for each row of exercise or lettering. Of course, photocopying paper with lines would be the quickest way. Following is another way I've come up with that's much nicer to look at and can be done relatively easily. (I've also made a youtube video demonstration of this method. Click the picture below for the link.)

You'll need:

1. One sheet of painting paper, tagboard, or any stiff paper that won't curl when it gets damp. This will be your 'master' sheet and will last through many manufacturing sessions. It should be several inches wider than the paper you'll be lining.
2. A stack of form drawing or Main Lesson Book paper to be lined.
3. A ruler or straightedge the height of the rows you want to make. (Also wider than the paper to be lined.)
4. A dark-colored pencil or pen.
5. Masking tape.
6. A dish with a small puddle of watercolor wash. You'll need to experiment with the thickness - you'd like the lines somewhat faint, but if the wash is too weak it will cause more curling of the paper.
7. A sponge, an edge of which is also the width of the lines you want.
8. Table or floor space to set the finished sheets on individually for a few minutes until dry enough to stack.

Steps:

1. Rule off your master sheet of painting paper - make sure the lines are strong enough that they can be seen at least a bit through the drawing paper.
2. Tape it down.
3. Set up a sheet to be lined, dampen the sponge in the wash, and trace your lines.
4. Set the sheet off to dry, and do another one.
5. When you have a batch of dried sheets, stack them with a weight on top to minimize curling.

