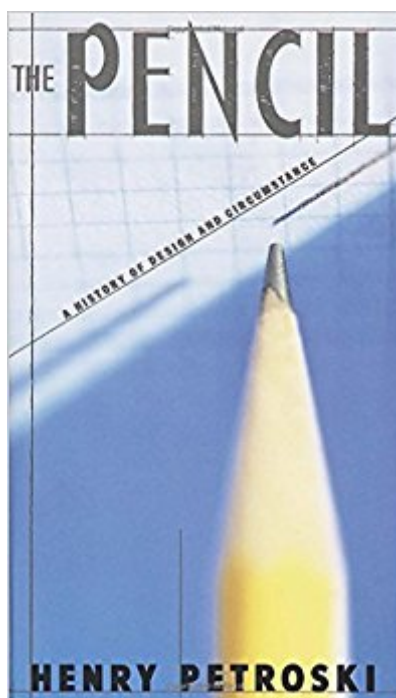


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# The Pencil: A History Of Design And Circumstance



## Synopsis

Henry Petroski traces the origins of the pencil back to ancient Greece and Rome, writes factually and charmingly about its development over the centuries and around the world, and shows what the pencil can teach us about engineering and technology today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Like most other human artifacts, the common pencil, made and sold today by the millions, has a long and complex history. Henry Petroski, who combines a talent for fine writing with a deep knowledge of engineering and technological history, examines the story of the pencil, considering it not only as a thing in itself, but also as an exemplar of all things that are designed and manufactured. Petroski ranges widely in time, discussing the writing technologies of antiquity. But his story really begins in the early modern period, when, in 1565, a Swiss naturalist first described the properties of the mineral that became known as graphite. Petroski traces the evolution of the pencil through the Industrial Revolution, when machine manufacture replaced earlier handwork. Along the way, he looks at some of pencil making's great innovators--including Henry David Thoreau, the famed writer, who worked in his father's pencil factory, inventing techniques for grinding graphite and experimenting with blends of lead, clay, and other ingredients to yield pencils of varying hardness and darkness. Petroski closes with a look at how pencils are made today--a still-imperfect technology that may yet evolve with new advances in materials and design. --Gregory McNamee

This delightful history of the lowly pencil offers a mind-sharpening look at the intersection of engineering, economics and culture. Illustrated. Copyright 1992 Reed Business Information, Inc.

I've read Petroski before, so I was prepared for his discursive style, alternately entertaining and annoying. Almost everything you might want to know about the pencil is here somewhere--perhaps just not where you'd expect it to be. Different readers will bring different agenda to this book, and some may revel in the entire volume as written. Personally, I found the book too long, and I eventually began skimming Petroski's meandering commentary on the connections between engineering, technology, craftsmanship and entrepreneurship, which he probably deemed the ground for writing the book in the first place. Having said that, there is much to enjoy here: great stories about mining Borrowdale "plumbago," the creativeness of Thoreau as pencilmaker, the 1847 discovery by Jean Pierre Alibert of a vast deposit of graphite on the border of Siberia and China, and the trials and successes of Armand Hammer's pencil making venture for the Soviet Union. "Appendix B," a discussion of Petroski's own pencil collecting, is as entertaining as anything in the book.

Somewhat of a boring read. Goes mostly into the history of graphite for pencil leads and the history of wooden pencils rather than the more interesting mechanical pencils. Good for pre-late 19th century information on pencil making and the companies involved, but doesn't get much into the more interesting mechanical pencils of the early 20th through 21st centuries.

A book about the history of pencils. Everything you wanted to know and a whole lot more. I got an ex-library copy and it had only been checked out five times. Locally, the one at our library has only been checked out twice. It is a strangely interesting book, if you are a very curious person. Lots and lots of incidental information. I'd bet that Petroski's classes at Duke were a delight. He appears to have a treasure trove as well as a cesspool of information. A bit repetitive, but fun to read. You will be the only person on your block, maybe even the only person in your town to know this information. Makes you appreciate something we all previously ignored.

Interesting. If you are always looking for the perfect pencil, you'll appreciate this book. Condition was as advertised.

READ THIS!! A subject that seems so simple yet becomes a metaphor for most of what makes the modern world. The author takes what should be a simple mundane subject and makes it a page turner. We all use the pencil but we have little understanding of how it changed the world.

Some stranger that I meet in a coffee shop for a brief moment told me about this book. Who would have thought that the history of pencils would be interesting? It's something we take so much for granted. I was intrigued enough to get it. Great surprise. There is a great deal of history involved with this story. When I finished, I gifted it to a good friend who loves writing with 'old time pencils'. She was thrilled. Book was new as far as I could tell. It seemed untouched. Shipping time was excellent.

Henry Petroski is a national treasure. He has taken ordinary, everyday objects and opened windows into their origins. Altogether fascinating. Entirely worth reading. You won't be sorry.

I thought I was eccentric until I found a fellow Professional Land Surveyor who had this text in his office. Imagine my surprise when I found out we have the same enjoyment of fine writing instruments. If you are a PLS or PE and have an appreciation of history, then you will enjoy this book.

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