

BOOK REVIEW

*Diane K. Tolliver, M.P.A.**

A Review of The Pencil

REFERENCE: Petroski, Henry, *The Pencil, A History of Design and Circumstance*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1990, 434 pp., \$25.00.

Even as the world of forensics becomes increasingly dominated by technology, a relic of the sixteenth century survives and plays an integral part in our daily lives. A product of graphite and clay, the pencil is an engineering marvel combining simplicity and function; yet these same qualities make its impact on our modern world so easy to overlook.

In this book, *The Pencil*, author Henry Petroski transforms the mundane into the romantic, as he takes the reader on a journey through the social, political, and technological contexts and histories of this amazing artifact. From ancient Greece and Rome to the modern factories of today, the pencil continues to make its mark on almost everything we do.

Petroski's style, a curious blend of the didactic and the romantic, rescues a potentially boring subject and presents an interesting and valuable study of the pencil. Despite his efforts, the reader who does not share Petroski's fascination and enthusiasm for the pencil will find himself nodding off on occasion, having to sort through an inordinate amount of minutiae and authorial tangents.

Nevertheless, for the document examiner faced with a lull in the conversation at the next conference, or faced with a pencil question on *Jeopardy*, this 434 page book, copiously and meticulously annotated, provides a wealth of information. The attentive reader, if faced with trial questions or depositions involving the use of a pencil, may well be armed with precisely *the* salient point of trivia needed to establish credibility.

If you have ever wondered why three out of four casings are painted yellow, why there are more hexagonal pencils than round ones, or just exactly what the role of the ferrule is, you'll find this book a valuable addition for your library. You may want to highlight the relevant sections to increase the usefulness of this volume on your reference shelf.

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