

Describe and Draw

Sèvres Porcelain Inkstand, 1759



This magnificent inkstand – a kind of writing set – is much fancier than your average pencil pot! It was made in 1759 by Sèvres, a French royal factory famous for producing porcelain objects. The inkstand belonged to Madame Marie-Adélaïde, who was daughter of King Louis XV of France.

In the 1700s, objects made of porcelain were precious and only very wealthy people could afford to buy them. This inkstand is incredibly elaborate but it's also very useful. Birs and felt tip pens hadn't yet been invented so people would write with a quill: a feather with a trimmed tip, which would be dipped into an inkwell (a pot of ink) and used like a pen.

The inkwell in this stand is hidden within the globe on the right, which is decorated with a map of world. The globe on the left is actually a map of the stars and it conceals a pot of sand, which would be used to soak up extra ink on the page. The crown in the middle of the stand hides a secret too: a small cushion for cleaning up an overly-inky quill. The crown even has a little bell underneath, which Madame Marie-Adélaïde might have rung to call a servant to collect her freshly-written letters.



If you look closely enough you can see the inkwell is a tiny globe map of the world.

Describe and Draw Challenge.

Practice your vocabulary and describing skills by writing a detailed description of this inkstand. Make sure to include lots of detail about the colours and complicated shapes and patterns. Once you've finished, read your description to a friend and ask them to draw the inkstand using only your description. How did they do? Does their drawing look like the inkstand? If it's completely different, make a few changes to your description and try again until you get a better match. Keep practicing with objects from around your home, or why not choose something else from our collection online?