

THE ORIGIN OF MAKEUP

The first cosmetics appeared in ancient Egypt more than 5,000 years ago, and they were worn by both men and women. Eye makeup called kohl was especially popular. It was made with galena, a lead compound, and it was believed to protect the wearer from illness. Cleopatra is famous for her heavy eyeliner, and she is said to have used a red lipstick made from ground beetles.

Many centuries later, in 16th-century England, a pale complexion became a popular trend among the upper class. A mixture of lead and vinegar, known as Venetian ceruse, was applied to the face, and Queen Elizabeth I famously used it to cover her smallpox scars. Her red lips were created with a custom mix of cochineal, gum arabic, egg whites and fig milk. Today we know that lead is poisonous, and some people believe that this makeup may have damaged her health.

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Discussion:

1. Which step in making lipstick surprised you the most, and why?
2. Would you have worn makeup in ancient Egypt or in Elizabethan England? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think people used dangerous ingredients such as lead? Would we make the same mistake today?
4. If you could check one thing on the label of your lipstick, what would it be?
5. Is lipstick just a product, or does it mean something more (confidence, fashion, tradition)? What do you think?
6. Use at least three passive sentences when you answer. Come ready to explain your choice.

Most lipsticks are made in small batches. Three main groups of ingredients are used: oils, waxes and pigments. A typical ratio is 50-70% oil, 20-30% wax and 5-15% pigment, but the exact blends are often kept secret by the companies. The most common waxes are beeswax, carnauba and candelilla, and it is the wax that allows the lipstick to be shaped into a stick.

First, the oil is heated to about 175-185 degrees Fahrenheit (80-85 degrees Celsius). The waxes are melted separately in a large heated kettle, and then the melted wax is blended with the oil. At the same time, the powdered pigment is ground into part of the oil with a special mill, so that the color is smooth and even. After that, the pigment mixture is added to the oil and wax and mixed until it is completely uniform.

Next, the mixture is cooled slightly, and fragrance and preservatives are added. Finally, it is poured into molds and cooled until it becomes solid. Sometimes the surface of each stick is briefly flamed to make it glossy. The pigments that can be used are strictly limited by regulators, such as the FDA in the United States and the authorities in the European Union.

