

## WRITING IN INVISIBLE INK

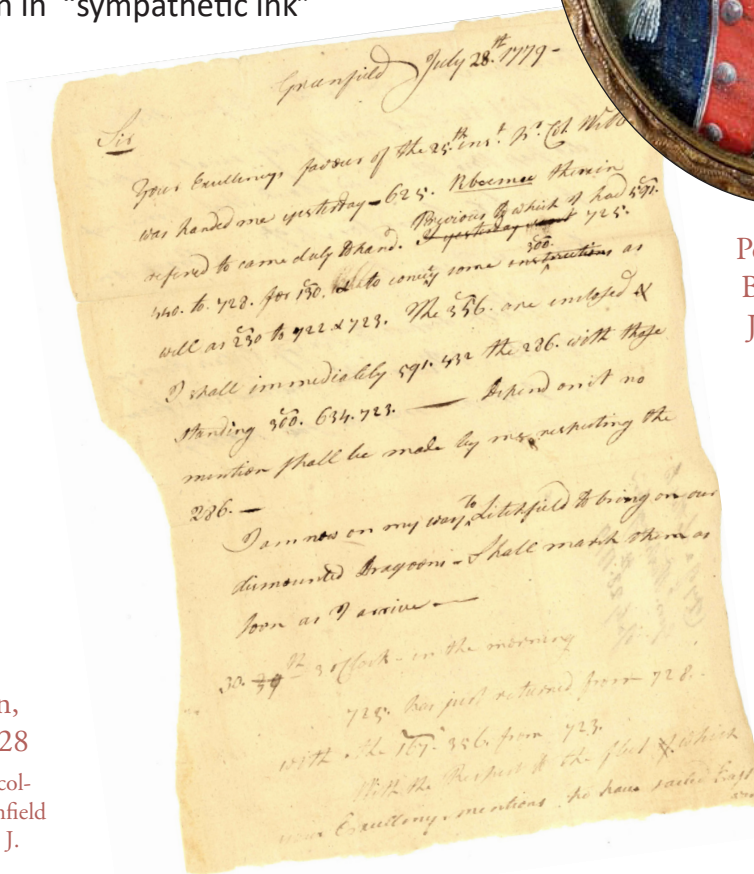
In a letter from July 28th, 1779, spy master Benjamin Tallmadge writes a coded message to General Washington about “phials” of ink that the Culper Spy Ring would use. The ink he is referring to is invisible ink!

Both the British and American armies used invisible ink during the Revolutionary War. There were different types of invisible ink used. Some hidden messages were revealed by heat

Washington wanted his messages even more protected. In 1775, James Jay, the brother of American congressman John Jay, created a system that required the use of two chemicals. This secret message would be written in “sympathetic ink” which, when dry, was invisible. Later, when the reader applied the second chemical or “reagent”, there would be a chemical reaction that revealed the message.



Portrait Miniature of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge by John Ramage (1748-1802)  
Litchfield Historical Society Col-



Tallmadge, Benjamin to Washington, George 1779 July 28

-- Benjamin Tallmadge collection, 1933-19-0, Litchfield Historical Society, Helga J. Ingraham Memorial.

# Write a Letter in Invisible Ink

While James Jay never revealed his secret formula for the invisible ink that the Culper Spy Ring used, below is a fun activity you can try at home to send your own messages in “sympathetic ink”

## Materials:

- 1/2 cup warm water
- 1 Tbl baking soda
- 1/4 cup rubbing alcohol
- 1/2 tsp tumeric
- q-tip or small brush
- paint brush

## To write the secret message:

1. **Make the ‘sympathetic ink’** - mix 1/2 cup of warm water with 1 tablespoon of baking soda.
2. **Write your secret message** - use a small paint brush or q-tip to write you secret message.

TIP: For super spies, use a pen or pencil to write a fake letter or draw a picture to make the message even harder to uncover.

3. **Let the paper dry completely**

## To revel the message:

4. **Make the “reagent”** - mix 1/4 cup of rubbing alcohol with 1/2 teaspoon of tumeric

TIP: Tumeric can be messy, so do this activity someplace easy to clean

5. **Apply the decoding stain** - use a paint brush to paint over the hidden message and writing will become visible.

Share your work with us!

Share your hidden messages with us  
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