

Restoring old paper

Institute: Szegedi Tudományegyetem Gyakorló Gimnázium és
Általános Iskola [Teacher Training Primary and Grammar
School of the University of Szeged, Hungary] class10/IF

Teachers: Veronika Németh, Tamás Kotroczó

Collaborators: Anita Meggyes (professional book and paper restorer)
Museum of Military History, Budapest, Hungary
Erzsébet Korom (leader of the MTA-SZTE Science Education
Research Group, University of Szeged, Hungary)

Age of the students: 16–17 years (Grade 9–10)

Period for implementation: 06.05.2019 – 11.29.2019

Project Diary

AIMS OF THE PROJECT

The project carried out in 2019 concerned the process of restoring paper. Our objectives were to explore the chemistry behind the process and to replicate the procedures of professional paper restoration that could be reasonably adapted to a classroom environment.

The project was designed for 9th grade students. Within the age group, the primary target group were students not specialising in science. Students in 9th grade already have some prior knowledge of acid-base reaction covered in primary school, which they are expected to expand in this grade as specified by the curriculum. The knowledge they already have is needed to understand the concepts of paper ageing and acidification.

The project began in 9th grade and continued during the following academic year. Seven students (Tamás Bíró, Richárd Budai, Csanád Csordás, Zsolt Gergely, Viktor Szabó, Beke Tanács and Bence Tóth- Kása) participated as a part of their after-school activities on a voluntary basis.

The project teacher (Veronika Németh) was assisted by Tamás Kotroczó (pre-service teacher in Chemistry and Biology) in guiding the programme. The pre-service teacher participated in the activity as a part of his pre-service teaching practice allowing him to gain some experience in inquiry-based learning as an after-school activity.

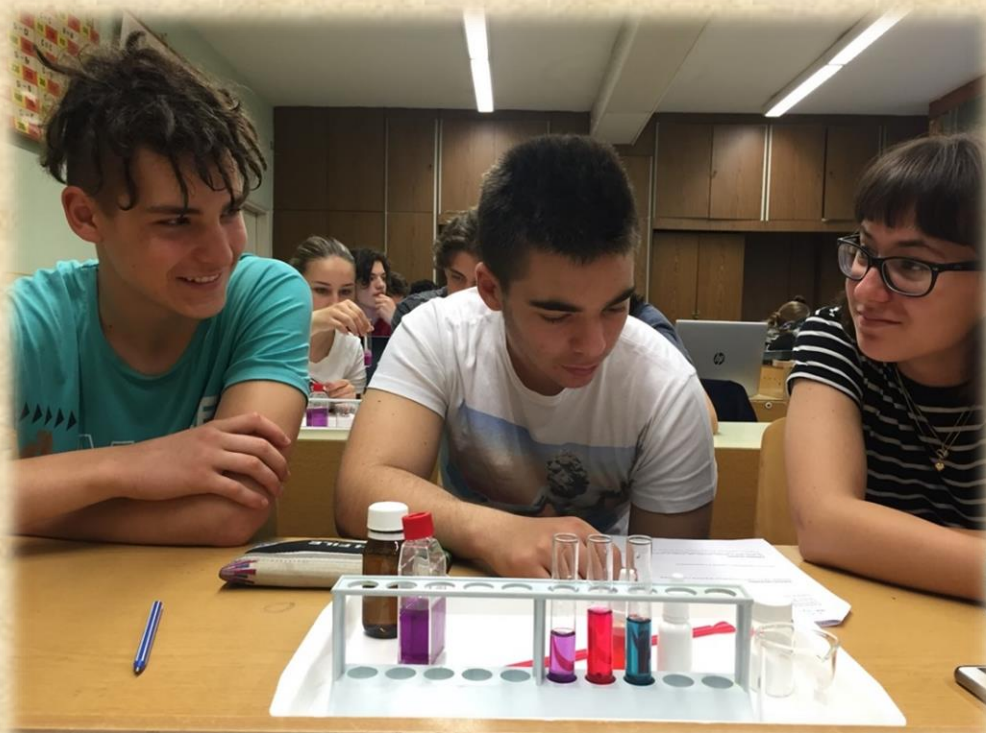
Here comes the students' report.



THE PHASES OF THE PROJECT

I. Theoretical foundations in the classroom

During the first phase of the project, we completed inquiry-based tasks involving everyday problems in order to revise the concepts of chemistry pertinent to paper restoration that we have learnt before.



The tasks were completed in groups; we were free to search the Internet for additional information.



Why does the petal of a Persian speedwell (*Veronica persica*) change colour in response to an ant bite?

When an ant stings, formic acid (HCOOH) is delivered into the petal and causes the colour of the petal to change. What could be the explanation for this phenomenon? Your help is needed to solve this chemical mystery.



What material/compound gives the petals of the Persian speedwell their colour?
Draw the structural formula of this material/compound.

Formulating a hypothesis:

An important step in the process of scientific inquiry is to look for possible explanations for a phenomenon and formulate hypotheses that can be tested. In groups of three, formulate a hypothesis regarding the possible cause of the above phenomenon.

The change in the colour of the petal is caused by ...

What arguments did you have for your hypothesis?

Designing the experiment:

Since an unlimited number of hypotheses could be formulated for any phenomenon and any one of those hypotheses could be correct, we must choose the one that is completely in line with the current state of our knowledge. To corroborate or refute a hypothesis, we need to run experiments. Working in pairs, design an experiment that you can use to test your hypothesis.

Describe the procedures of the experiment. What will you do? In what order?

On the list below, draw a circle around the tools and materials that you may need to carry out your experiment and ask your teacher to supply them.

Spirit lamp, glass rod, tweezers, chemical spoon, glass, Petri dish, test tube, test tube stand, distilled water, bicarbonate of soda, formic acid solution, phenolphthalein indicator, red cabbage decoction, methyl orange indicator, plastic tray

Explain what outcome of the experiment you expect if your hypothesis is correct.

Conducting the experiment:

Carry out the experiment you have designed. Record your observations.

What conclusions can you draw from your observations?

Revising the hypothesis:

The last step is to accept or reject the hypothesis given the experimental results. Decide whether your hypothesis matches the outcome of your experiment or not.

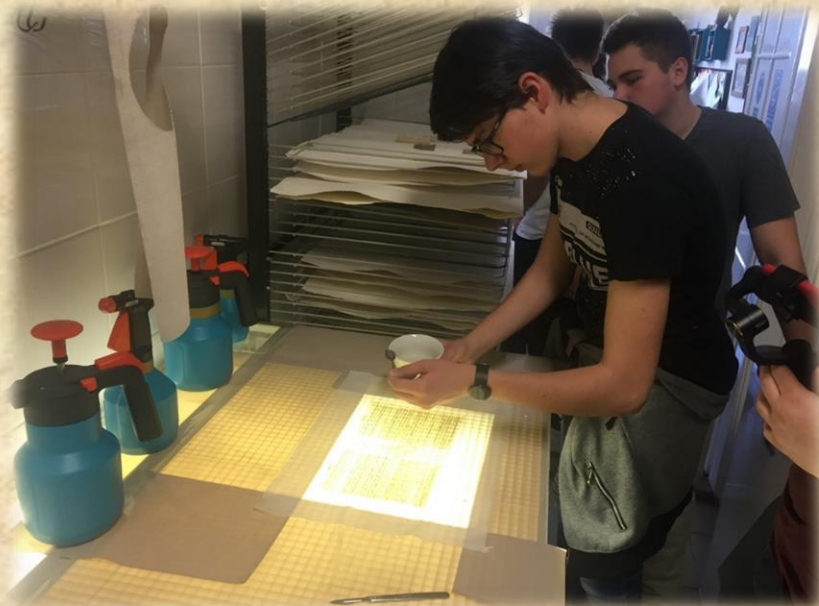
The hypothesis matches/does not match the outcome of the experiment because ...

II. Field trip

After revising what we know about acid-base reaction and discussing the causes of paper ageing, we went on an interesting field trip in Budapest. Anita Meggyes, book and paper restorer at the Museum of Military History showed us a lot of interesting things in connection with paper restoration. We did not arrive unprepared: we had been given a copy of the handbook that trainee paper restorers study from (Beatrix Kastaly, A papír savtalanítása és fehéritése [The deacidification and bleaching of paper]). Since we had studied the pertinent sections, we were confident in asking questions from the professional restorer. We also had the opportunity in the workshop to give a hand at some steps of the process.



Zsolt is measuring the pH value of old pieces of paper using a portable pH meter.



Viktor is restoring a corner of an old, torn piece of paper with paper paste over a light table.

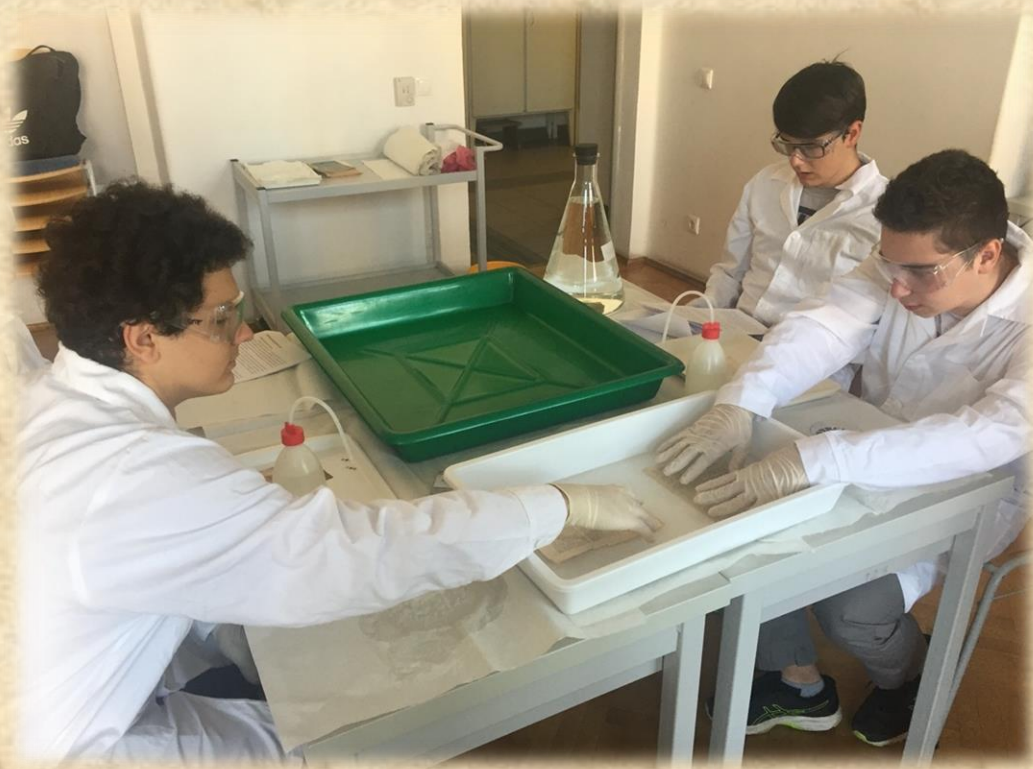
III. Restoration workshop at the school



After the field trip, equipped with our newly acquired knowledge, we set out to restore paper ourselves. We kept restoration records of every major step of the process as we had learnt on our field trip. We enjoyed learning by doing together.



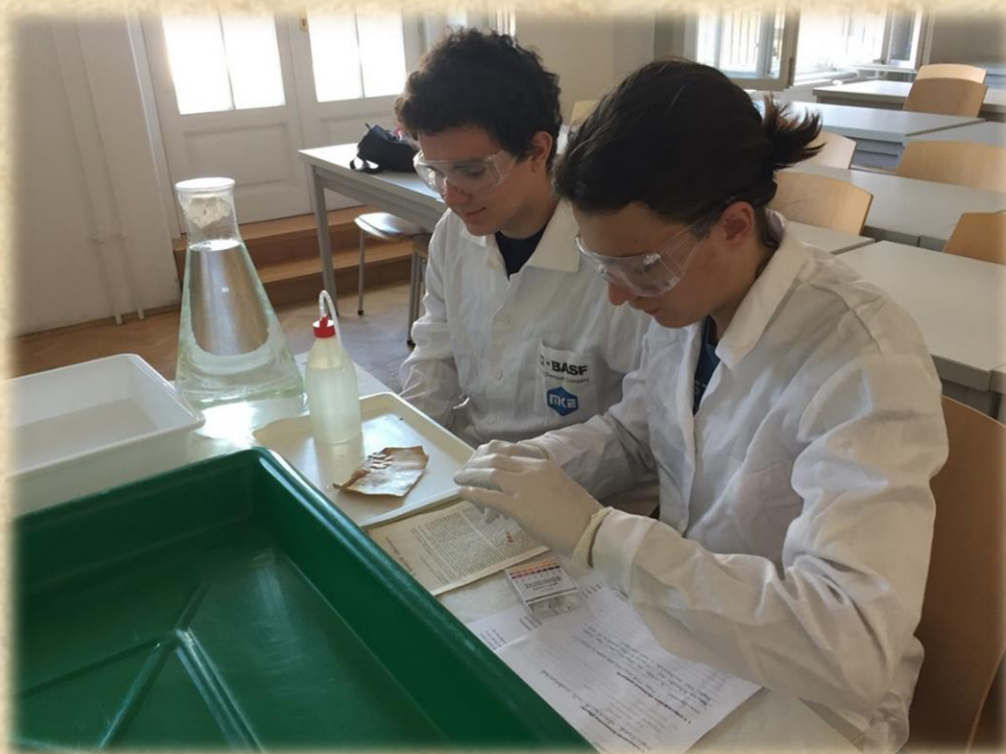
Bence and Csanád first measured the pH value of the old sheets of paper using various indicators. Every group found that the sheets were acidic ($\text{pH}_{\text{paper}} \approx 5.5$).



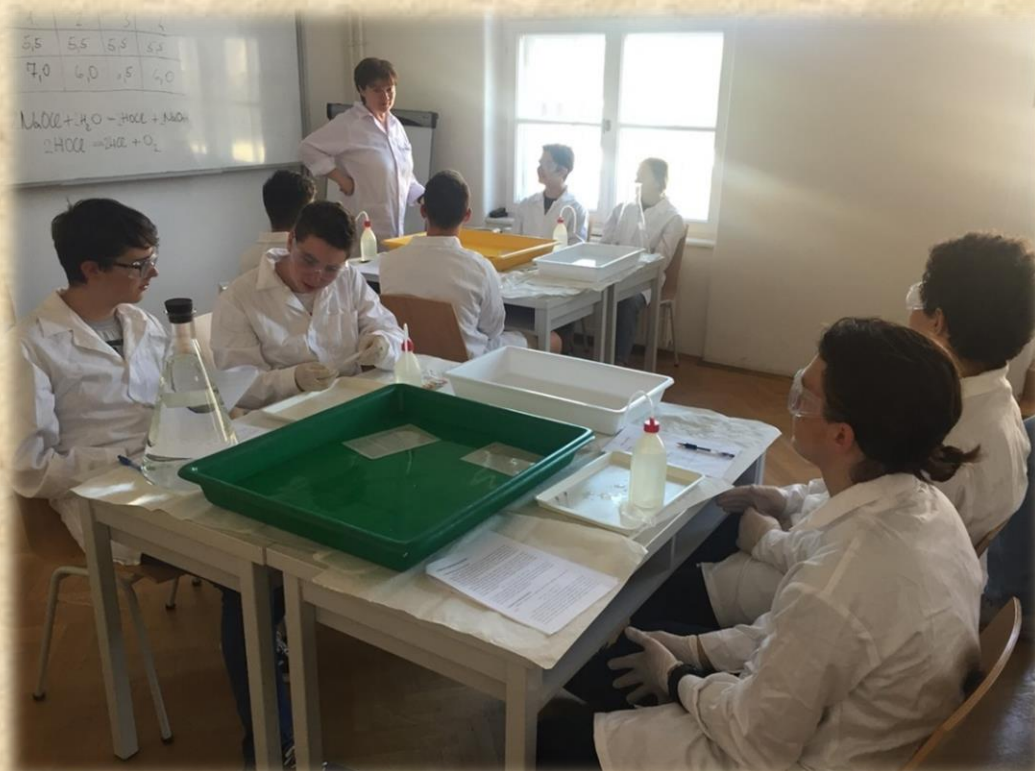
Zsolt and Richárd soaked the yellowed sheets in lukewarm tap water in order to remove water soluble impurities from them.



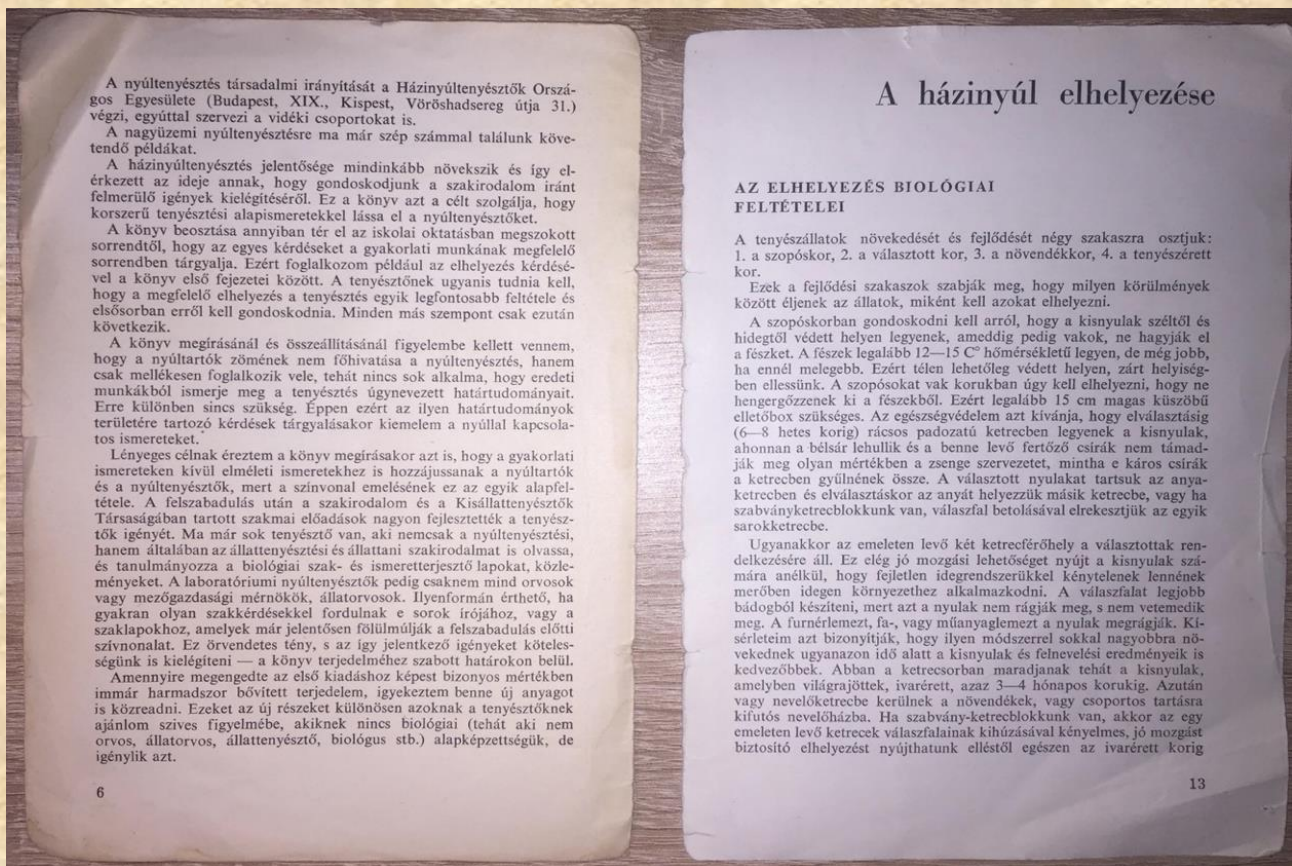
After washing them in warm water, we transferred the sheets into a $\text{Ca}(\text{OH})_2$ solution in order to deacidify them.



Following the step of deacidification, Beke and Zsolt measured the pH value of the sheets once again using indicators. They found that the acidity of the sheets was reduced ($\text{pH}_{\text{paper}} \approx 7$).



Following the step of deacidification, we used NaOCl solution to bleach the yellowed sheets.



A comparison of the yellowed sheet on the left with the whitened sheet on the right clearly shows the effectiveness of the bleaching process.

IV. Reporting the results

The fourth phase of our work, the recording and reporting of the outcome of the process, was also very important. We learnt to report the process of experimenting in a way to make it comprehensible to others and thus replicable. We learnt what makes a good presentation and how to deliver it. Our work was fruitful. The presentation we created about our work – and delivered in front of a larger audience at an event for secondary school students held at the Faculty of Science and Information Technology at the University of Szeged – was well received.

The students' views on the project



Bence Tóth-Kása

“The project allowed me to get to know several chemical reactions previously unfamiliar to me and I even had an opportunity to learn something about history when we were in Budapest, in connection with a restored letter by Kossuth, for instance (Lajos Kossuth, Hungarian statesman 1802-1894). This was the most interesting part for me and the experiments that we could carry out under laboratory conditions. In my opinion this method of learning helps to bring students closer to chemistry and to make it more interesting. The project completely met my expectations, largely thanks to the exciting experiments. I benefitted a great deal from participating in the project since I could increase my knowledge and had first-hand experience of what chemistry was really like, thanks to the experiments.”

“What did I learn from the project?”

- ✧ A lot of things; for instance, how to bleach paper and reduce its acidity.

What did I find the most interesting part?

- ✧ When we went on the field trip and saw in the Museum of Military History how paper was restored.

What did I not like about the project?

- ✧ I think that we had too little of the practical part when we could work with the sheets of paper.

What was my favourite part?

- ✧ When we bleached the sheets.”



Richárd Budai

The teachers' views on the project



Tamás Kotroczó

“Both the students and I really enjoyed the work we were doing during the project. The experience of inquiry-based learning, and the project-based learning was very useful, and I will be able to make good use of it during my future career. Based on these experiences, I can confidently claim that I will try to use these methods as frequently as possible in my teaching, since students greatly enjoy these non-traditional methods of learning.”



Veronika Németh

“I killed two birds with one stone! My trainee teacher, Tamás, whose compulsory teaching practice I was mentoring, learnt a new method, and my secondary school students also learnt something new.

Tamás worked independently and did a good job guiding the students. I hope that he will be keen to use instruction methods based on active student participation when he has completed his training.”