



Background Information



For most of the Middle Ages, books were rare, expensive, and often beautiful. In the early years of the Medieval period, technological deficiencies prevented the efficient reproduction of books. Therefore, talented and gifted artists and writers were solely responsible for the production of texts. The majority of these documents were written on parchment (made of calf, sheep, or goat skin), and select few were written on vellum.

Illuminated manuscripts originally referred to illustrations within a book that were decorated with gold or silver. These artistic drawings were said to “embellish and illuminate” the text. In modern iterations, an illuminated manuscript is often considered to be any ornately decorated text. During the Medieval period, these manuscripts were primarily found in monasteries, where monks worked to hand-craft the documents. This proved to be a very time consuming and difficult task, and over time, scribes and illuminators were soon utilized to assist with production.

When making a book, it was very common for a scribe to leave a space at the beginning of a section or chapter for a large illuminated letter. These letters decorated with images that related to the text. **Illuminated letters** often included fanciful flowers, creatures, and abstract designs. The first printed books, produced from the printing press, had hand drawn illuminations as well. However, as printing became more common, illuminating the text by hand went out of fashion.

Inquiry Overview

Through the creation of individual journals and illustration of an illuminated letter, students will explore the intricacies involved in Medieval book-making. They will also reflect on the efficiency, intricacy, and limitations of this process. Students will utilize this journal throughout their exploration of the Medieval curriculum by placing completed student pages within the journal itself. At the completion of the curriculum, students will review and compare their journals as a class.

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UNIT #1: ILLUMINATING THE JOURNEY

NOTES

Activity

Activity: Illuminating the Journey

Estimated Time: 60 minutes

Objectives:

- Experience the art of creating illuminated letters.
- Evaluate the procedural implications and the importance of bookmaking in the Middle Ages.

Standards:

Common Core State Standards ELA/Literacy: RH.6-8.7, SL.6-8.4, SL.6-8.5, SL.6-8.6

Suggested Inquiry Approach:

Begin this unit by first evaluating the students' prior knowledge with medieval manuscripts and/or books. Pose the following questions to generate a whole class discussion:

- ✓ **Have you ever seen a very old book? What does it look like?**
- ✓ **Manuscripts, or books, that were produced during the Medieval period often contained an illuminated letter. What do you think this is?**
- ✓ **What do you think the illuminated letters symbolized?**
- ✓ **How do you think these books with illuminated letters were made?**

Allow time for the students to explain their ideas, and encourage them to give a detailed explanation of how these documents are written and illustrated.

A PowerPoint with various illuminated letters and manuscripts is provided in the Content Classroom!

Next, show the students the Power Point included in the *Teacher Resources* section of the Content Classroom. This slide show contains examples of illuminated letters and manuscripts graciously supplied with permission from Syracuse University. During this time, students may be eager to critique and dissect the images to look for artistic characteristics and meanings of the symbols. Encourage students to share their ideas.

Illuminating the Journey

Materials:

per student:

- 1 – Copy of Student Pages
- 2 – Pieces of Tag Board
- 2 – Brass Fasteners
- Assorted Art Supplies

for the teacher:

- *Computer with Projector*

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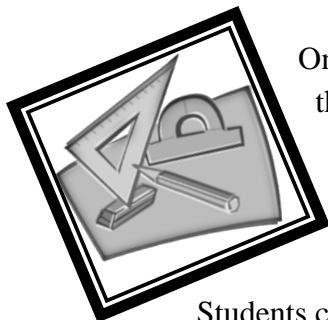
UNIT #1: ILLUMINATING THE JOURNEY

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Inform the students that they will be creating their own manuscript as they complete the Medieval STEM curriculum. In this journal, they will place the student pages for each activity, as well as any additional pages containing materials or projects.

Begin by providing each student with the appropriate materials, including the student pages titled, **Illuminating Your Journey**. Select one volunteer to read the first page aloud. Then, as a class, brainstorm ideas for symbols that could be used in their designs, and discuss how they will create these designs using the materials provided. You may choose to record these ideas on a whiteboard or chart paper for students to use as a visual.

Next, allow time for the students to make a rough draft of their design. Each design should be unique and meaningful to the student, either expressing personal characteristics or acceptable images that they associate with the Middle Ages. They may also create this illuminated letter as the ornate letters that were popular during this time, and include interesting details such as flowers and greenery.



Once a rough draft has been completed, make available all of the necessary materials, and allow the students to complete their designs on the tag board. Once the designs have been created, the students should share their design with the class, and explain the symbols they chose in their design.

Students can then prepare their book for the remainder of the Medieval STEM curriculum by punching two holes in the cover and attaching subsequent student pages with the brass fasteners.



Debrief:

Have a discussion regarding this particular process in book-making:

- *Was the process long or complicated? Explain your thoughts.*
- *Compare the process of creating one illuminated letter to that of drawing multiple illuminations throughout an entire book: How much, time and effort would it be worth to create these images?*
- *Why do you think the Medieval society valued such drawings?*
- *Do you think that today's technology and machinery would allow for such intricate illuminate letters? Why or why not?*



illuminating Your Journey

*I*ncipit. This word was often placed at the beginning of Medieval manuscripts. It means "here beginneth." To the typical Medieval person who could not read, books must have seemed mysterious. After all, how could symbols on a page have any relationship to objects, people, or events in real life? Books were rare, expensive, and often beautiful, and some cost more than works of art. For example, *The Codex Aureus*, was so valuable that when it was stolen by the Vikings in the 9th Century, its owners paid a ransom for its return.

*I*n creating books, the medieval scribes would leave space on the pages for decorations, or "illuminations," to be painted. These illuminations were ornate and often contained intricate and meaningful symbols related to the text. It was very common for scribes to leave a space at the beginning of a chapter for a large illuminated letter.

*A*s you begin your journey through the Middle Ages, you will construct a book to record your explorations. On the cover of the book you will create an illuminated letter of your own. As you create your letter, you will want to think about what symbols, decorations, or drawings you want to include. Make it unique!

- Use the tag board provided - two pieces, one for the front cover and one for the back cover. The illuminated letter will be placed on the front cover.
- You are also provided two brass fasteners to place through the covers, student pages and other materials you will include in your book.
- Throughout your Medieval STEM journey, you will receive many student pages. Be sure to collect them and place in the book as soon as they are completed. At the end of the journey, you will get a chance to explore all your "travels" through time!

Incipit. Let the journey begin...



illuminating Your Journey

Brainstorm a list of symbols, drawings, or decorations that you want to use for your illuminated letter:

Practice drawing the symbols that you will use, and create a draft of the letter that you will choose to illuminate. You may choose to research different font types before creating your design.