

LESSON TITLE: Illuminated Text, Gilded Letters

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Grade Level: MS HS University

Background Information:

Illumination of a manuscript means that the text is decorated and embellished with beautiful color or precious metals. Particularly in the Middle Ages, religious manuscripts were illuminated and sometimes gilded with thin sheets of gold or silver. Illuminated manuscripts could be used to glorify God, convey information to the illiterate, and demonstrate a patron's wealth. In this workshop, we will use gold leaf, double-sided adhesive and colored pencil on black card stock to create a small illuminated letter. Participants can use an initial from their name, the first letter of a favorite poem, or choose from letters of various fonts that will be provided.

Content Standards:

2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION:

2.1 Solve a visual arts problem that involves the effective use of the elements of art and the principles of design.

3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT:

3.3 Identify and describe trends in the visual arts and discuss how the issues of time, place, and cultural influence are reflected in selected works of art.

Common Core Content Standards addressed with the lesson:

Craft and Structure:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.7

Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

Learning Objectives/Goals/Essential Understandings:

To learn how manuscripts were made before the invention of printing by creating a hand-made illuminated letter.

Vocabulary:

Illumination, text, manuscript, gild, gold leaf, precious metal, burnish, Middle Ages

Materials:

-140 lb. black cardstock cut to 4"x4", one per student

-Mona Lisa Simple Leaf, gold (Blick #27021-2070) cut to 2-3/4"x2-3/4", one per student

-Graphix Double Tack Mounting Film (Blick #23205-1005) cut to 2-1/2"x2-1/2", one per student

-Colored pencils, assorted colors

-Scissors, one per student

- Graphite pencils, one per student
- Paint brushes to remove excess gold leaf
- Examples of various lettering styles (such as: Roman, Uncial, Gothic) for reference or for tracing printed out (2-1/2" high) and cut out

Motivation:

Show examples such as *Book of Hours* and *Book of Kells*.

Show step-by-step procedure for creating illuminated manuscript:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illuminated_manuscript#/media/File:Illumination_execution.gif (Lucia Cosma, Density Design Research Lab)

Procedure:

1. Use a pencil to draw or trace your letter onto the Double Tack paper. Letters do not need to be reversed. Cut the letter out.
2. Put your cut-out letter on the card stock and lightly mark its position with pencil dots on top, bottom, and sides.
3. Peel the release paper off of the **BACK SIDE** of your letter. Use your pencil dots to place the letter on the card stock in the proper position. Once the letter is positioned, it can't be moved.
4. Burnish the Double Tack letter onto the card stock by rubbing it with your fingers, then peel off the **TOP** release paper.
5. Place Simple Leaf gold sheet onto letter with shiny gold side facing down. Burnish with fingers until edges of letter become visible through Simple Leaf release paper.
6. Peel off Simple Leaf release paper and brush away excess with paint brush. Scraps can be saved.
7. Use colored pencils create ornamentation, decoration, and patterns around the letter.

Assessment and/or Evaluation:

Sample reflection questions:

1. How is the amount of work that goes into making a book by hand reflected in how much people value the book and the information it contains (as compared to how easily we can access information now, with printed books, the Internet, etc.)?
2. Compare and contrast the role of illuminated manuscripts in the Middle Ages with modern comics/manga/graphic novels. Do they serve a similar function? Does the fact that many copies can easily be made now make the latter less valuable?
3. How do illustrations (and illumination) make a text more easily understood?

Extensions:

This lesson is meant to be completed in a one-hour time frame, and therefore focuses on a single letter, but if a longer time period is available, students could illuminate a poem (their own or a favorite piece), or make a series of illuminations, such as an accordion book. Students could also experiment with using other (more traditional) materials, such as vellum and ink, in place of the cardstock and colored pencils.