

SELF-LED ACTIVITY

DESIGN AN ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPT



KS3

Recommended for

KS3 (History, Art)

Learning objectives

- Understand the type of work that Carthusian monks carried out at the priory.
- Understand the status of monks within the community as learned members of the upper sections of society.
- Recognise the significance of illuminated decoration and create their own impression of medieval art.

Time to complete

20–30 minutes

SUMMARY

The monks at Mount Grace were renowned for their high level of education. The priory had many hundreds of books in its library. Some monks became famous for their writing, for example the first prior, Nicholas Love, who was a very important author and translator. His work 'Myrroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ', was one of the most popular devotional works in England in the 15th and early 16th centuries. Love wrote that he produced his work 'at þe instance & þe prayer of some deuoute soules' for 'symple creatures'. He wrote for an audience of men and women, literate and illiterate, religious and lay.

One of the monks' daily manual labour tasks they could carry out was illuminating manuscripts. They used oyster shells to hold their pigment. The key colours were red, blue, green, yellow, white, black, silver and gold. The use of gold was highly prized, as it demonstrated the glory of God's work. Illuminations were created on parchment or vellum (calfskin) and etched into it with a quill feather.

Illustrated borders and lettering brought the text to life for readers. The colour and detail were also a statement of great skill, and rich patrons would commission manuscripts from monasteries to demonstrate their wealth.

The students can use the template on p.52 to design their own illuminated manuscript.



Oyster shells used to hold pigment.

MORE LEARNING IDEAS

Students can explore the British Libraries' [manuscripts archive](http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts) (www.bl.uk/manuscripts) to find examples of manuscripts surviving from Mount Grace Priory such as 'The Book of Margery Kempe'. Kempe was an important late 14th/early 15th-century mystic and pilgrim whose book describes her religious devotion and her many pilgrimages.

DESIGN YOUR OWN ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPT

An illuminated manuscript was decorated to help bring the text to life for the reader. It also showed off the great skill of the monk who decorated it. Look at an example of a medieval manuscript and then design your own here:

