

Inspiration: Book of hours



Book of Hours (Use of York)

In this activity sheet you'll learn about medieval manuscripts, and particularly about books of hours. You'll also see a beautiful example of one of a *Book of Hours (Use of York)* on the Mirror of the World website.

In the spotlight
Book of Hours (Use of York)
York, England
late 15th century

Words to know
manuscript, scribe, parchment, vellum, illuminated, medieval

Pages to visit

<http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/>

<http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/inspiration/manuscripts/index.php>

<http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/inspiration/manuscripts/bookofhours.php>

Books before printing

A **manuscript** is a book written by hand. Before printing was invented, all writing was done by hand, so when people needed a copy of a book, they had to pay a **scribe** to copy it out for them. Of course this made books very expensive, and only the richest people could afford them. The pages were made of **parchment** (the skins of sheep, cows and goats) or **vellum** (the skins of younger animals).

In **medieval** Europe, many Christian monks were scribes and most of the books were religious books, like the Bible, or books of psalms or prayers. They often made **illuminated** manuscripts, which were beautifully decorated manuscripts, with illustrations in the borders of the page and around capital letters. Some illuminations used real silver and gold. Other paints and inks were made using plants, bones, charcoal, egg, and different earths, metals and minerals.

Activity 1 – Get interactive!

Look at the *Book of Hours (Use of York)* page on the Mirror of the World website

http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/inspiration/manuscripts/book_of_hours.php

Read the text and explore the interactive display by following the Gallery of Images link on the left-hand side of the page.

Question time 1

Once you have you have finished looking at the *Book of Hours (Use of York)* see if you can answer the following questions:

1. What year was it made?

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2. Where was it made?

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3. Who was it made for?

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4. Why do you think illuminated manuscripts were slow to produce and expensive to make?

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5. Describe some of the pictures. What activities are the people doing?

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Activity 2 – The missing month

Did you notice which month was missing when you were exploring the Gallery of Images?

This *Book of Hours (Use of York)* is over 500 years old. Unfortunately many old books are destroyed and some have missing pages. See if you can draw the missing month. Think carefully about what they would have done at that time of year. And remember, it is the northern hemisphere, so May will be Spring. Use the website images to give you an idea about the medieval style of drawing.

Activity 3 – The making of a manuscript

Visit the following website to how manuscripts were made:

http://www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/pharos/sections/making_art/index_manuscript.html

The Importance of Books of Hours in the medieval world

What were books of hours?

Books of hours were special Christian prayer books that people could carry with them. They usually contained a calendar, like a diary, which had special religious dates and different prayers or psalms that could be read each day. They also had pictures for each month showing activities for different times of the year. Some also included information about zodiac signs. People read prayers from the book at many different times of the day – when leaving the house, entering a church, or at night.

If you were very rich you could pay someone to illustrate and decorate your own personal book of hours. Some of them were illuminated with real gold and others had jewels on them! Some books took months to complete.

Who used them?

Books of hours were extremely popular in medieval Europe. Almost everyone who could afford them in Europe had one. Before the invention of printing, only royalty, nobility and the rich could afford to have their own personal Book of Hours. The owners of the books often personalised them by adding their own notes and names into prayers. Some of them also included portraits of the owners.

Illustrations like the ones that you can see featured on the Mirror of the World website's *Book of Hours (Use of York)* are very valuable to historians. They tell us a lot about day-to-day activities in medieval society. Books of hours show us the different labours of each month and scenes of traditional village life. Life was very different then - there were fewer people and life moved at a slower pace. There was no electricity, no water on tap in houses, no television, and no cars.

Question time 2

Look at the pictures on the Mirror of the World website once more and describe some ways in which medieval life is different to life today.

1. What extra jobs would you have to do?

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2. Where would your food come from?

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3. What do you think is similar about medieval life and life today?

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4. What did medieval people do in each season of the year? There are many clues in the pictures to help you. Remember though, the seasons in the northern hemisphere are not in the same months as the seasons in the southern hemisphere (for example, when it's summer in England, it's winter in Australia).

Summer	Autumn
Winter	Spring

5. Estimate how long it would take to write a book of hours by hand with such beautiful writing and pictures.

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6. Why did people have a book of hours?

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7. Do people have similar books today (books that help people to think about their life and help them with day-to-day things)?

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8. Books of hours were precious and sacred objects that people carried around with them. What's the most valuable thing that you carry around with you?

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Activity 3 – Getting into the medieval mindset

Learn more about medieval life on this website. It was made by students for students.

<http://library.thinkquest.org/J002390/>

Activity 4 – Write like a medieval scribe

Imagine you are a medieval scribe. Describe how you would go about making a manuscript.

- What materials would you use?
- Where would you get your materials from?
- What tools would you need?
- What special skills would you have?
- What is the manuscript about?
- Who are you making the manuscript for?

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Activity 5 – Get interactive!

Have a look at some more medieval manuscripts on the Mirror of the World website. The *Antiphonarium* and *De Musica* can be found in the Manuscripts section. Look for the Zoom & Pan links on the left-hand side of the web pages. These take you to an interactive display that allows you to look very closely at the fine details of the manuscript.

<http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/inspiration/manuscripts/antiphonarium.php>

http://www.mirroroftheworld.com.au/inspiration/manuscripts/de_musica.php

Activity 6 – Create your own manuscript

Can you write like a medieval monk? Have a go at writing and drawing in this style. It takes a lot of patience and creative flair. That's one reason why it took so long to make a books of hours.

To see more examples of illuminated text and medieval images, go to the Retrokat website

<http://retrokat.com/medieval/>

Now try writing your name in illuminated capital letter and medieval script.

Did you know?

A Book of Hours, made in 1505, and only 8cm high, was sold in 1999 for around A\$20 million - a world record price for an illuminated manuscript!