

Lesson Plan: Become a Medieval Scribe!

Materials Needed

- **Books:** At least one engaging, illustrated book about medieval times. Suggestions include:
 - *Castle* by David Macaulay
 - *A Medieval Feast* by Alike
 - *The Usborne Book of Knights and Castles*
 - Any age-appropriate picture book or encyclopedia with clear images of medieval life and art.
- **Paper:** A few sheets of thick white or cream-colored paper (cardstock works well).
- **"Aging" Supplies (Optional but fun):** A used, damp black tea bag and paper towels.
- **Drawing & Coloring Tools:**
 - Pencils and erasers
 - Fine-tipped black marker or pen
 - Colored pencils or markers
 - A metallic gold and/or silver pen or marker (essential for the "illumination"!)

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Identify three key features of an illuminated manuscript (e.g., decorative initial, illustrations, borders).
- Summarize a fact or short story about medieval life in their own words.
- Design and create a single, original page of an illuminated manuscript that combines text and illustration.

Lesson Procedure

Part 1: The Spark - Discovering the Manuscript (10 minutes)

1. **Engage with a Question:** Start by asking, "Imagine you lived 800 years ago, long before printers or computers. If you wanted to write down a very important story or fact, how would you make the book look special and beautiful to show its importance?"
2. **Introduce the Scribe:** Explain that in medieval times, people called **scribes** and **illuminators** were artists who copied books by hand. They didn't just write the words; they turned the pages into works of art called **illuminated manuscripts**. The word "illuminate" means to light up, and they used gold and silver to make the pages shine.
3. **Book Exploration:** Look through your selected book(s) together. Hunt for any pictures that show writing or books. If the book has artistic borders or decorated letters, point them out. Specifically, look for:
 - **Historiated Initials:** The huge, fancy first letter of a chapter that often has a little scene or character drawn inside it.
 - **Marginalia:** The cool little drawings, doodles, and scenes in the margins (borders) of the page.
 - **Rich Colors and Gold Leaf:** The bright colors and shiny gold that made the pages glow.

Part 2: The Quest - Finding Your Story (15 minutes)

1. **Read for Inspiration:** Read a short section from one of the books. Focus on a topic the student

finds exciting, like how a knight's armor works, what was served at a feast, how a castle was defended, or a legend about a dragon.

2. **Choose a Focus:** Ask the student to choose the single most interesting fact or the main idea from what you just read. What do they want to record on their own special page?
3. **Become the Author:** Help the student rephrase that fact or story into their own words. Aim for one to three short sentences. For example, "A knight's helmet was called a helm and had only small slits to see through," or "At a royal feast, they ate roasted swan and a sweet pudding called a tart." This is the text for their manuscript.

Part 3: The Scribe's Workshop - Creating Your Page (30-40 minutes)

1. **Prepare the "Parchment" (Optional):** Gently wipe the damp (not dripping) tea bag across the paper in broad strokes. Blot any wet spots with a paper towel. Let it air dry for a few minutes (or use a hairdryer on low for faster results). The paper will now look like old, valuable parchment.
2. **Plan the Layout:** Using a pencil, have the student lightly sketch the layout on their "parchment."
 - Where will the big, decorated first letter go?
 - Where will the rest of the text be?
 - Where will they add their drawings in the margins? Maybe a castle along the bottom or a dragon winding up the side?
3. **Write the Text:** Carefully write the sentence(s) from Part 2 onto the page using a pencil first, then tracing over it with the fine-tipped black marker. Encourage them to try writing in a slightly fancier, "medieval" style.
4. **Illustrate and Illuminate!** This is the most creative part.
 - **The Initial:** Draw the first letter of the text large and fill it with patterns, vines, or even a tiny picture.
 - **The Margins:** Draw the chosen illustrations (knight, castle, feast food, dragon) in the borders.
 - **Add Color:** Use colored pencils or markers to fill in the drawings.
 - **Make It Shine:** The final, most important step! Use the metallic gold and silver pens to trace parts of the initial, add shiny dots to the borders, or color in special objects like a crown or a sword. This is what officially "illuminates" the manuscript.

Part 4: The Royal Presentation - Sharing Your Work (5 minutes)

1. **Present the Manuscript:** Ask the student to present their finished page as if they were a scribe presenting it to a king or queen.
2. **Explain the Art:** Have them read the text aloud and explain why they chose their specific illustrations. ("I drew a dragon in the margin because my story is about a brave knight.")
3. **Display with Pride:** Find a special place to display the finished illuminated manuscript.

Differentiation and Extensions

- **For Extra Support:**
 - Provide a pre-drawn light outline of a large initial for the student to color in.
 - Write the sentence for them to trace.
 - Offer simple medieval shapes (shields, swords, simple castles) as inspiration for the marginalia.
- **For an Extra Challenge:**
 - Encourage the student to create a full border around the entire page.
 - Have them write a short, original poem or a longer story (4+ sentences) about a medieval character.

- Challenge them to research and include a "drollery" – a funny or fantastical human-animal hybrid creature – in their margins, a common feature in real manuscripts.

Assessment

Observe the student's process and review their final artwork. Use this simple checklist for feedback:

- The page includes a large, decorated initial letter.
- The page includes text related to a medieval topic learned from the book.
- The page includes illustrations in the margins or around the text.
- The page uses a metallic color to "illuminate" it.
- The student can clearly explain what their manuscript shows and says.