

Name:

Hour:

Illuminated Letter



Illuminated manuscripts are handwritten books created during the **Middle Ages** that incorporated pictures and decorations. The illustrations were painted in bright colors with **accents of gold and silver** to light up, or “illuminate,” the page. Many illuminated manuscripts were religious texts like the Bible or prayer books. The illuminations were created as a form of worship. Painters who created illuminations demonstrated great skill.

Leaf from a Missal, was created around 1290

In the early Middle Ages, illuminated manuscripts were made in **monasteries**. As more people learned to read and own books, usually the very wealthy, manuscripts were created in universities. Producing illuminated manuscripts was an expensive and **complex process**. All parts of the book were done by hand, and a number of craftsmen were involved. There were parchment-makers to prepare the animal hides for the vellum pages, scribes to write the text, painters to create the illustrations, and bookbinders to assemble the books.

A common form of illumination was the embellishment of **initial letters** within a text. As the scribe copied the text by hand, he would leave large spaces open for the painter to create the illuminated letters. These **initial letters were enlarged and heavily decorated**. The letters were often decorated with details and elements from the story on the page. For the illiterate, this helped them to understand the content of the story. Most illuminated manuscripts also included **ornate and elaborate borders** to enhance their beauty.



Leaf from a Manuscript: **The Birth of the Virgin in an Initial G**, ca. 1375

Assignment

For this project you will be creating an Illuminated Letter that represents **you** or **someone important to you**. You may choose a **first or last initial** to create your design.

1. To begin, find a few lettering styles that you like from the resources available, or design your own. Create three block-style letters that might work for your design. Circle your favorite.

--	--	--

2. Step two is to brainstorm a list of things that remind you of that person. If you are creating an autobiographical piece, make a list of your hobbies, things that you collect, etc.

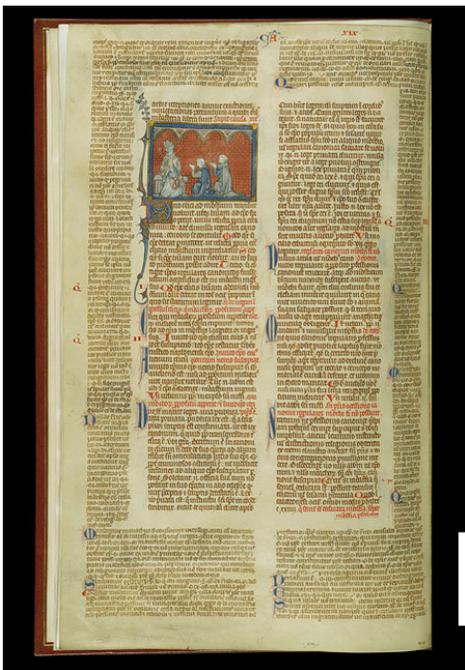
--

3. Step 3 is to create some **stylized** drawings of the items you listed in step 2. Create a minimum of 5 drawings on scratch paper. To **stylize** a drawing, simplify the object to its basic parts. In other words, use less detail to show the same thing.
4. Now it is time to put the pieces together for your design. On a piece of manila paper or newsprint, create a larger version of the letter you are representing, leaving room for a border. Add some of your stylized drawings inside the letter.
 - Consider having some drawings reach outside and overlap the boundaries of the letter to create more interest.

- Keep the drawing **balanced** and don't forget to fill the space!
5. Add a decorative border to frame your illuminated letter. You may modify one that you have found, or design your own.
 - Consider having some of the drawings or parts of the letter overlap the border.
 6. When your design is complete, you will be ready to transfer it to the final paper. You may use a lightbox or a window to trace your design if you'd like.
 7. Next use watercolors to add color to your design. We will practice several techniques that you can incorporate into your illuminated letter.
 8. Use an Extra Fine Point Sharpie or pen & ink to outline and define your drawing. Use gold or silver ink as an accent to "illuminate" your design.

Vocabulary

- Balance:** arranging the elements of an artwork so that no one part overpowers the other; all aspects carry equal weight
- Assymetry:** informal balance; two different elements carry equal weight
- Overlap:** objects in front of others appear closer to the viewer
- Illumination:** illustration within a manuscript
- Stylize:** simplify an object to its most basic parts
- Autobiographical:** about the creator/artist



Bifolium (and detail), from a Manuscript of the **Decretals of Gratian**, ca. 1290