

Shaftesbury Abbey Education Days

Calligraphy and Illuminated Letters



Activity Objectives:

- To use reed pens to practise calligraphy
- To design and decorate an illuminated letter using gold and colours appropriate to the medieval period

Background:

Books were rare during the medieval times because they were handwritten by monks and nuns and took a long time to complete. Decoration on the medieval manuscripts included small painted scenes, intricate borders and ornate chapter letters. All were aimed to glorify the written word of God. For a book to be truly illuminated (lit up), it had to be decorated with gold.

Instructions:

Calligraphy

1. Use the reed pen to practise writing different letters and words on the practice paper.

Tip: Don't use too much ink on the reed - dip the pen little and often!!

2. Copy out the beginning of St Edward's prayer (which was a prayer recited at Shaftesbury Abbey) using the reed pen and calligraphy style.
3. If time make a small book to contain your calligraphy

Medieval Alphabet

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg
Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn
Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt
Uu Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Illumination

1. Look at different letters of the alphabet that are written as ornamental chapter letters. Notice the size of the letter is much larger than the others. Choose one letter to copy (or trace) into the square on the piece of paper provided.
2. Decorate the letter to create an ornate chapter letter. Use flowers, leaves, people and animals (traditional decorations used) to weave inside, outside and around the letter.
3. Colour your design using the pencil crayons. Include blue in your decoration as a special colour used in medieval times (to represent the purity of the Virgin Mary) and finish the design with gold edging and highlights so that it 'illuminates' (lights up) the letter.



Page from the Shaftesbury Book of Hours, early 16th C

