



How can visual elements affect the way we experience a story?

Illuminated Manuscripts: Textual and Visual Storytelling

Background Information

Geoffrey Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* in the late 14th century. The Ellesmere Chaucer, owned by The Huntington Library, was created in the early 15th century. It is unknown which scribe wrote the text of this manuscript (scholars regularly debate this), but scholars agree the entire manuscript was written by one scribe. Multiple illuminators provided the illustrations and decorations in this manuscript (how many? This is also debated). The scribe and illuminators used parchment, quills, brushes, iron gall ink, gold, and pigments to create this work.

The page students will use in this lesson contains the beginning of *The Knight's Tale*, one of the stories in *The Canterbury Tales*. In this excerpt, the knight tells of a duke of Athens who conquered the land of the Amazons and brought home with him his new wife (Ypolita/Hippolyta) and her younger sister (Emelye/Emily). The knight then interrupts his story to address his fellow travelers. The excerpt ends with the knight returning to his story.

Lesson Description

In this lesson students will read and analyze an excerpt from *The Canterbury Tales* and look at and analyze the excerpt as it appears in an illuminated manuscript. Students will then create illuminated manuscripts for a piece of their creative writing.

Grade Range: 7th– 10th

Time to complete lesson: 2-3 hours

Resources needed:

- Provided Materials, printed
- Blank paper (1 per student)
- Drawing or painting supplies (for each student)

Lesson Author: Anonymous





By the end of this lesson, students will **know:**

- People can use both text and visuals to tell stories
- People often incorporate multiple modalities to convey meaning and create experiences for the story's recipient
- Stories are dynamic, and their meaning can change over time

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

- Read and interpret a pre-modern story
- Discuss the ways in which illumination changes their interpretation of the story's meaning
- Identify the differences between their experience reading a story on its own and seeing the story with its visual components

Standards

National Core Arts Standards:

MA:Cr1.1

MA:Cr2.1

MA:Re7.1

MA:Re8.

Common Core State Standards- English Language Arts

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2

California English Language Development Standards

ELD.PI.7.1 Emerging-Bridging

ELD.PI.8.1 Emerging-Bridging

ELD.PI.9-10.1 Emerging-Bridging

ELD.PI.7.6 Emerging-Bridging

ELD.PI.8.6 Emerging-Bridging

ELD.PI. 9-10.8 Emerging-Bridging

ELD.PI.7.10 Emerging-Bridging

ELD.PI. 8.10 Emerging-Bridging

ELD.PI. 9-10.10 Emerging-Bridging



Introduction

- 1) Brings students together
- 2) Have students identify items in the room that use both text and visual imagery (pictures, an interesting font or handwriting style, etc...). Examples you might have in your classroom include: posters, graphic novels, book covers, anchor charts, etc...
- 3) Ask students why the people who created these items may have chosen to use both text and visual imagery in their work. Affirm what students say.
- 4) Highlight student responses that touch on any storytelling elements
- 5) Tell students that today we are going to study a famous story from the Middle Ages- The Knight's Tale by Geoffrey Chaucer.
- 6) Optional: Read aloud (in Middle and/or Modern English) the Knight's Tale passage (Material #2)

Activity #1: Read the Knight's Tale (15-20 minutes)

- 1) Break students into pairs or small groups
- 2) Give each group a copy of the Knight's Tale in Middle and Modern English (Material #2)
- 3) Have students work for approx. 10 minutes, reading the passage and discussing the story
- 4) Regroup. Invite students to share out things they noticed about the story. Affirm their thoughts.
- 5) Share with students that this story was written at a time when books were produced individually (before the advent of the printing press). Multiple people worked together to create a finished book. Introduce students to the following vocabulary:
 - *Manuscripts* are documents written by hand
 - *Illuminated Manuscripts* are documents written by hand and that include colored illustration
 - *Scribes* wrote down the stories they had heard (or copy the stories from other scribes)
 - *Illuminators* drew the pictures and decorations

Alternative Execution: The class can read and interpret the text all together

Differentiation:

- Divide students so that each group has at least one person capable of reading the passage
- Students can read some or all of the provided excerpt (lines 873-885 are a good section for readers looking for less text)
- Provide students with the Glossary of Terms (Material #1)



Activity #2: Interpret an Illuminated Manuscript (25-30 minutes)

- 1) Tell students that they will look closely at a page in an *illuminated manuscript* of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. This page contains the excerpt from *The Knight's Tale* that we just read and discussed.
- 2) Break students into pairs or small groups
- 3) Give each group an Observe, Interpret, Question chart (Material #4)
- 4) Share the *illuminated manuscript* page in one of the following ways
 - Have students use their ipads/chromebooks/etc... to pull up the page on the Huntington Digital Library (Note: students will be able to zoom to aid in close looking): <https://hdl.huntington.org/digital/collection/p15150coll7/id/2385>
 - Use the classroom overhead projector to pull up the page on the Huntington Digital Library: <https://hdl.huntington.org/digital/collection/p15150coll7/id/2385>
 - Provide students with a printout of the page (note: this printout is much lower resolution than the image on the Huntington Digital Library) (Material #3)
- 5) Have students work for approx. 20 minutes, looking closely at the *illuminated manuscript* page and writing down their thoughts on their Observe, Interpret, Question chart (Material #4)
- 6) Regroup. Invite students to share what they observed, how they interpreted what they observed, and any questions they still have. Affirm what students share, and help them make connections between their shared ideas.
- 7) Ask students how the illuminations (pictures and decorations) changed the way they experienced the story. Affirm what students share.

Alternative Execution: The class can view and interpret the manuscript all together. Students can add post-its with their thoughts to a group Observe, Interpret, Question chart (created by the teacher out of graph paper, butcher paper, or on the whiteboard).

Differentiation:

- Students can be guided to focus on one specific aspect of the manuscript (such as the border or the miniature)
- One person in the group can be the designated note-taker
- Provide students with the Glossary of Terms (Material #1)

Activity #3: Create an Illuminated Manuscript (60+ minutes)

- 1) Reiterate students' thoughts on how visual elements affect the meaning of a story and the way a reader experiences it
- 2) Share with students that they will be creating an *illuminated manuscript* for one of their stories (or poems/other creative writing).



- 3) Have students read through their work and identify an excerpt that they would like to illuminate (approx. 100-200 words, or what they can fit on a single sheet)
- 4) Invite students to look around the room again at the various items that include both text and visual imagery. Let students know that each of these can serve as inspiration, along with the Chaucer manuscript we just studied.
- 5) Have students prepare for the activity by thinking about
 - where they would like to put the writing on the page and what kind of handwriting they would like to use.
 - how they would like their illuminations (colored illustrations and decorations) to impact the meaning and reader experience of their story. What can they do to make that happen?
- 6) When students feel ready, have them begin to work, using whichever artistic materials you feel are appropriate. The time devoted to student work will depend on the artistic materials used.

Differentiation:

- Offer a variety of art supplies so students can choose whichever they find most comfortable
- Discuss a specific element of a visual work (such as color) with a student, then prompt the student to incorporate that element into their own work
- Provide adaptive grips for paint brushes
- Students can use artmaking software to complete part or all of the activity using a computer. Whenever possible, students should generate the illustrations themselves (rather than use pre-made illustrations)

Conclusion

- 1) Regroup. Have students pair share their work, taking turns discussing the choices they made in their own work and how they interpret the work of their partner
- 2) Invite students to share out any thoughts on their experience creating an *illuminated manuscript*



Vocabulary List

Note: a student glossary is also provided (Material #4)

<u>Word</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Variations to Use (and Encourage Students to)</u>	<u>Notes</u>
Scribe	A person who copies or transcribes manuscripts		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Etymologically related to manuscript
Illuminator	A person who decorates a manuscript with pigments and/or metals (gold or silver)	Illuminate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Etymologically related to “Illuminated Manuscript” light
Manuscript	A document written by hand		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Etymologically related to scribe
Illuminated Manuscript	A handwritten document with decorative elements added with pigment and/or metals (gold or silver)	Illuminate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Etymologically related to “Illuminator” Students may be familiar with “illuminate” as a word meaning “to give light. The silver and gold used in illuminated manuscripts reflects light, which is why we say it is “illuminated”
Miniatures	Figurative colored illustrations added to a manuscript		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students may be familiar with miniatures with miniatures in the context of figurines or miniature animals
Border	Decorative elements surrounding the text of a manuscript		
Decorated Letter	A letter in a manuscript (usually the first of a chapter or section) made larger and more colorful with pigment and/or metal (gold or silver)		



Related Resources

- Huntington Blog on Graffiti in the Ellesmere Chaucer: <https://www.huntington.org/verso/2018/08/graffiti-ellesmere-chaucer>
- Harvard's Teach Yourself to Read Middle English: <https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/less-o.htm>
- Harvard's Geoffrey Chaucer website: <https://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/>
- British Library's "How to Make a Medieval Manuscript" <https://www.bl.uk/medieval-english-french-manuscripts/articles/how-to-make-a-medieval-manuscript>



Glossary of Terms

Material #1

Border– Decorations surrounding the text on a manuscript

Decorated Letter– A large and colorful letter in a manuscript

Illuminated Manuscript– A document written by hand and decorated with pigment and/or metals (gold or silver)

Illuminator– A person who decorates a manuscript with pigments and/or metals (gold or silver)

Manuscript– A document written by hand

Miniatures– Colored illustrations of people or animals that are added to a manuscript

Scribe– A person who copies or transcribes manuscripts



An Excerpt from The Knight's Tale
Chaucer in Middle English and Modern English

Heere bigynneth the knyghtes tale

859 **Whilom, as olde stories tellen us,**

860 **Ther was a duc that highte Theseus;**

861 **Of Atthenes he was lord and governour,**

862 **And in his tyme swich a conquerour**

863 **That gretter was ther noon under the sonne**

864 **Ful many a riche contree hadde he wonne**

865 **What with his wysdom and his chivalrie**

866 **He conquered al the regne of Femenye**

867 **That whilom was ycleped Scithia**

868 **And weddede the queene Ypolita**

869 **And broghte hire hoom with hym in his contree**

870 **With muchel glorie and greet solempnytee**

871 **And eek hir yonge suster Emelye**

872 **And thus with victorie and with melodye**

873 **Lete I this noble duc to Atthenes ryde,**

874 **And al his hoost in armes hym bisyde**

875 **And certes, if it nere to long to heere**

876 **I wolde have toold yow fully the manere**

877 **How wonnen was the regne of Femenye**

878 **By Theseus and by his chivalrye**

879 **And of the grete bataille for the nones**

880 **Bitwixen Atthenes and Amazones;**

881 **And how asseged was Ypolita,**

882 **The faire, hardy queene of Scithia;**

883 **And of the feste that was at hir weddyng,**

884 **And of the tempest at hir hoom-comyng;**

885 **But al that thyng I moot as now forbere.**

886 **I have, God woot, a large feeld to ere,**

Here begins the Knight's Tale

Once, as old histories tell us,

There was a duke who was called Theseus

He was lord and governor of Athens

And in his time such a conqueror

That there was no one greater under the sun

Very many a powerful country had he won

What with his wisdom and his chivalry

He conquered all the land of the Amazons

That once was called Scithia

And wedded the queen Ypolita

And brought her home with him into his country

With much glory and great ceremony

And also her young sister Emelye

And thus with victory and with festivity

I leave this noble duke riding to Athens,

And all his host in arms beside him

And certainly, if it were not too long to hear

I would have told you fully the manner

How the reign of Femenye was won

By Theseus and by his chivalry;

And of the great battle at that time

Between Athenians and Amazons;

And how Ypolita was besieged,

The fair, bold queen of Scithia;

And of the festivity that was at their wedding,

And of the storm at her home-coming;

But all that matter I must now forgo.

I have, God knows, a large field to till,



887 **And wayke been the oxen in my plough.**
 888 **The remenant of the tale is long ynough**
 889 **I wol nat letten eek noon of this route;**
 890 **Lat every felawe telle his tale aboute,**
 891 **And lat se now who shal the soper wynne;**
 892 **And ther I lefte, I wol ayeyn bigynne.**

893 **This duc, of whom I make mencion,**
 894 **Whan he was come almoost unto the toun**
 895 **In al his wele and in his mooste pride,**
 896 **He was war, as he caste his eye aside,**
 897 **Where that ther kneled in the heighe weye**
 898 **A compaignye of ladyes, tweye and tweye,**

And the oxen in my plow are weak.
 The remnant of the tale is long enough.
 Also I will not hinder any one of this company;
 Let every fellow tell his tale in turn,
 And let's see now who shall win the supper;
 And where I left off, I will again begin.

This duke, of whom I make mention,
 When he was come almost unto the town,
 In all his prosperity and in his most pride,
 He was aware, as he cast his eye aside,
 Where there kneeled in the high way
 A company of ladies, two by two

Translation from:

"Interlinear Translation of Some of The Canterbury Tales." 2006. Harvard University. <http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/tr-index.htm>



Ellesmere Chaucer, page f.10 r. The Huntington Library, San Marino.



Name: _____

OBSERVE

Describe what you **see**. What do you notice about the **text**? What do you notice about the **illuminations**?

INTERPRET

Why do you think somebody made this? **What** can you learn from **examining** this? What makes you think that?

QUESTION

What do you **wonder**? What **questions** do you still have?