

# Illuminated Letters



# History Of Manuscript Illumination

- During the Middle Ages books were hand written.
- They were called Illuminated Manuscripts because they often used gold leaf to brighten up the page. (Illuminated means “to lighten up”)
- Some existing Manuscript illumination books date back to the 5<sup>th</sup> century, but the height of its popularity date back to approximately 1100.
- Illuminations took the form of decorated letters, borders, and independent figurative scenes.



# The Printing Press

The Printing Press was invented circa 1440, by Johannes Gutenberg of Germany during the early Renaissance. The invention of the printing press changed the world in many aspects. Texts became available to many, which promoted the ability to learn to read. Reading was no longer reserved for the clergy or the wealthy.



# History of Manuscript Illumination

- Until about the 12th century, the most elaborate and beautiful illuminations were devoted to religious works, and most manuscripts were produced in monasteries. In a monastery, the *scriptorium* was the center for both scholarly activity and the copying of texts.

- During the rise of universities in cities in the 12th and 13th centuries, scribes and illuminators were increasingly laymen who made their living by supplying fine manuscripts to noblemen, the new middle class, and students and professors of emerging universities.



# How they are made

- By the high Middle Ages, the making of a manuscript was often divided among four distinct craftsman: the **parchment maker**, the **scribe**, the **illuminator**, and the **bookbinder**. Typically, each belonged to a guild (sort of like our Unions of today) with specific guidelines and standards.
- The construction of an illuminated manuscript began with the **parchment maker**, who prepared the animal skins used to make the leaves of a manuscript. Although paper was present in Europe as early as the 14th century, manuscripts were most often written on the specially prepared skin of calves, sheep, or goats. Though expensive, parchment provided a surface that was beautifully textured, translucent, and durable.



Quelle: Deutsche Fotothek

# How they are made

Once the skins were prepared and cut, the **scribe** wrote the manuscript's text by hand. A scribe usually made his own quills and ink. In the manuscript page at the left, St. Mark is portrayed as a scribe dipping his quill into a pot of ink as he sits before a lectern. Mark holds a knife in his left hand, used not only to sharpen his quill, but also to “erase” any mistakes on the manuscript by scratching away the top layer of the parchment along with the mistake.



# How they were made

- After the text was written, the **illuminator** added gilded details, if any, and then provided the manuscript's painted decoration. The miniatures were painted with a variety of precious colors made from a wide range of sources, from vegetable extracts to ground minerals from the earth.
- The number and variety of illuminations in a single luxury manuscript often required the collaboration of several craftsmen. Together, the scribes and artists created a manuscript with eighty-three large illuminations filled with startling illusions and intricate details, including architectural renderings and illustrations of flowers and fauna.



# How they were made

- A luxury manuscript was not considered complete without an equally fine binding to protect the manuscript, hold the leaves together, and keep them from absorbing moisture and therefore curling. The **bookbinder** affixed metal clasps or ties of leather or fabric to keep the manuscript tightly closed. Bindings were sometimes embellished with paint, enamel, or with designs stamped into leather with metal tools. The most precious bindings were adorned with metalwork and jewels, particularly in the early Middle Ages.



# How does this relate to our lesson

Each illuminated letter exemplifies the some of the elements of art and the principles of design. Lets look at an example and discuss.

Line?

Color?

Shape?

Value?

Texture?

Balance?

Symmetry?

Variety?

Emphasis?

Rhythm?

Pattern?

Movement?

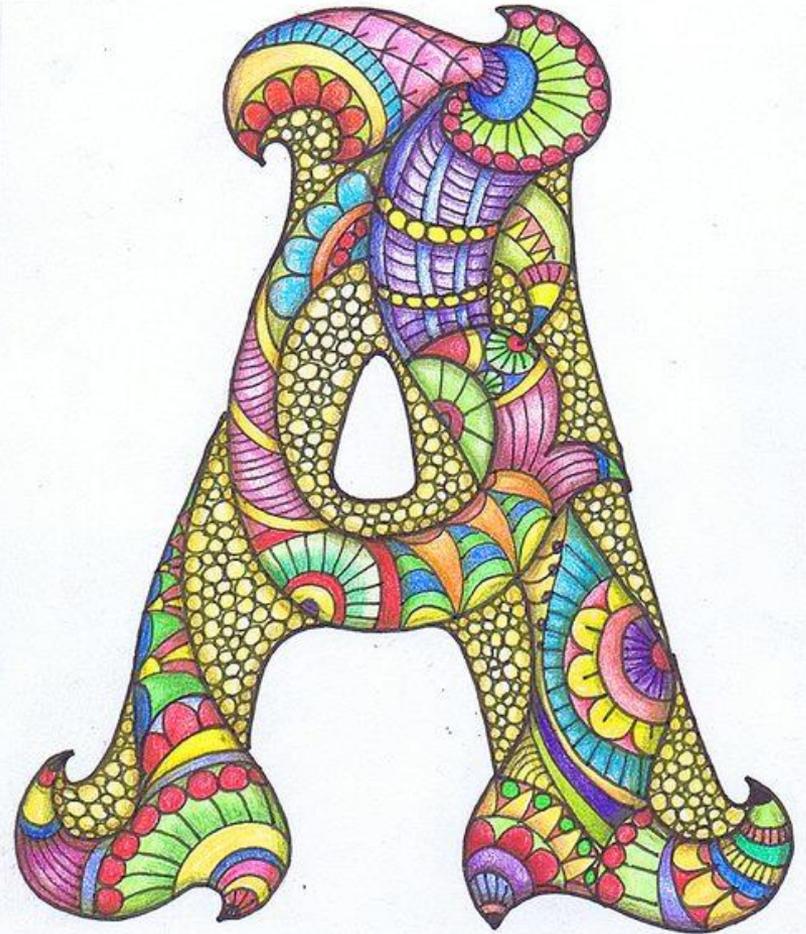
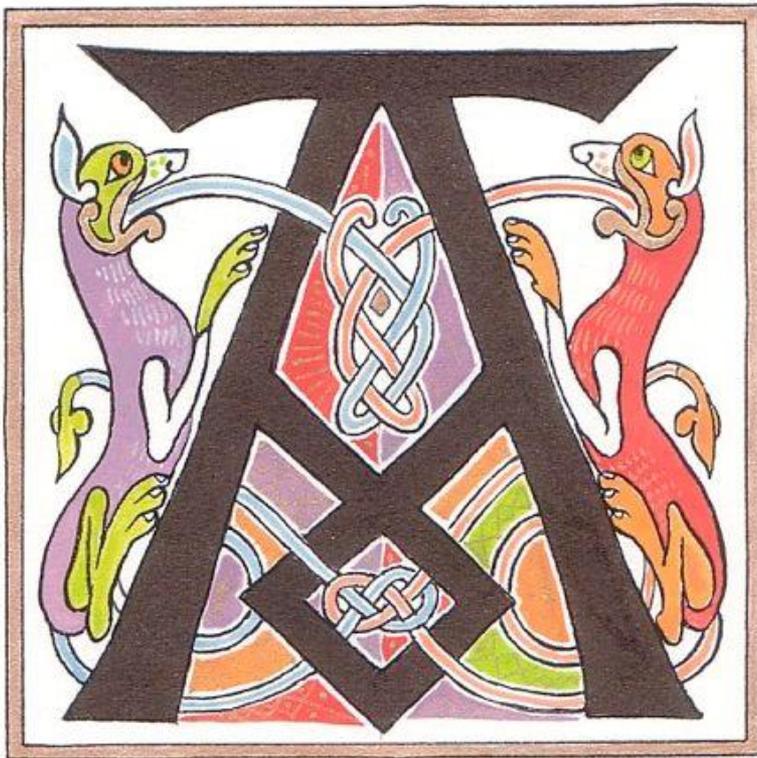
Contrast?



Here are a few more to  
view and discuss



# Modern Day “Illuminated” Letters



# Your Assignment:

## Create an Illuminated Letter

### Criteria:

- Letter must take up the majority of your paper.
- Must have an overall theme, such as plants, flowers, animals, gears, zentangle patterns.
- There must be embellishments around the outside of the letter.
- Color must be added throughout.

### Things to Consider:

- The elements and principals of art- you should be able to state which ones you have used.
- The use of overlap to add dimension- this will add a lot to the work if you include it.
- A color scheme- Choose wisely young Padawan!

# Let's Look at this Example and Discuss



What elements are dominant here?

Line, shape, color, texture, form, value, space

What Principles of design are represented?

Balance, contrast, movement, rhythm, unity/variety, emphasis and pattern

# Options for your Project

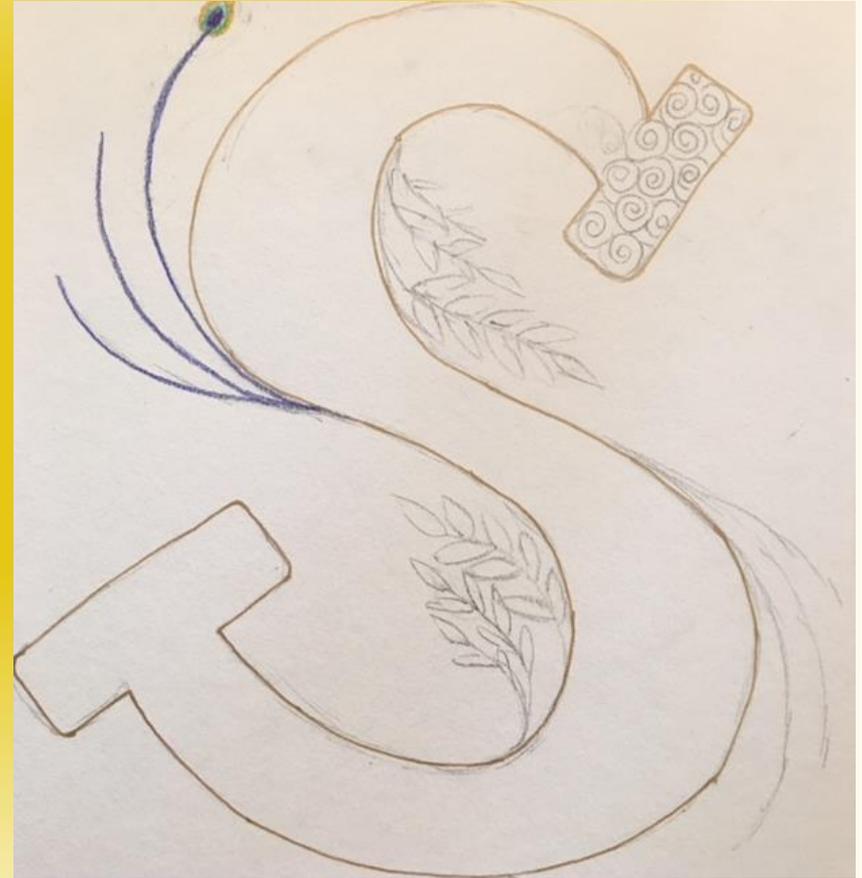
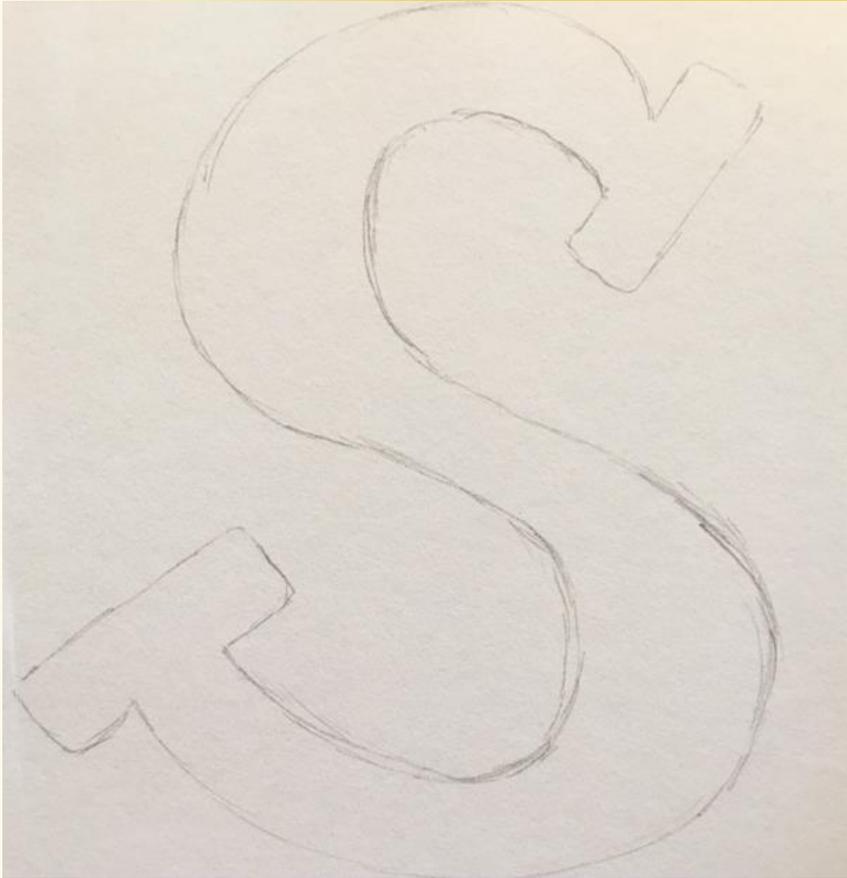


- Choose your color paper:  
Black or White
- Choose your Medium:  
Color Pencils, Gelly Pens, Water  
color pencils, sharpie. Or  
combine a few of them.
- Choose your letter style.

# Steps to create your composition

1. When I am done giving directions and you are starting this, you may use my reference sheets for inspiration or you may get your phone from the rack. Your phone is to only be used to look up ideas! When done, return it!
1. Create your preliminary sketches, also called thumbnail sketches. There are some small squares on your hand out that are to be used for this. Remember to meet the criteria of the project.
2. Once your designs have been approved by me, you may get your 8 x 8 in paper and begin to lightly draw out your composition.
3. Then you may begin to add color with whatever medium you have chosen.

# Here is a Letter from Beginning to End



# Next Steps



# Final Steps



**Now it is time to start!**