

Lesson Plan: Illuminations

Subject Area: Visual Arts

Grades: Middle School, High School

Topic/Theme: Illuminations

Illuminations: This term refers to the embellishment of manuscripts with geometric and vegetal designs, but it also can have a deeper meaning. First of all, such decorations often incorporate metallic and polychrome paints that give a glow to the page when light reflected off of the paint. Second, the text itself illuminates the reader by shedding light on the subject it discusses. And third, for those who might not be able to read the text, the decoration indicates the importance of the text and sometimes even provides a visual clue as to what the text is about.



Illuminated double-page opening of the Qur'an, dated AH 1032/1623 CE, Ottoman lands, ink and gold on paper. Special Collections, Hatcher Graduate Library, Isl. Ms. 167.

Goals:

- To explore the meaning of the theme "Illuminations"
- To draw comparisons in the modern world
- To use visual evidence to support inferences

Questions to consider:

- Look at the manuscript for a minute or two. Describe what you see.
- Now think about what does the word “illumination” mean? Come up with as many definitions as you can.
- Looking at the manuscript again, in what ways do you think this is illuminated? How does the gold paint play a role? How is the manuscript illuminating? How does the content play a role?
- Are there parallels to this in the modern world? List a few (i.e. neon signs, text books, religious documents, websites).
- Discuss why you might consider these texts to be illuminated as well. How are they similar to the illuminated Qur’an? How are they different?

Classroom Activity:

Supplies: Blank sheets of white paper, colored pencils or paints for students, ink pens.

Have the students bring in a favorite poem, passage, or other type of text that has meaning to them. On a blank sheet of paper, ask them to write it out by hand in pen. Then using colored pencils or paints, especially gold and silver if you can find them, have the students decorate the borders and the text itself. The decoration should translate the meaning of the text visually and/or highlight key words or sections of the passage. How would someone know what this passage was without reading it? How do you convey its importance visually? Have the students discuss the process. Was it difficult or easy to translate the text visually? How is your text illuminated and illuminating?



The Prophet Muhammad’s death, Fuzuli (1495–1556), *Hadiqat al-Su’ada* (Garden of the Blessed), text dated AH 1006/1598 CE, possibly Ottoman Baghdad, ink, pigment, and gold on paper. Special Collections, Hatcher Graduate Library, Isl. Ms. 386, page 137.

Common Core Standards: ART.VA.IV.K – 5 Standard 4: Understand, analyze, and describe the arts in their historical, social, and cultural contexts

National Learning Standards: Visual Arts NA-VA.K-12.4 Understanding the Visual Arts in Relation to History and Cultures