

Procedure

1. Begin with a slide and video introduction to the various styles of texts produced in the Middle Ages. You may wish to show examples of texts using the Latin alphabet in upper and lower case (it was during the Medieval period that *minuscule* letters were introduced), as well as Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, and Cyrillic texts. Point out that even in modern books, the first letter of a chapter or a paragraph may be very large and fancy, a legacy of Medieval scribes.
2. Discuss the various methods of decorating letters. Some letters are just extremely fancy, embellished with vines, knot designs, or animal interlace motifs. In other cases, the letter is actually made up of animals, plants, buildings, or some such device. Also point out the extreme distortion of many of the figures and how fanciful some of the imagery is.
3. Explain that students are to choose one letter from any appropriate alphabet and illuminate it in an authentic way. Clarify that Chinese characters, Egyptian hieroglyphics, and other letters not in use in Medieval Europe are not appropriate. Explain that in this context *illuminate* means to decorate. Then show previous students' works in various stages of completion, to demonstrate the project.

Instructional tip: This project can offer wonderful possibilities to your more creative students while allowing those with less fertile imaginations to produce pieces equally beautiful in their own way. I encourage students to stick with a single letter, but I have accepted very short words in the past.

4. Once students have chosen their letter, (usually an initial), they do a rough sketch on manila paper. Have students place a ruler with the outer edge on the edge of the paper and draw a very light pencil line along the inner edge. They repeat this process on all sides to create a border a ruler's width wide. The letter and any background must fit within the border so that some parchment will show on all finished projects.
5. Within the image area, students may choose whether to enclose the letter in a solid painted background or simply have the parchment be the background. They may draw an oval, circle, diamond, or shield-shaped background. If they choose a geometric pattern for the