

Illuminated Letters

Lesson by Sue Lindemulder

<http://www.isop.ucla.edu/shenzhen/2002ncta/lindemulder/>

Some time during the middle ages scribes began to emphasize the first letter of a chapter, book or document. the book of Kells is one of the oldest examples of a Celtic illuminated manuscript that can be studied. By the time that the book of Kells was made, the letters, or versals, had become highly decorated. The term "illumination" comes from the fact that actual gold and silver were melted and used as paint. Light would reflect off those surfaces, presenting a lighted of "illuminated" surface.

Vocabulary and terms for further study

Book of Kells

Celtic

Illumination

Versal

Materials:

- 9 in x 12 in paper (or another size of your choice)
- pencil
- ruler
- colors (tempera, watercolor, and/or markers)
- brushes, water, newspaper drop cloths as necessary
- gold and silver ink, paint, or markers

Visual decoration

- 1) All letters are shapes, not lines.
- 2) Versal letters are usually inside a box. the letter must fill the box.
- 3) Decorate behind the letter.
- 4) Decorate inside the letter.
- 5) Decorate around the letter.
- 6) Decorate using pattern and texture.
- 7) Decorate using foliage.
- 8) Inhabit the letter (birds, animals, people, etc. "live" in the versal box.)
- 9) Historiate - illuminate inside the letter (ie. "O" for "once upon a time" with a picture of a glass slipper inside the "O".)
- 10) Accent with gold or silver, sparkle, sequins, and/or jewels.
- 11) the box should include a small frame.
- 12) Fantasy figures can be used.

Procedure

- 1) Draw a series of frames around the edge. The first one should be about one inch from the edge of the paper. The second one should be about a half an inch inside the first.
- 2) Choose one of your initials and draw it in the inside frame. The letter must be a shape (not just a line) and it must touch all frame sides. Make sure that the letter is thick and full, not wimpy.
- 3) Decorate inside, behind and/or around the letter. You may choose to have a figure or figures who will "live" in the versal.
- 4) Add color - Do not use black, and try to stay from dark colors.
- 5) When it has been completely colored, go back and add some silver and gold as line and pattern.

