

A Letter Worth a Thousand Words

Visual Storytelling from Illuminated Manuscripts to Book Covers

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Grade Level	9th – 12th Grade	**Time Frame**	210 minutes
Subject	Visual Arts	**Duration**	4 class periods

Essential Question

How can we tell a story in one image? How can messages be conveyed visually?

Summary

This lesson explores how visual storytelling conveys meaning through illuminated manuscripts and book covers. Students begin by engaging in a word guessing game using medieval terms. They then watch an interview with a professional illustrator to reflect on visual storytelling. From there, they analyze historical illuminated manuscripts and book covers, noting how they communicate stories in a single image. Finally, students design an illuminated letter based on a song lyric of their choice, using watercolor, paint pens, and gold leaf. They apply artistic principles to capture the mood and meaning of the song. The lesson concludes with a gallery walk, where students showcase their artwork and provide peer reflections on the visual impact and storytelling elements of each other's works.

Snapshot

Engage

Students play a definitions game where they guess the meaning of medieval words.

Explore

Students watch a video interview with a professional illustrator and book cover artists.

Explain

Students view and reflect on images of illuminated manuscripts and book covers throughout history.

Extend

Students create their own illuminated letter artwork for a song lyric of their choice.

Evaluate

Students view each other’s illuminated letters and write reflections on them.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Fine Arts: Visual Art (High School: Advanced (II)))

VA.P.1 : Utilize a variety of ideas and subject matter in creation of original works of visual art.
II.VA.P.1.1 : Utilize inquiry methods of observation, research, and experimentation to explore unfamiliar subjects through original art-making.
II.VA.CHP.1.1 : Analyze works of art in a variety of societal, cultural, and historical contexts and make connections to uses of art in contemporary and local contexts.

Attachments

- Balderdash--A Letter Worth a Thousand Words .pdf
- Balderdash-A Letter Worth a Thousand Words.docx
- Illuminated Letters Art Techniques - A Letter Worth a Thousand Words .pdf
- Illuminated Letters Art Techniques - A Letter Worth a Thousand Words.docx
- Magnetic Statements-A Letter Worth a Thousand Words.docx
- Magnetic Statements-A Letter Worth a Thousand Words.pdf
- Magnetic Statements—A Letter Worth a Thousand Words - Spanish.docx
- Magnetic Statements—A Letter Worth a Thousand Words - Spanish.pdf
- Paired Texts H-Chart—A Letter Worth a Thousand Words - Spanish.docx
- Paired Texts H-Chart—A Letter Worth a Thousand Words - Spanish.pdf
- Paired Texts H-Chart—A Letter Worth a Thousand Words.docx
- Paired Texts H-Chart—A Letter Worth a Thousand Words.pdf
- Presentation Slides - A Letter Worth a Thousand Words.pptx
- See,Perceive,Reflect - A Letter Worth a Thousand Words.docx
- See,Perceive,Reflect - A Letter Worth a Thousand Words.pdf
- See,Perceive,Reflect—A Letter Worth a Thousand Words - Spanish.docx
- See,Perceive,Reflect—A Letter Worth a Thousand Words - Spanish.pdf
- Triangle-Square-Circle Handout—A Letter Worth a Thousand Words - Spanish.docx
- Triangle-Square-Circle Handout—A Letter Worth a Thousand Words - Spanish.pdf
- Triangle-Square-Circle Handout—A Letter Worth a Thousand Words.docx
- Triangle-Square-Circle Handout—A Letter Worth a Thousand Words.pdf

Materials

- Lesson Slides — A Letter Worth a Thousand Words (attached)
- Mentimeter App to access Menti slides (student devices)
- Triangle-Square-Circle Handout (attached; one copy per student)
- See, Perceive, Reflect Handout (attached; one copy per student)
- Balderdash Handout (attached; one copy for instructor)
- Paired Texts H-Chart Handout (attached; one copy per student)
- Magnetic Statements Handout (attached; one copy per class)
- Illuminated Letter Art Techniques Handout (attached; one copy for instructor)
- Watercolor paper
- Watercolors
- Paintbrushes
- Paint pens
- Gold leaf
- Mod podge or gold leaf adhesive

30 minutes

Engage

Move to **Slide 2**, "What Does it Mean?" Provide time for everyone to access the Mentimeter. Ask students to make up a definition for the words on each of the slides, moving through the **Mentimeter** slides for as many words as you have time for. Allow a minute or two for students to come up with a definition for the word displayed on the slide and then ask them to share the definition they wrote in the Mentimeter.

As everyone is entering their guesses, enter the correct definition as well. Then, have them vote in the Menti on the one they think is right.

Technology Note: Setting Up Mentimeter

In Mentimeter, copy the menti we've created or make your own with words of your choice. To make your own, create a new presentation using the open-ended option for slide 1 and the following prompt: What is the definition of the word _____?

While presenting in class, you can select the light bulb button to allow students to vote on their favorite guess.

Reveal the correct definition and give a point to any student who guessed correctly and to the student definition that received the most votes. Whoever ends with the most points wins.

Next, introduce the essential questions and objectives for this lesson on **slides 3 & 4.**

30 minutes

Explore

Embedded video

https://youtube.com/watch?v=13a1GiT19p4

Display **slide 5**. Explain to students that they will be watching an ICAP interview with Aster Kordona who is an artist and illustrator. Hand out the **Triangle, Square, Circle** handout. While students watch the video on **slide 6**, have them complete the Triangle, Circle, Square reflection prompts on the handout:

- What are three important points that you have learned from the interview?
- List four things that squared with your thinking, meaning you found them to be interesting or relatable.
- What is one thing that is still circling in your head?

Display **slide 7** and discuss their reflections.

30 minutes

Explain

Teacher's Note: Preparation

Share the slideshow digitally with the students before this portion of the lesson.

Have students examine **slides 8-13**. These are examples of illuminated texts. Ask them to write on the **Paired Text H-Chart** handout in the left column one thing that catches their eye and one thing that puzzles them about the images.

Then, have students work through **slides 14-17**. These slides demonstrate the evolution of book cover design. Have students write something that catches their eye and one thing the puzzles them about this set of images in the right column of their Paired Text H-Chart handout.

Have students share their notes from the Paired Text H-Chart in groups at their table. Share **slide 18**, a rephrase of the essential question, "How do both illuminated letters and book covers tell a story in one image?" Have students write their answer to this question in the center portion of their H-Chart handout. Depending on your class size and time allotted for this lesson, have each student share their answers or ask for a few volunteers to share out with the whole class.

60 minutes

Extend

Embedded video

https://youtube.com/watch?v=laYxROekO-E

Display **slide 19**. Explain to students that they have the opportunity to watch a brief clip about the creation of illuminated letters.

Following the video, move to **slide 20** and inform students that their upcoming assignment is to make their own illuminated letter to accompany a song of their choice. Their letter should represent the essence of the song. It can be inspired by the mood of the lyrics and/or the music. This is a good stopping point for the day so that students have time to listen to music they like and consider what song will be their inspiration.

Teacher's Note: Preparation

Determine whether you will do the Magnetic Statements activity below with both *Understanding the Elements of Art* (20 minutes) and *Understanding the Principles of Design* (19 minutes) or whether you will do only one. You may prefer to write the principles on chart paper or display each of the elements/principles around the room in another way and discuss them rather than take the time to watch the videos.

If you decide to have students select the principles/elements they prefer, print one copy of the attached **Magnetic Statements** handout and post around your classroom. Consider printing on cardstock or laminate the pages for continual use.

Start the next day with **slides 21** and **22** for a quick review of the videos Understanding the Elements of Art and Understanding the Principles of Design. Have students take a few minutes to reflect on which of the elements of art or design would have the greatest impact on the demonstration of their song.

For **slides 23** and **24,** ask students to move to the element of art that they have decided on as a starting point for their illuminated letter design. Instruct them to talk with others who share their interests and share why they've chosen this element as a starting point. After students have discussed their ideas, have them move to another design principle and talk with someone from a different element.

Facilitation Options:

You can repeat **slides 23** and **24** with the elements of art or only use the principles of design instead if that's what you want to emphasize with your students.

Display **slide 25** and guide students to begin with sketches on scrap paper to work out their letter design and style elements that will best illustrate the lyrics or the song's meaning. Encourage them to play with 3-5 different ideas before deciding on and refining the one they will use in their final work of art.

After sketching, have students create their illuminated letter on watercolor paper, using watercolors, paint pens for detail work on top, and gold leaf.

This is a good time to introduce the materials (watercolor paper, watercolor paint, pens, gold leaf) they will use to create their letters. You may choose to do a demonstration of the techniques you desire your students to focus on. There are tips provided for facilitating this demonstration on the attachment called **Illuminated Letters Art Techniques.**

Display **slide 26** and provide as much class time as you consider appropriate for students to create their illuminated letters based on the song lyrics they have chosen.

30 minutes

Evaluate

Teacher's Note: Preparation

Display students' final illuminated letter projects around the room. Have students include a QR code linking the song they chose so that people can listen to the song as they view the artwork.

Display **slide 27**. Distribute the **See, Perceive, Reflect** handout and instruct students to complete the chart questions for X number of classmates as they participate in a Gallery Walk of their class's artwork. Remind students to focus on the positives.

- See: What do you notice? What stands out? Do you feel like a message is being conveyed? How would you describe this art?
- Perceive: What emotions/feeling/mood do you feel looking at the art? Are you sad? Happy? Melancholy? Angry? Disappointed? What message do you feel is being conveyed?
- Reflect: What did you learn from this project? What can improve for next time?

Resources

- Hopper, J. (2020). *Understanding the elements of art*. YouTube. Video: https://youtu.be/wQhuN1iR_9Q?si=7sWQDxGGk1l9BKT5
- Hopper, J. (2020). *Understanding the principles of design*. YouTube. Video: https://youtu.be/65WjYDEzi88?si=ptXGRVwPtT0eadoX
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Mentimeter. Tech tools. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/tech-tool/645
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Triangle-square-circle. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/65
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Paired texts H-chart. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/132
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- Age of Empires. (2003). Hands on history - *The illuminated manuscript*. Video: YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=laYxROekO-E
- Google
  Arts & Culture. (n.d.). Topics about "Illuminated manuscript." https://artsandculture.google.com/search?q=illuminated%20manuscript
- Grapheine. (n.d.). *History of book covers (part 1)*. *Grapheine*. https://www.grapheine.com/en/history-of-graphic-design/history-of-book-covers-1
- Grapheine. (n.d.). *History of book covers (part 2)*. *Grapheine*. https://www.grapheine.com/en/history-of-graphic-design/history-of-book-covers-1
- Grapheine. (n.d.). *History of book covers (part 3)*. *Grapheine*. https://www.grapheine.com/en/history-of-graphic-design/history-of-book-covers-3
- Grapheine. (n.d.). *History of book covers (part 4)*. *Grapheine*. https://www.grapheine.com/en/history-of-graphic-design/history-of-book-covers-4