

The Canterbury Tales with a Chicago Twist



***Stained Glass Border*, 1220**

English (Canterbury)

Stained glass and pot metal

Loyola University Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Gertrude Hunt in memory of her husband John Hunt and to commemorate Fr. Martin D'Arcy, S.J., 1976-22

Grades: 5 – 9

Subjects: English Language Arts, Social Science, Fine Arts

Time Required: 2 – 4 class periods, 45 minutes each

Author: Written by Carolyn Ziembo, with contributions by Susan Friel, and edited by Jonathan Canning, Ann Meehan, and Molly Tarbell

Lesson Overview

Students will learn that stained glass became an essential element of architecture in the Gothic period (ca. 12th to 16th centuries), and that LUMA's piece is from Canterbury Cathedral, an important church in England. They will discover that stained glass had Christian symbolic value: its images were made vibrant by what they perceived to be God's light, and it was made to imitate the New Jerusalem. Students will understand the practice of pilgrimage and be exposed to stories, including Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, from the period in which the stained glass border was created. Students will then take one of the *Tales* and update it to reflect a story that could take place in 21st-century Chicago. They will also create their own "stained glass" borders using clear acetate and markers.

Materials

- Reproduction of the *Stained Glass Border*
- Lined paper and pencils
- Graph paper
- A children's version of *The Canterbury Tales*, like Puffin Classics' *The Canterbury Tales*, adapted by Geraldine McCaughrean (available at Chicago Public Library), might be helpful in introducing your students to Chaucer's narratives
- Permanent markers

- Tape – either scotch or masking
- Clear acetate sheets, approximately 4 x 5 inches (take a standard size transparency and cut in half to create two pieces).

Lesson Steps

1. Have students look closely at the *Stained Glass Border*. See how much they can figure out about the work when they take time to look at it, think about it, and share ideas.
2. Use a brainstorming technique, such as Pair Share, to get them started before sharing with the whole class.
 - Pair Share: Students turn to a partner and take turns naming one thing that they notice about the stained glass. After naming some of the most obvious things, they will soon begin to look more deeply and notice things that their partners did not. They should remember to share these ideas in the discussion later.
3. Use the following questions to begin a discussion.
 - What do you see? What more can you find?
 - What patterns do you see?
 - This particular work features the repeated design of a palmette (an artistic motif based on the fan-shaped leaves of a palm tree) and foliage with berries inside a border. The origin of the palmette motif is likely an acanthus flower. Acanthus flowers and leaves were often included in Christian artwork because their thorns could be interpreted to represent the pain of sin and the prickly journey from life to death.



Flowering acanthus plant

4. What do you think this work is made of?
 - Stained glass and metal
5. What is the purpose of this object? Where would you find stained glass? What does this colored glass remind you of?
 - Stained glass windows had symbolic value. Light, as the first act of God's creation, was seen as the purest manifestation of God's presence, and stained glass windows came to life when illuminated by sunlight. To medieval theologians (people who study religious faith, practice, and experience), the vibrant holy images depicted in the windows were therefore brought to life only by God's presence.
 - Stained glass was used along with sculptures, altarpieces, and other art, to inspire churchgoers and make them feel as if they were in heaven. The colorful glass represented the walls of the New Jerusalem (the heavenly city of the saints), which were said to have been built of rich jewels: "And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first

foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald....And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass" (Revelation 21:18 – 21).

- This piece of stained glass in LUMA's collection comes from Canterbury Cathedral. It was a border in a window and could have framed the story of a saint's life or a Biblical narrative. Located in southeast England, Canterbury Cathedral was an important pilgrimage site because it housed the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket. The cathedral's choir (eastern arm), where the monks sat, was rebuilt after Becket's murder in 1170 to house his magnificent gold and jewel-encrusted shrine. The new choir was built with tall, slender windows in which stained glass panels told Biblical stories and conveyed the lives and miracles of saints, particularly Thomas Becket, whose relics (body parts or articles associated with a saint, like bones or pieces of cloth) were kept in the Cathedral.

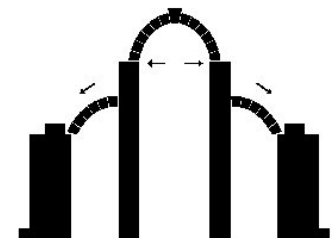


England

- What kind of skills would the artist of this work need to make stained glass? How do you think stained glass is made?
 - We do not know the artist of this particular piece, but we do know the process used to create stained glass. It was produced by cutting pieces of colored glass to match a drawn template. These pieces were fitted into a lattice of lead *comes* (slender grooved lead rods used to hold together panes of glass). Lead was the perfect metal to use because it was soft, flexible, and could bend easily to the shape of the glass. The window was supported with rigid metal arms.

6. **Historical Background:** Now let's learn about the period in which this panel was created and the architecture associated with stained glass.

- Stained glass was, and is, primarily associated with Gothic ecclesiastical (of or relating to a church) architecture. Starting in the twelfth century, churches were built with stone piers and flying buttresses which distributed and carried the weight formerly absorbed by thick walls. Walls could then be thinner and filled with windows of stained glass. Since only small sections of glass were available at the time, multiple pieces were colored and held together by lead to fill the large spaces.



flying buttress



First Activity

1. Introduce your students to *The Canterbury Tales*.
 - *The Canterbury Tales* is a collection of stories written by Geoffrey Chaucer (CHAW-sir) in the fourteenth century. These stories are told by English pilgrims to entertain the group, who are on their way from London to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral. Traveling roughly sixty miles (or for about four to five days), the pilgrims decide to tell four stories each—two on the way to Canterbury and two on the way back. The one who tells the best story will have his/her supper paid for by the rest of the group. Each person's story reflects his/her social position, and some stories are intended to make fun of others in the group. Since Chaucer never finished writing his tales, no winner is chosen by the host, and not all of the pilgrims have told their tales by the time the story ends.
2. Read the prologue together.
3. Divide the class into four groups, giving each a tale to read and summarize.
4. Each group will update one of the tales from the fourteenth century by renaming the characters, giving each one a different occupation, and setting the story in a different place. Instruct students to give the new stories a Chicago twist.
5. When students are finished, they summarize the tale they were given and present their new stories to the class.

Expanding the Lesson

Students could do one or more of the following:

- Act out the tales they have written in front of the class.
- Research and write a report on popular pilgrimage sites of various religions, such as Mecca (Islam) or Bodhgaya (Buddhism), or a secular pilgrimage site, like Graceland (Elvis Presley's home).

Second Activity

1. Ask students to select key elements or symbols from the new tale for stained glass border designs.
2. Students will create simple designs using pencil on sheets of 8-1/2 x 11 inch paper which have been folded and cut in half. The new size is now approximately 4-1/4 x 5 -1/2 inches. Graph paper may be used to facilitate the creation of geometric and symmetrical designs.
3. Encourage students to make their designs symmetrical and to include borders.
4. Each student then takes a piece of acetate which is the same size as the paper and tapes it over the drawing.
5. Students will use permanent markers to color in the shapes on the acetate. They should use black to outline and emphasize each shape.
6. Finally, students remove the paper drawings and tape the "stained glass" drawings to window where the light will shine through.

Vocabulary

acanthus: a plant whose flowers and leaves were often included in Christian artwork. The thorns represent the pain of sin and the prickly journey from life to death.

ecclesiastical: of or relating to a church.



Gothic period: ca. 12th to 16th centuries. Defined in architecture by a building style featuring huge indoor spaces with expanses of wall broken up by intricate patterns. Its characteristic aspects include pointed arches, ribbed vaults, and flying buttresses.

palmette: an artistic motif based on the fan-shaped leaves of a palm tree.

pilgrimage: a journey, especially a long one, made to a sacred place as an act of devotion.

relic: body parts or articles associated with a saint, like bones or pieces of cloth.

symbol: something used for or regarded as representing something else.

theologian: someone who studies religious faith, practice, and experience.

Illinois Learning Standards

English Language Arts

2 – Literature

3 – Writing

4 – Listening and Speaking

5 – Research

Social Science

16 – History

17 – Geography

18 – Social Systems

Fine Arts

26 – Creating and Performing

27 – Arts and Civilization