

# Displaying Culture In Art And Literature



## LESSON 4

### Objectives

#### The students will:

- Learn about how books were created before the advent of the printing press.
- Examine illustrations to see how they reflect the culture of a story.
- Identify characteristics that define their own community.
- Illustrate a story to reflect the conventions used in pre-printing press illustrations and to reflect the cultural background of the story.

### Materials

- Student Handout: "Before There Were Books" (one per student)
- A printed version of a fable or folktale with which your students are familiar
- Paper and colored pencils for each student
- "Once There Was and Was Not: A Modern Day Folktale from Armenia" book

### Procedure

- 1. Discuss written manuscripts before the invention of books.**  
Distribute the handout "Before There Were Books" and read together as a class. Discuss why manuscripts were so valuable before the printing press was invented. Discuss why illustrations in medieval manuscripts were also valuable.
- 2. Have students search for cultural features in the illustrations in the book, "Once There Was and Was Not."** Explain to the class that Armenia is located in a region of the world where two continents, Asia and Europe, meet. Look for clues in the illustrations of "Once There Was and Was Not" that the story takes place in Armenia. Some things to point out to the students include:
  - The rural, mountainous landscape of Armenia.
  - The peasant style of clothing.
  - The architectural style of the buildings.
  - The style of decorations on the animals.
  - The patterns in the ornamental borders.

It may be helpful to do an internet search to find other examples of medieval manuscripts to show students. Printed copies on glossy paper can serve as a beautiful classroom display for student reference.

### National Standards Addressed



#### LANGUAGE ARTS

- Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information.
- Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate and appreciate texts.
- Students adjust their use of spoken, written and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences for different purposes.

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## Procedure (continued)

**3. Direct students to identify features of their own culture that can be shown in illustrations.** Talk about living in your own city or town, and aspects of life there which might differ from other places in the world. For example, your community may be near an ocean or a lake and people may spend a lot of time at the beach or at the lakeside. Or your school may be in a place that gets a lot of snow in the winter and people may wear a lot of outdoor winter clothing when it gets cold. Brainstorm with your class to create a list of features that would identify your particular community in illustrations. This may include famous landmarks in your community, things in nature, clothing people wear, items that people carry with them, etc. Emphasize that the list the students developed comprises only ideas. There are many other ways to illustrate culture in a drawing. Post the list so that students can refer to it during the remainder of the lesson.

**4. Have students illustrate a familiar folktale with features of your own community's culture.** Choose a printed version of a folktale or fairytale with which your class is familiar. This can be a story from any culture that you have already read in class or one that most of your students will already know. Tell students that they should choose one passage from the story to illustrate. If there is only one copy of the book, the teacher may choose the passage and the students can illustrate the same passage. Their illustration should show the story in the culture of their own community. Encourage the students to use features common in medieval manuscripts, including ornamental borders, decorative initial letters and brightly colored small illustrations. Adapt them to features of their own community. For example, students who live in the Midwest may have prairie plants in their ornamental borders. Have the students create a draft of their drawing.

Next, have students make a final one-page illustrated manuscript. First have them write out by hand the passage of the story. Then have them illuminate the passage by adding in their drawings or decorations. Encourage the students to fill one entire page with the text and the illuminations. Also encourage them to use gold, silver, and other bright colors to create a very decorative look to their manuscript. Remind students that in medieval times, every single copy of a manuscript had to be written and illustrated by hand. Writing out the text by hand and illuminating the manuscript will give them an appreciation of how much time and effort it took to create manuscripts before the printing press was invented.

## National Standards Addressed

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### VISUAL ARTS

- Students choose and evaluate a range of subject matter, symbols and ideas.
- Students integrate visual, spatial and temporal concepts with content to communicate intended meaning in their artworks.
- Students use subjects, themes and symbols that demonstrate knowledge of contexts, values and aesthetics to communicate intended meaning in artworks.
- Students understand the visual arts in relation to history and cultures.
- Students describe and place a variety of art objects in historical and cultural contexts.



### SOCIAL STUDIES

- Participate in experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

## Extension Activities

1. Have your class illustrate passages from folktales from different parts of the world. You can go to [www.HeiferEducation.org](http://www.HeiferEducation.org) for suggestions on age-appropriate stories from around the world or ask your school librarian/media specialist. Identify features you want to highlight in your illustration. Try to portray the culture of the story by portraying the architecture, clothing, landscape, special patterns or other images. Encourage the students to incorporate features of medieval illuminations such as ornamental borders, decorated initial letters or miniature paintings by adapting characteristics of the culture in the story. Some ideas for patterns or borders include incorporating a plaid pattern for a Scottish story, Kente cloth patterns for a story from West Africa or Celtic symbols in an Irish story.
2. There are many different versions of the Cinderella story from around the world. Compare illustrations from the different versions of the story. Ask your school librarian/media specialist for suggestions. Discuss how the illustrations differ, representing the cultures of the different regions.

## Links to Heifer International

### The Importance of Community Identity

One of Heifer International's Cornerstones is "Sustainability." Sustainability has many meanings, but one important aspect of it is the idea that a community continues to improve itself without being reliant on outside assistance. Through decades of helping families around the world, Heifer International has learned that ideas imposed from the outside onto a small community are often not as successful as ideas that come from within the community. Ideas from outside may not be technologically or culturally appropriate for a particular community. Thus, empowering the people from the community and encouraging ideas from within are a major part of Heifer International's approach to sustainable development. Identifying and celebrating parts of the local culture are subtle but important parts of empowering ideas from within the community.

Armenia has a rich culture of literature, music, dance and art. The most important collection of ancient Armenian art and manuscripts is housed at the archival library called the Matenadaran. The Matenadaran sits atop a hill overlooking the capital city of Yerevan and Mount Ararat, the ancient symbol of Armenia. A larger than life statue of Toros Roslin stands at the entrance to the Matenadaran. The illustrations in "Once There Was and Was Not" are reminiscent of the famous Armenian miniatures found in the Matenadaran and are a tribute to the rich and ancient Armenian culture.



## Student Handout:

# Before There Were Books

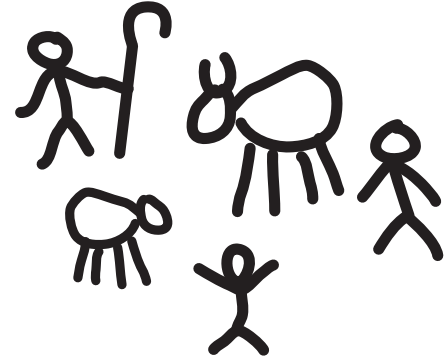
Name \_\_\_\_\_

If you look around your classroom, you will probably see many books. If you wander into a library or a bookstore, you will also see a lot of books. There are many books around, but it wasn't always this way. Books used to be extremely rare objects. Why?

### Early Manuscripts

Manuscript is a word that can be used to describe any type of recorded writing. What were early manuscripts made of?

Some of the earliest written records were made on wooden or stone tablets. People then started using dried animal skins. Other forms of materials similar to paper were invented, including parchment and vellum. When paper was invented it became the standard material for writing, even to this day



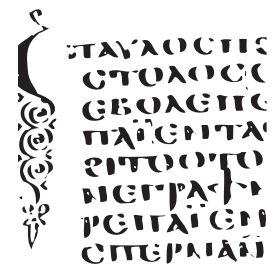
Scrolls were a single (or continuous) piece of parchment or paper that was rolled up for storage. To read the text on the scroll, you would unroll it. If you wanted to read a particular part of a text, you would have to roll through the rest of the scroll until you came to the part you wanted. Scrolls were eventually replaced by something called a codex.

A codex was created by taking separate pieces of paper or parchment, a front cover and back cover and sewing them all together. This was the earliest form of the book format that we are so familiar with today. More than one codex were called codices.

Codices had several advantages over scrolls. First, they were an easier shape to store and to transport to different places. Second, you could open the codex to any part of the text you wanted immediately. Third, the codex had a spine where you could write a title to identify the book while keeping it in storage (similarly, modern books have titles written on the book spine that you can read while they are sitting on a shelf). Finally, the codex opened flat to every page, making it much easier to read than a scroll.

### Manuscripts in the Middle Ages

Before the invention of the printing press, it took a lot of time to make a manuscript. Before mechanical printing was invented, every single copy of a manuscript had to be written by hand. Think about the last book you read in school and imagine how long it would take to write out the entire book by hand! Even writing one chapter of a book by hand would take a long time.



### The Scriptorium and the Scribes

In Medieval Europe, a manuscript was usually written by monks living in monasteries. A monastery was a place where monks and other people belonging to a particular religious faith lived. They worked, studied, ate and slept in or near the monastery. Most monks were given a particular job. One of the jobs was to be a scribe. The scribes in the monastery would work in a special place called a scriptorium that was kept clean and secure in order to protect the valuable manuscripts that the scribes worked with and that were stored there. Because manuscripts took so long to write, they were extremely valuable. The great majority of people did not own any type of manuscript. Only kings, other wealthy nobles and monasteries could



afford to own manuscripts. Also because manuscripts were rare, most people never learned how to read. In Medieval Europe, only the wealthy nobility and the monks learned how to read.

A scribe was someone who made copies of manuscripts. A scribe had to have beautiful handwriting. He would work on manuscripts in the scriptorium, using a quill – a writing tool made from a feather. The inks were made from berries, insects and other natural sources. When the scribe finished writing a manuscript, the separate pages would be sewn together into a codex.

### **The Illuminator or the Miniaturist**

If the manuscript was important, then before it was sewn together to be a codex it would be illustrated. The person (usually a monk) who would illustrate the pictures or ornamentation for the manuscript was called an illuminator. This name comes from the term “to illuminate” something, which means to shed light on something. The illuminator would decorate the manuscript with a drawing or other decoration using bright colors, including gold and red. These bright colors would add light to the text. Another term for the illuminator was the miniaturist. The word miniaturist comes from the red lead that was used to make red ink (called “minium”) and the Latin word *miniare* which means “to paint something red.” The word miniature came to mean the decorations or drawings in manuscripts. (Because the drawings in medieval manuscripts were small, the word “miniature” later became used to describe something that is small.)

Having an illuminator draw pictures for every single copy of a manuscript was very time-consuming. It was also expensive to buy the materials to create the brightly colored ink that the illuminator used. So, manuscripts usually only had drawings or decorations at the very start of the manuscript. Sometimes it would be a drawing depicting the subject of the story. Other times the illuminator would create a fancy border for the first page of the codex. Another common feature would be a finely decorated initial letter of the first word in the text.

### **Toros Roslin**

One of the most famous illuminators, or miniaturists, was a man named Toros Roslin. Roslin lived in Armenia in the 13th century. He included many features of Armenian society in the pictures and decorations he drew in medieval manuscripts. Some features you can see in his illustrations include Armenian landscapes, trees, birds, and other objects from nature. He also included Armenian ornamental decorations in the borders he painted onto manuscripts.

### **The Gutenberg Printing Press**

In Germany in approximately 1440, a man named Johannes Gutenberg invented a machine that could make many copies of words or pictures by pressing paper against an inked surface. This machine became known as the Gutenberg Printing Press. It was the first widely used method of mass producing written text – which means making many copies of stories, articles or other written texts. The separate sheets of printed paper were sewn together with a cover, like a codex. This printed format became known as a book. Use of the machine spread quickly and, as a result, books became more and more plentiful.

