



Stained Glass, 1250-1500

11-18 activity – Christianity in 10 Objects



Look closely. What do you notice? Make as many observations as you can.

What questions do you have? What do you wonder about?

How could this connect to you today? Can you find any connections to your school work or personal interests?

Westminster Abbey is full of beautiful stained-glass windows. Nearly all the medieval glass has disappeared from the windows now, but over 30,000 small fragments of medieval glass were discovered under the floorboards when renovating the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Galleries.

When the present building was constructed in the 13th century, the stained-glass windows were used as a way of telling Bible stories to those who couldn't read the Bible or understand the Latin church services. Many of the windows would have shown scenes from the Bible or important characters from the Bible.

Talk to others

Take some time to think about visual storytelling. What kind of visual storytelling do you enjoy: fine art, graphic novels, comic books, comic strips, television, films? What do you think is more powerful: words or images? Do they have different strengths? What can visuals tell us that words cannot? Can you think of a connection to spirituality, faith or religion?

Activity: Story fragments

Although we can only see a fragment of the original window we can still see clues (is that a halo behind her head?) and infer meaning (what exactly is that expression?). In the same way, the full window would have been a fragment of a fuller story. A representation of an individual reminds the viewer of their whole story - if they are familiar with it - and inspires them or lifts them up. Why not create a story fragment that inspires you?

Find a modern image of a person, it could just be a fragment or you could just zoom in on the face. It might be from family photographs, a magazine or social media.

Begin by looking for clues. What information can you source from the image? What do you know about the people from looking at them? What are their expressions? What do their bodies or clothes tell you?

Consider if that information is entirely reliable. Can you tell which time period these people are from? Could the people be in costume from a different time period? Does this image look staged or do you think it was a snapshot of real life?



Your modern fragment is likely to show a moment in time, part of a bigger story. Can you tell where in the story this fragment comes from? Is it our introduction to the person? The middle of the story where perhaps they meet an obstacle or struggle? Or at the end of their story where they have been inspired to overcome their problems? Where has their inspiration led them?

Think about the struggle the person in your image might face. Can you relate or empathise with them? Think about their inspirations and their triumphs. How did this person succeed or work through struggles? Who or what might have been sources of love and support?

Try creating the story behind your chosen fragment. It could be a short story, a poem or a comic.

Extension

Over the centuries the style of stained-glass windows has changed. Take a look at the most recent window to be added to Westminster Abbey, here on the right. Known as the Queen's Window, this was added in 2018 and designed by British artist David Hockney on an iPad. How is it different to stained-glass windows you've seen before?

It was commissioned to celebrate the reign of Queen Elizabeth II, the United Kingdom's longest-reigning monarch. The design uses bright colours to depict a country scene.

Why not try creating your own modern stained-glass window? Think about the colours and shapes you could use, and whether you are designing it to celebrate a specific person. You could follow in David Hockney's footsteps and create a digital design.

Share your experience on Facebook or Twitter using #WAbbeyFun

