Grades: 6, 7  
Subjects: World History & Geography, Visual Arts  
Time Required: 1 50-minute class period  
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**OVERVIEW**

In this activity, students discuss the history and purpose of illuminated manuscripts. Then they consider examples from the illuminated texts of three major world religions (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism). Using a worksheet, students analyze, compare and contrast three manuscript pages.

**INVESTIGATIVE QUESTIONS**

What are the characteristics of illuminated manuscripts?  
How do they reflect the religions that produced them?

**Curriculum Standards**

**Grade 6 Social Studies**

6.22 Describe the origins and central features of Judaism: Key Person(s): Abraham, Moses; Sacred Texts: The Tanakh (i.e., Hebrew Bible); Basic Beliefs: monotheism, Ten Commandments, emphasis on individual worth and personal responsibility

6.59 Describe the origins and central features of Christianity: Key Person(s): Jesus, Paul; Sacred Texts: The Bible; Basic Beliefs: monotheism, sin and forgiveness, eternal life, Jesus as the Messiah

**Grade 7 Social Studies**

7.12 Identify the continuation of the Eastern Roman Empire as the Byzantine Empire, and describe the diffusion of Christianity and the Latin language.

7.16 Describe the origins and central features of Islam: Key Person(s): Mohammad; Sacred Texts: The Quran and The Sunnah; Basic Beliefs: monotheism, Five Pillars

**Visual Art**

6.VA.Cn2.A Analyze how art reflects changing times, traditions, resources, and cultural uses.

7.VA.Cn2.A Analyze how responses to art are influenced by understanding the time and place in which it was created, the available resources, and cultural uses.

6.VA.R1.B Identify and interpret works of art that reveal a variety of world cultures and values.

7.VA.R1.B Explain how presentation methods and environments influence how art is perceived and valued.

6.VA.R2.A Interpret art to identify ideas and mood conveyed by determining relevant context and analyzing use of media and subject matter while using appropriate art vocabulary.

7.VA.R2.A Interpret art to identify ideas and mood conveyed by analyzing art-making approaches, relevant context, subject matter, and use of media while using appropriate art vocabulary.

*The Furtmeyr Bible [1400 CE - 1499 CE]* (Page 98)
Step 1: **Background and Preparation:** Before the invention of the printing press, all books had to be hand-written and copied by scribes. Many of these books were beautifully illustrated, or “illuminated.” Talented scribes often lavished their work on sacred texts in particular. The World Digital Library includes examples of these illuminated texts from several of the world’s major religions.

Before beginning the lesson, you may wish to read or have your students read some background on the history of illuminated manuscripts. One good resource is “The Manuscript Tradition,” part of the Oregon State University Library’s McDonald Collection: [http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/omeka/exhibits/show/mcdonald/manuscripts/scribe/](http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/omeka/exhibits/show/mcdonald/manuscripts/scribe/). Then you should familiarize yourself with the bibliographic pages for each text listed under “Resources” on this page. Before class, decide how to divide the class into pairs. Make sure each student will have internet access and print out enough copies of the worksheet for each student. (If computer access is not available during your class period, make copies of pages 6-8 of this lesson plan for each of your students. Students should then be directed to skip question 2 on the worksheet.)

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**Step 2:** To begin the lesson, lead a discussion on the definition, process, and history of illuminated manuscripts. What do students already know? Have any of them seen such a manuscript before? With what type of books do they associate this art form?

Tell students that they will be studying examples of illuminated manuscript pages from the sacred texts of three major religions.

**Step 3:** Assign pairs of students to a computer (or pass out the copies of the manuscript pages) and give each student a copy of the worksheet. You may wish to go over the worksheet questions, and, if using paper copies, identify each manuscript page.

Allow the class time to complete their worksheets. Circulate to answer questions and provide help.

**Step 4:** Come back together as a class to look at each page again. Ask students to share some of what they discovered. If time permits, you make wish to read and discuss the descriptions of each text found on the bibliographic pages (listed under “Resources”). You might also assign these description as homework reading, and ask students to discuss how this new information affects their understanding of the manuscript pages.

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**RESOURCES**

- **Qur’an [1400 CE - 1500 CE]**

- **The Furtmeyr Bible [1400 CE - 1499 CE]**

- **Mishneh Torah [1300 CE - 1350 CE]**
  - Bibliographic Info: [http://www.wdl.org/en/item/3962/#q=jewish&time_periods=500-1499&qla=en](http://www.wdl.org/en/item/3962/#q=jewish&time_periods=500-1499&qla=en)
ILLUMINATED MANUSCRIPTS WORKSHEET (PAGE 1)

NAME__________________________________________

INSTRUCTIONS:
Click on the link provided next to each of the illuminated manuscripts to view one selected page from each (or simply view the selected images on pages 6-8 of this lesson plan). When you have answered all of the questions for each of the manuscripts, answer the Final Questions in the box at the bottom of page 5.


1. Describe what you see. How much text is on the page and how much decoration? What colors have been used? Do you notice illustrations? Decorative designs? Symbols?

2. Now scroll through other pages using the sidebar to the left. Is this book heavily illuminated or is it mostly text? Is the selected page you first looked at typical or unusual for this text?

3. Could you identify this text as a product of a particular religion if you saw only this page? Why or why not? What details are important?

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**FINAL QUESTIONS:**
How are these texts similar? How are they different? Why do you think all three religions used illumination in their sacred texts?
لله بالغ في خلقه وشؤونها و мировه لما أرسلنا نبينا موسى على فرعون ولا أهله وجعلنا له رسلنا مهدلين و سلحتنا له سلاحا وأطيعنا او أخافنا فطمعنا ضررنا أمرنا على نفس الأموات نمأنا لهما سينبهم لآخرة حرة فأسنا أخافنا إن أخفينا أو أمعنا على من عنا فأمعناه ما نصى لنا ألا أعلب عيني أو أشفنها أو أحل قناتنا أصبر الأفواه الألقى