# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How to use this resource</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum links</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Irish manuscripts</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact sheet 1: The Book of Kells</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom activities 1: The Book of Kells</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact sheet 2: How was the Book of Kells made?</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom activities 2: How was the Book of Kells made?</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact sheet 3: Artists and their decoration</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom activities 3: Artists and their decoration</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact sheet 4: Scribes and their calligraphy</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom activities 4: Scribes and their calligraphy</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fact sheet 5: Meaning</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom activities 5: Meaning</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Visit Activities</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ Answers</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Glossary</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Reading</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This resource is **for classroom use** pre-visit/post-visit.

**Fact sheets:** The fact sheets included in this guide may either be used by teachers to assist with lesson planning or may be given to students as hand-outs.

**Classroom activities:** The classroom activities for each section are intended to be photocopied by teachers for their students to use in class. There are separate classroom activities for Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle students. At the back of the pack there are some additional post-visit activities which are not cycle-specific.

All other sections of the guide are aimed at teachers and the meanings of words in bold print throughout the text are included in the glossary.
CURRICULUM LINKS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Junior Cycle</th>
<th>Fact sheet</th>
<th>Senior Cycle</th>
<th>Fact sheet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>History</strong>&lt;br&gt;Strand 1: Think like a historian&lt;br&gt;Strands 2 and 3: The history of Ireland and the history of Europe and the wider world Element: Exploring people, culture and ideas</td>
<td>1: The Book of Kells 2: How was the Book of Kells made? 4: Scribes and their calligraphy</td>
<td><strong>Religious Education</strong>&lt;br&gt;Section E – God Talk&lt;br&gt;Section G – Celebrating Faith&lt;br&gt;Section H – Story</td>
<td>1: The Book of Kells 5: Meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Religious Education</strong>&lt;br&gt;Strand 1: Expressing beliefs Element 1: Enquiry, exploration and reflection and action&lt;br&gt;Strand 2: Exploring questions Element: 1 Enquiry, exploration and reflection and action</td>
<td>1: The Book of Kells 5: Meaning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION TO IRISH MANUSCRIPTS

Christianity was introduced to Ireland in the early fifth century. As this was a religion based on a book, the Bible, the earliest missionaries to Ireland would have brought books (manuscripts) with them, and ultimately taught the Irish how to read and write. Before the arrival of Christianity in Ireland, we had ogham (an ancient system of writing designed specifically for the Irish language), but it was only practical for short inscriptions, and was superseded by the Roman alphabet which was introduced from Britain.

Most manuscripts were produced in monasteries that were wealthy enough to afford the resources required (a library and access to sources of vellum and pigments). At the time the Book of Kells was made, Irish monasteries were important places of learning and students came from all over Europe to study in them. Ireland became known as the land of saints and scholars. The Library of Trinity College Dublin is privileged to have the world’s largest collection of gospel books from Early Christian Ireland. These manuscripts include the Codex Usserianus Primus, the Book of Durrow, the Book of Armagh, the Book of Dimma, the Book of Mulling, the Book of Kells and the Garland of Howth.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT...

In times past, many people regarded these manuscripts as having talismanic or magical properties, offering protection from harm.

In the seventeenth century, one farmer went as far as to dip the Book of Durrow into his cattle’s drinking water in the hope that it would protect them from illness. Water mixing with Verigris (green pigment) caused damage to the vellum which can still be seen to this day.
What is the Book of Kells?

The Book of Kells is one of the world’s greatest medieval treasures. It is a lavishly decorated illuminated manuscript written in Latin. It contains a copy of the four gospels (the gospel according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) as well as supporting texts and commentary on the Bible. It is set apart from other illuminated manuscripts of the same period by the quality of its artwork and the sheer number of illustrations that run throughout the 680 pages of the book. It was intended for ceremonial use on special occasions such as Easter rather than for everyday use.

When was it made?

It is not known exactly when the Book of Kells was made but it is thought that it may have been around 800 AD, which was almost 400 years after St Patrick arrived in Ireland as a missionary to convert the Irish people to Christianity. When the Book of Kells was written, there were less than half a million people living in Ireland. During this period, people lived and farmed in close communities along rivers and waterways and had fortified homesteads to defend themselves against raiding groups. There were three categories of social standing in a community; slaves or hostages at the bottom, then peasants and soldiers, and at the top were tribal kings.
Where was it made?

Two monasteries are important to the story of the Book of Kells: the monastery of Iona (off the West coast of Scotland) and the monastery of Kells in Co. Meath (Ireland). When Viking raids made it too dangerous for monks in the monastery of Iona to remain there, they fled to the monastery of Kells in Co. Meath. This was around 806 AD. It is not known if the book was made wholly in Iona or Kells or if part of it was written in each location, but we know that it remained in Kells throughout the Middle Ages and eventually, it was placed in the library of Trinity College Dublin by Bishop Henry Jones of Meath in 1661.

The monastery of Iona was set up by St. Colum Cille (or Columba), who was one of Ireland’s best known saints. He was born in Gartan, Co. Donegal, but left Ireland to go into exile on the island of Iona and founded the monastery there in 563 AD. While it is not known why the Book of Kells was made, one theory is that it was written to honour the 200th anniversary of St. Colum Cille’s death.

DID YOU KNOW?
The pages of a manuscript are called folios and the page numbering system works like this:

Folio 1 recto (or f 1r for short) means the front of page 1 and folio 1 verso (or f 1v) means the back of page 1.

DID YOU KNOW?
The Book of Kells was never completed. Two pages are blank and in a few others we can see some decorative elements that were begun but left unfinished. Why? Nobody knows!
Life in an early Christian monastery

In the days when the Book of Kells was made, young men who joined the monastery, did so when they were about 15 or 16 years of age. One of the ways that people knew these men belonged to the monastery was because the tops of their heads were shaved. The shaving of part or all of the hair on their head was called ‘tonsure’. Monks chose to live removed from the secular communities and monastery life meant following a strict timetable of prayer and work. The self-sufficient monastery was a hive of industry. Each monk had a role within the monastery and some were scribes, who did the writing in manuscripts like the Book of Kells. Some monks were farmers, others were metal workers, some taught the neighbouring children and others were missionaries, telling people outside the monastery about the gospel. The missionaries carried pocket gospel books e.g. the Book of Mulling, which were small enough to carry in a satchel.

DISCOVERIES

Archaeologists have carried out special studies in Iona which have led to interesting discoveries. For example, they found that the monastery was surrounded by a sturdy enclosure which probably had bushes growing on top. Within it there were several buildings dotted around an open space called a plateola. They also found evidence that the monks made book satchels and shoes from leather and covered boats with it as well. The leather was made in their tannery from the skins of cattle and sheep. Some of the monks were expert at woodworking and the knives and other tools that they used were made by monks who were good at iron-working. Fortunately, they swept some debris from their trades into the ditch outside the monastery’s enclosure, which has been very helpful for archaeologists.
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES 1: THE BOOK OF KELLS

Junior Cycle & Senior Cycle: The Book of Kells Creative Competition

Each year, Trinity invites people of all ages, from school children to adults, to submit new artistic interpretations of the Book of Kells. Create a painting, drawing, poem or short story based on the images of the Book of Kells and enter to be in with a chance of winning a prize for your school. Find out more at:

[www.bookofkells.ie/competition](http://www.bookofkells.ie/competition)

**ART**
- Painting / Drawing

**WRITING**
- Poem / Short Story

FREE to ENTER
Fact sheet 2: How was the Book of Kells made?

As the Book of Kells was made over 600 years before the invention of the printing press, it had to be written and illustrated by hand. (In fact, the word *manuscript* literally means *written by hand*. It comes from two Latin words, *manus*: *hand* and *scriptus*: *written*). This was a time before factories made paper and books, so every page was made by hand and every book was bound by hand. This was a long and difficult process for the monks who made the book, not least because they had to make all their own materials. Even the ink used to write the book was made by the monks.

**Tools and materials**

Sometimes Gospel books include images of the *evangelists* depicted as *scribes*, so we get to see tools of the trade such as quills, ink horns, styluses and wax tablets. These were the basic tools for writing, but how was the whole thing put together?

**Quill Pen**

The monks wrote with quill pens and made them from birds’ tail feathers – swans and geese were a favoured source. They would cut the base of the feather at an angle to form the nib or point of the pen. Quills would be given a sharp, angled tip so that scribes could produce the thick and thin lines of lettering that is remarkable for its beauty and both elaborate and graceful in appearance.

**Ink well**

Ink wells, which the scribes kept their ink in while writing, were made from cow horns. A scribe would dip their quill into the ink well to ink it up for writing.

**Stylus**

A stylus is a pointed implement, generally made of metal or bone, which was used for ruling a manuscript. It was also used for writing on wax tablets.

Before beginning writing, scribes would typically rule the page to provide a guide for their *calligraphy*. They did this in drypoint, which means that instead of drawing lines using ink, they scored the page i.e. pressed the lines into it with a stylus. First they would mark out a series of pin holes along the margins with a knife and then score the page with a stylus to create horizontal lines between the pinholes.
a) Detail from folio 76v of the Book of Kells, showing line endings clearly marked with a series of pin holes.
b) Wax tablet (Springmount Bog Tablet, National Museum of Ireland)
c) Detail of folio 316r of the Book of Kells, where the scribe wrote over a patch.

**Wax tablet**

A wax tablet was a slab of wood with a wax inset. Words could be scratched into the wax with a stylus. Wax tablets fulfilled a variety of functions, for example, they were used by scribes and their trainees to practice their writing (a cheaper surface than vellum to practice on), for drafting texts (making rough copies) and for trying out designs.

**Vellum**

The *folios* of the Book of Kells were made from vellum, which is prepared calf-skin. To make vellum, the skin of a calf was soaked in lime or excrement to loosen the hairs. This had to be done for the right amount of time. The skins were then scraped with a knife to remove hairs and loose fatty layers and stretched on a frame to dry. Re-wetting and scraping on both sides of the skin might be repeated several times before the surface was finished by rubbing it smooth with a pumice stone. Finally, it was cut to form individual folios.

Young animals with low fat content were best as fatty patches were hard to remove and could be translucent, and so were not good for writing. Cattle were a significant commodity in the cashless society of the time and the value of vellum meant that it was used even when it was of uneven quality or contained flaws. You can sometimes see stitching on the vellum where a manuscript was repaired or patched.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

It took the skins of approximately 185 calves to make the Book of Kells.

**YUCK!**

Some imperfections and holes in vellum were actually caused by flies and parasites while the animals were still alive. Sometimes they were maintained and even highlighted e.g. by outlining them in red ink.
Inks and Pigments

The monks most likely made their own inks and pigments. Beautiful colours were used in the Book of Kells, but what plants and minerals did they make the colours from? Recent research using x-ray fluorescence and micro Raman spectroscopy have helped to answer this question and confirm the employment of a palette which was largely available locally.

Inks

Iron gall ink (black): Made from iron sulphate, crushed oak apples and a binding medium of gum in a solution of water, wine or vinegar. This ink is very durable when applied to vellum, although it can fade. This is the principal ink on the Book of Kells.

Carbon black: Made from soot deposits from wood or bone, this ink was also used but liable to flake.

Binding media

An ingredient like egg white (glair), egg yolk, natural gum or animal gelatine was needed to bind the pigment and make it adhere to the surface of the page. This is called a binding medium. (Not to be confused with bookbinding, which is the process of physically assembling a book).

Pigments

Pigments were more complex and some of those used in the Book of Kells are outlined below. The artists of the Book of Kells employed a technique of adding as many as three pigments on top of a base layer.

**Orange-red**
- Red lead. Made from heating lead to high temperatures. Also known as minium (after the river Minius in northern Spain where it was extensively mined in ancient times).

**Yellow-gold**
- Orpiment, a highly toxic arsenic sulphide, known in the Roman world as auripigmentum, or ‘gold pigment’.

**Blue**
- Despite its frequent identification in previous studies as lapis lazuli, the blue in the Book of Kells has been identified as indigo or woad (a plant widely grown in Ireland).

**Green**
- Verdigris, which due to its corrosive properties perforates the pages of many insular manuscripts, has a high copper content. It is formed from the corrosion/oxidisation of copper when exposed to acid.

**Dark green**
- ‘Vergaut’ was made by mixing orpiment with indigo.

**White**
- Mostly made from gypsum, an abundant mineral which contains calcium, sulphur bound to oxygen and water.

**Purple**
- ‘Orcein’ is a dye made from the lichen Roccella Tinctoria (a species of fungus).

---

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Scribes and artists spent long hours preparing colours and vellum and they had to work with poisonous and foul-smelling materials. Not an easy job!
Binding

Binding is the process of physically assembling a book. Manuscripts were typically bound only after writing and illumination was complete. Several pieces of vellum were folded in half and placed one inside the other to create a ‘quire’ or ‘gathering’ (rather like a booklet), which was then sewn together down the centre fold. Then, to form a book, quires were bound either into wooden boards or into a soft cover. Usually, soft covers were made from leather and had a flap, like the wallet-shaped leather cover found with the Faddan More Psalter in Co. Tipperary in 2006. This structure with three buttons is shown in a number of evangelist portraits and was probably stamped with a design like the St. Cuthbert Gospel which is a British manuscript held in the British Library in London.

The St. Cuthbert Gospel  
Cover of the Fadden More Psalter
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES 2:
HOW WAS THE BOOK OF KELLS MADE?

Junior Cycle: Work as a historian

1. Historians find out about the past by searching for and examining clues. These clues are things which people made or used or wrote long ago. You can work as a historian by looking at the clues below, sources one, two and three, to see what you can find out about how the Book of Kells was made.

Source One
This image is a detail from a page of the Book of Kells (the page number is folio 76v). It shows pin holes in the page at the start of each line.

Source Two
This image, which is a detail from a page of the Book of Kells, (folio 316v), shows a patch in the vellum. Vellum (calf-skin) is the material the pages of the Book of Kells are made from. The patch has writing on it.

Source Three
This page from the Book of Kells is known as the Portrait of St. John (folio 291v). In the picture, St. John is represented as a scribe.
Source One

a. What do you think was the purpose of the pin holes?

b. What does the use of these pin holes tell us about the way the scribes worked?

c. After marking out these pin holes, what do you think the next step was for the scribe?

Source Two

a. Identify evidence from this image that valuable vellum was not wasted.

b. What evidence is there that vellum was a durable material?

c. Can you tell if the writing was done before or after the patch was added and what does this tell us about the reason the patch was used?

Source Three

a. Give two pieces of evidence from the picture to show that the artist wishes to portray St John as a scribe.

b. Name two things we learn from this image about the tools scribes used for writing.

c. Can you guess what main pigments were likely to have been used to make the colours in this page?
Sources One, Two and Three

a. Are these images primary or secondary sources of information?

2. In the box provided, match each letter from Box X with the number of its pair in Box Y. One match has been completed as an example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOX X</th>
<th>BOX Y</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Wax tablet</td>
<td>1 This was made from a cow horn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Vellum</td>
<td>2 The colouring agent in paint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Binding</td>
<td>3 Used to score a page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D Stylus</td>
<td>4 number of pieces of vellum, folded together like a booklet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E Quire</td>
<td>5 A page for writing on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F Ink well</td>
<td>6 Had a number of functions including writing practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G Quill</td>
<td>7 The process of physically assembling the book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H Pigment</td>
<td>8 The pages of the Book of Kells were made from this</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Folio</td>
<td>9 A pen made from a bird's feather</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Put the stages of the vellum-making process in the correct order by numbering them from 1 to 5.

<p>| |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Re-wetting and scraping on both sides of the skin was repeated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The skin was scraped with a knife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The skin was soaked in lime or excrement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The surface was rubbed smooth with a pumice stone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The skin was stretched on a frame to dry.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Use the clues provided to solve the word puzzle.

**Clues**

1. The disadvantage of carbon black ink was that it could ______________.
2. The pigment used to make the blue colour in the Book of Kells came from this plant.
3. Ink made from oak apples and iron sulphate.
4. The word manuscript comes from two Latin words; manus and ______________.
5. The animal whose horns were used to make ink wells.
6. This word comes from the Latin for leaf.

**Word Puzzle**

```
6
v
1>
2>
3>
4>
5>
```
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES 2:  
HOW WAS THE BOOK OF KELLS MADE?

Senior Cycle: Quick Quiz

1. The feathers of which birds were favoured for making quills?  
   a) Crows  
   b) Budgies  
   c) Geese or swans

2. What are folios?  
   a) Pages  
   b) An ancient kind of book cover  
   c) Folders that completed artwork was kept in

3. The colour that was made from indigo or woad was ________________ .

4. Unscramble the letters to find the name of the pigment that caused holes to form in vellum due to its high copper content:  
   i g e d v s r r i

5. Ink wells were typically made from the horns of which animal?  
   a) Goats  
   b) Cows  
   c) Sheep

6. When were manuscripts usually bound?  
   a) As soon as vellum had been made  
   b) Once they had been ruled for writing  
   c) After artwork and calligraphy had been done

7. The scientific techniques recently used to ascertain the materials used to make inks and pigments are called _________________ and _________________ .

8. Unscramble the letters below to find the name of the poison contained in the yellow-gold orpiment colour used in the Book of Kells:  
   n e c a r i s

9. What was a quire?  
   a) A group of monks who sang hymns in the monastery church  
   b) A type of ink  
   c) A number of pieces of vellum, folded together like a booklet as part of the binding process

10. At the end of the vellum making process, after the skin was rubbed with a pumice stone, it was ________________ .
Fact sheet 3: Artists and their decoration

Artists

Dr Françoise Henry (1902-82), a renowned scholar of early Irish art and lecturer in University College Dublin, identified three main artists from the different styles that can be seen in the decorated pages of the Book of Kells. They are known as the Goldsmith (credited with the famous Chi Rho page and the eight circled cross page), the Illustrator (thought to have painted the temptation page and the arrest of Christ page, illustrating stories from the Bible) and the Portrait Painter (believed to have painted the portraits of Christ, St Matthew and St John). The Goldsmith, who liked using the orpiment colour, with its lustrous golden quality, produced art of a fine and detailed nature that resembles metalwork and illustrated the sacred text as if with precious jewels and textiles.

Decoration

The artwork in the Book of Kells is superior and more sophisticated than anything else produced in other manuscripts from the same period. Only two of the book’s 680 pages lack colour and some of the intricate detail is so minute that it is barely visible to the naked eye. For example, take the Chi Rho page, which is one of the most celebrated images of medieval art. Letters which resemble X, P and I in stylised format take centre stage, with the large X shape sweeping right across the surface of the page. XPI (Chi Rho) denoting the first two letters of Christ’s name in Greek, was often used as a Christian symbol. One of the great surprises about this page is the animals such as cats, an otter and butterflies that are dotted amongst the letters. The page is also packed with a variety of spirals, triskeles and trumpet scrolls with panels of intricate interlace and a wide range of patterns.

The Chi Rho page, folio 34r, the Book of Kells.

FACT

James Joyce compared his masterwork, *Ulysses* to the intricate artistry of the Book of Kells and expressed the hope that a page of his own work would be as easy to identify as a page of the Book of Kells.
The designs for some of the more complex pages were planned using compasses and templates and for repetitive design features ink stamps may even have been used. The Book of Kells has relatively few naturalistic images. Instead, it incorporates decoration such as Greek key patterns, Roman vegetal patterns, step patterns and a number of other types of more abstract ornament such as spirals and interlace. This demonstrates an awareness or engagement with the continent. The interlace seen in medieval Irish manuscripts developed from the art of antiquity. The animal interlace in Kells displays a higher order of ingenuity than the examples of interlace found in earlier illuminated manuscripts.

**Spirals:** These are common throughout the book and trace their origin to the Iron Age. They reflect the art style that was popular in Ireland from approx. 200 BC up to the introduction of Christianity in the early fifth century AD.

**Interlace:** Plain ribbons knotted together were a feature of art in various mediums in the Mediterranean.

**Animal interlace:** Careful examination of much of the interlace in the Book of Kells shows that it is formed from the bodies of birds, animals, snakes and humans. This was a popular form of art in Germanic territories at the time.

a. Detail of spirals in folio 4v.

b. Interlace in folio 27v.

c. Animal interlace in folio 8r.

d. Greek key pattern in folio 4v.

e. Step pattern in folio 8r.
Insular Art

The reason that the Book of Kells and other early Irish gospel books are often designated as ‘Celtic’ is because they are adorned with designs fashioned from tightly sprung spirals and whorls. These motifs have origins in the art style which the Celts brought to Ireland. In these gospel books, we see how the fusion of *curvilinear* forms with art from other cultures resulted in a new art style – **Insular** art. There are clear similarities between the decoration used in the manuscripts of Early Christian Ireland like the Book of Kells and in other forms of insular art such as the metalwork and stonework of the period. For example:

**Dotting/Stippling**

![Detail from folio 34r, Book of Kells showing tight red dotting on a blank background.](image1)

![Detail from the Ardagh Chalice showing stippling on the bowl of the chalice.](image2)

**Triskeles**

![Triskeles shown in a detail from folio 3v of the Book of Durrow (carpet page).](image3)

![Triskeles shown in a detail from the back of the Tara Brooch.](image4)

**Spirals**

![Spirals on the eight-circle cross page (folio 33r) of the Book of Kells.](image5)

![Spirals on an engraved disc found in Donore, Co. Meath.](image6)
Illumination

Illuminating a manuscript means embellishing (decorating) it with bright colours. The word *illumination* comes from the Latin word for ‘lit up’ or ‘enlightened’. In the Book of Kells, illumination was used to portray entire scenes on certain pages and to embellish initial letters and animal motifs throughout the book.

Illumination was geared towards elevating the status of the book (as well as its contents, patron and the monastery in which it was produced), but it had other functions too, such as punctuation. The punctuation marks we use today didn’t exist at the time the Book of Kells was made. At its most basic, illumination is applied to the opening words of important passages or used to highlight important phrases.

Detail from folio 89r, Book of Kells. Here we see how a horseman’s foot elegantly draws attention to an essential piece of Christian doctrine ‘Et tertia die resurget’ (‘and the third day he shall rise again’: Mt 20.19). Today we would probably use bold text or underline if we wanted to draw attention to certain words.

In bibles today, the gospels are divided into chapters and verses, but in these manuscripts this is not the case and the beginnings of gospels were often marked by an evangelist portrait (a painting of the author of that gospel). In several gospel books the evangelist portrait was followed by a ‘carpet page’ which is a page that is covered with ornamentation like interlace or spirals and has no text on it e.g. folio 3v of the Book of Durrow (shown below). Don’t you think it looks like an Eastern patterned prayer carpet? That’s how it got its name!

**DID YOU KNOW?**

Many books, including the Book of Kells, were placed in book shrines (ornate precious metal boxes) some of which were used as status symbols by their owners.

In the year 1006 AD, the Book of Kells was stolen. Why? For its golden book shrine. The book was found two months later but the golden shrine was never found.

This theft is recorded in the Annals of Ulster, which describes the book as “the most precious object of the western world”.

The Book of Kells
Secondary School Teachers’ Guide
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES 3: ARTISTS AND THEIR DECORATION

Junior Cycle: Design Inspiration

Take a close look at the Chi Rho page (folio 34r) of the Book of Kells. You can view the Book of Kells online at [http://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/index.php?DRIS_ID=MS58_003v](http://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/index.php?DRIS_ID=MS58_003v) and navigate to folio 34r. You will be able to zoom in to different parts of the page and observe the minute details of the decoration. Select any one design motif from the page and explore it in detail and then respond to the following questions and design task.

Select one design motif, for example:

![Chi Rho Page, folio 34r, Book of Kells](image)

1. Look at the design motif you have chosen. What does it remind you of?
2. What do you think inspired it?
3. What does it inspire you to make?
4. Copy it and colour it using a different colour palette.
5. Combine it with another motif (either from this page or from elsewhere) to make a new design.
6. Design task: Take inspiration from the motif you’ve chosen to design either hand-printed textiles, metalwork, pottery or another type of craftwork.
   Or
   Design a tattoo inspired by the motif you have chosen.
   (Plan and research as appropriate and clarify your ideas through the use of working drawings).
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES 3: ARTISTS AND THEIR DECORATION

Senior Cycle: Five-minute finds

Working in pairs, you have 5 minutes to complete each of the following tasks. You can use the digital version of the Book of Kells as a resource. Go to: http://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/index.php?DRIS_ID=MS58_003v

1. From your knowledge of the La Tène art style, name and sketch as many La Tène motifs as you can.

2. Look at pages from the Book of Kells and identify as many of the motifs from your answer to question one as you can.

3. Compare with your classmates to see who found the most motifs!

4. There are clear similarities between the decoration used in the manuscripts of Early Christian Ireland like the Book of Kells and in other forms of insular art such as the metalwork and stonework of the period. Find the common motifs used in the works listed in the table below and fill them in on the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMON MOTIFS</th>
<th>BOOK OF KELLS</th>
<th>BOOK OF DURROW</th>
<th>TARA BROOCH</th>
<th>ARDAGH CHALICE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E.g. Triskele</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Working in groups, discuss the following statement:
"Once a motif, whether figurative or symbolic or purely ornamental, is employed in any medium, it enters a common currency of decoration, and can be borrowed, re-used and adapted" Meehan (1994).
Fact sheet 4: Scribes and their calligraphy

Scribes
It was a scribe’s job to do the writing in manuscripts like the Book of Kells and some scribes were also artists. Larger books like the Book of Kells used several scribes. A number of hands have been detected in the book, but because the scribes did not sign their work, the exact division of labour is difficult to identify.

Very little archaeological evidence survives to tell us who these scribes were so we have to look to other sources for information. It is most likely that early scribes were clerical i.e. they were part of religious establishments. As copyists they didn’t absolutely have to be literate, but it would certainly have helped. It is likely that scribes were young. Given the detail seen in early Irish manuscripts, scribes would have needed excellent eye-sight and on account of the poisonous nature of the pigments they used, they may also have had quite a short lifespan. There are lots of references to saints being scribes and also scribal teachers, signifying the importance / status of scribes in Irish society at that time. But most commonly, we learn something about scribe illuminators from colophons, which are notes left by the scribes themselves in medieval manuscripts. For example, in the Book of Armagh, a scribe named Ferdomnach left an inscription saying he produced the book for Torbach, who was Abbot of Armagh in the year 807 and this allows us to date the book quite precisely.

After the Book of Kells, the Book of Durrow is the next best known manuscript in Trinity College Dublin’s collection. Smaller, and thought to be about 150 years older than the Book of Kells, the Book of Durrow is sometimes referred to as the ‘elder sister of the Book of Kells’. It includes a colophon in which the scribe requests to be remembered in the prayers of whoever holds in his hand this little book. There is unfortunately no colophon in the Book of Kells to provide clues as to who produced it and the identity of its scribes and artists is one of the many mysteries which surround this enigmatic book.

Scribes worked in a special writing room in a monastery called a scriptorium and they were trained in calligraphy, which means beautiful writing. The scribes made many errors when they were copying the text. The usual method of correction was to insert dots within the letters to be deleted. One scribe copied a whole page by accident (folio 218v). It was cancelled through the addition of red crosses.
Calligraphy

The Irish began writing manuscripts after Christianity was introduced to Ireland in the early fifth century and isolation from developments in scripts in the rest of Europe appears to lie behind the distinctive ‘insular’ script which had developed by the late sixth century. This first emerged in majuscule (‘uppercase’ letters usually of even height, also referred to as insular half-uncial).

Features of insular majuscule script:

- Letterforms are wide and rounded
- Several of the uprights are curved
- Balance is achieved by triangular serifs at the top
- Ascenders and descenders are proportionately short
- Majuscule script is tidily contained within head and base lines

This imposing script was used for important books such as the Book of Kells and once established, was written more cursively (with joined writing), producing minuscule (‘lower case’ letters where the ascenders and descenders extend beyond the body of the letter). These scripts were to form the basis of the script used to print the Irish language right up to the mid-twentieth century. It has been observed that the impeccable majuscule script of the Book of Kells has a formal, print-like quality, while the compact insular miniscule script used in the smaller pocket gospel books such as the Book of Dimma and the Book of Mulling gives them a more handwritten feel and personal character.

---

The Book of Kells, early ninth century (TCD MS 58, f. 16v) © The Board of Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin. 2015.

The Book of Dimma, late eighth century (TCD MS 59, p. 107) © The Board of Trinity College Dublin, the University of Dublin. 2015.
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES 4: SCRIBES AND THEIR CALLIGRAPHY

Junior Cycle: Try something new - copy something old

1. Make your own ink

Many of the ingredients used to make ink in Early Christian Ireland were toxic and when it comes to recipes for them it would be a classic case of “don’t try this at home”! Here is a safe alternative.

What you will need
• Sieve or tea-strainer
• Bowl
• Pestle and mortar
• Gloves (optional - to protect hands from staining)
• Jar (to store the ink in once made)
• Quill or dip pen (to write with)

Ingredients
• ½ cup of berries (either blackberries, blueberries or raspberries)
• ½ teaspoon salt
• ½ teaspoon white vinegar
• A few drops of water

Method
1. Crush the berries using a pestle and mortar.
2. Sieve them to collect the juice in a bowl.
3. Add vinegar, then salt.
4. If ink is too thick, add a few drops of water.

2. Write with your homemade ink

• Using your ink with a quill or dip pen, try writing some letters.
• Write your name.
• Try writing the word in this picture, copying the style of the calligraphy.

3. Think like a scribe-illuminator

In Early Christian Ireland, people did not have shops to buy their art materials from. They had to be resourceful, imaginative and willing to experiment. Create a drawing or painting using only things you find or make. For example, instead of drawing lines with a pencil, you could make lines from string that you stick onto a page. Paper is allowed, unless you would like to be very strict with yourself!

TOP TIP!
Calligraphy isn’t as easy as it looks. The scribes who wrote the Book of Kells would have had lots of training and practice, so don’t expect perfect results. Just enjoy yourself!
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES 4: Scribes and Their Calligraphy

Senior Cycle: Creative Calligraphy

1. With the help of your teacher, have a class discussion on lettering and calligraphy:

   (a) Do the below typefaces suggest a different mood or tone of voice?
   Which style would you use to write the words historic, Broadway, horror, Ireland, pretty and laugh?
   Can a writing style change how we read a piece of text?

   (b) What are the similarities and differences between the two examples of script shown below?
   Do they suggest a different mood or a different level of importance?
   Look at roundness of letter, ascenders and descenders etc. (Both examples are from manuscripts in the Library of Trinity College Dublin’s collection). The first is insular majuscule script from the Book of Kells and the second is insular miniscule script from the Book of Dimma).
(c) Have you ever seen modern calligraphy like the envelope calligraphy shown here? Do you like it? On what kinds of projects could you use modern calligraphy?

(d) In your opinion, what have the pieces of art in each of the photographs below got in common with the calligraphy and illuminations of the Book of Kells?

Example of Expressive Calligraphy by Irish artist calligrapher, Denis Brown.

Example of work on vellum skins by Dennis Brown.

Street art from the ‘They are Us’ project by Irish artist, Maser.

2. Create a piece of art based on a word, letter or phrase of your choice, taking inspiration from the modern works featured in this exercise.

Or

Create a design for a piece of contemporary/traditional calligraphy based on the following quote from twelfth century writer Gerald of Wales which is thought to be about the Book of Kells:

“You will make out intricacies, so delicate and so subtle, so full of knots and links, with colours so fresh and vivid, that you might say that all this were the work of an angel, and not of a man.”

Lettering should be hand-constructed and you are encouraged to work to scale and show measurements and relevant information on your choice of typography, spacing and layout and on how your design is produced. You may wish to incorporate images, decorative motifs, expressive words and lettering.
Fact sheet 5: Meaning

No-one knows for sure what the meaning of the various decorations in the Book of Kells was intended to be and the intricate detail may even be the result of a devotional or meditative exercise. Motifs occurring with frequency throughout the text are believed to have particular meanings and **symbolism** is important.

**Symbols and their meanings**

**Designs grouped in three**: The Trinity

**Vines, chalices, circular elements**: The Eucharist

**Lozenge**: One of the most important elements of **iconography** in the Book of Kells, the lozenge, represented Christ as the Word of God from early Christian times. With its four corners, it also represented an early **medieval** understanding of the world as flat e.g. lozenge on folio 188r, Quoniam page.

**Angels**: Angel is the Greek word for messenger and angels were intermediaries between God and man. Angels, like the book, helped to make clear the unseen mysteries of the faith. When four angels occur together, as they do on a number of pages, they are usually interpreted as the archangels.

**Lion**: Symbolises Jesus and the royal house of Judah from which He was descended.

**Peacock**: Symbolises the incorruptibility of flesh. Also, the ‘eyes’ in the peacock’s tail feathers may symbolise the all-seeing eyes of God.

**Snake**: Symbolises the resurrection as snakes shed their skin every year. But it can also symbolise the devil and a reminder of the fall of man, the snake in Genesis being responsible for the loss of innocence.

**Fish**: Symbolises Jesus. A reminder of Christ’s power to work miracles (the story of the loaves and the fishes). Also, the initial letters of the words ‘Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour’ form the Greek word for fish, **icthys**.

**DID YOU KNOW?**

According to medieval encyclopaedia, the *Etymology of Isidore of Seville*, there was an ancient belief that lion cubs were born dead but revived by the male breathing on their faces and roaring. Images of lions in the Book of Kells may hint at this, since like the lion cubs, Jesus rose from the dead.

Another ancient belief that we learn about from Isidore is that a peacock’s flesh was thought to be so hard that it would not rot. St. Augustine of Hippo put this belief to the test. After being served roast peacock at dinner, he had some of the meat put aside. After thirty days, he found that there was no bad smell and even a year later, the flesh had become only a little dried out.
Reading the meaning of a page

The Virgin and Child page

This is one of the earliest depictions of the Virgin and Child in a western manuscript and probably takes its influence from a Byzantine icon. It is filled with icons and symbols: triple white dots, lozenge, lion’s head, the colour purple, flabellum, thurible, angles, the cross.

- Clothing: The Virgin Mary wears purple, a colour which signified royalty. The clusters of triple dots in white are a symbol for the Trinity. In the Far East, triple dots were also used to decorate the finest garments. The separate veil and cloak is north-west European.
- The brooch that Our Lady is wearing is shaped like a lozenge with four smaller lozenges contained within it. Her halo contains three crosses which link her to the Trinity.
- Jewelled throne with lions head: Lions represent Christ. The breath of life can be seen emerging from the lion’s mouth. This throne may also allude to Solomon’s throne described in the Old Testament as having lions’ heads.
- Christ’s hand on the Virgin’s breast: reference to milk of Christian instruction and also to fons vitae - the fountain of life.
- Our Lady is surrounded by four angels: Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and Uriel. The angels hold flabella (liturgical fans intended to keep insects away from the Eucharistic host as well as to show honour)
- A thurible (incense burner) shows we are in the presence of the sacred
- The group of six men who are all looking to their left (towards the bottom right of the page) is used as a device to guide the reader’s eye towards the facing page, signalling that the two pages should be read together. The text on the facing page begins Nativitas Christi in Bethlem (‘The Birth of Christ in Bethlehem’).
The Temptation page

The temptation of Christ page (folio 202v) is one of the few narrative scenes in the Book of Kells. It depicts a scene from the Gospel of St. Luke; the third temptation of Jesus (Luke 4:9-11), in which the devil tries to tempt Jesus to cast Himself from the roof of the temple and Jesus responds ‘thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God’.

- Jesus is shown at the top of the temple, protected by the angels above him while the black winged figure of the devil stands to Christ’s left, with the empty space around him helping to isolate him.
- The temple takes the form of an Irish shingled church/shrine. Although no wooden churches from Early Christian Ireland survive, clues about their appearance can be gleaned from art such as this page of the Book of Kells, which shows a church with an ornate roof of shingles (wooden tiles), emphatic ‘barge-boards’ (defining the edge of the roof) and carved finials on the top of the gables. Similarities can be seen with early Irish churches like the church on St. Macdara’s Island in Connemara, Co. Galway. For example, in St. Macdara’s church, decorative finials similar to those in this image of the temple can be seen. The imitation barge-boards and shingle shapes which are carved into the stone roof of St. Macdara’s church are also comparable.
- The temple is literally the body of the church and Christ the head. The people below are the living stones of the church that were referred to in biblical exegeses.
- The frame is like the ground plan of a church with a rectangular object at the top where an altar would be.
- The haloed figure holding crossed rods at the door is seen as Christ the judge.
- The surrounding figures may allude to the second temptation of Jesus, where He is led to a high place, shown all the kingdoms of the world and told that if he worshipped the devil it would all be his.

a. The Temptation page, folio 202v, the Book of Kells.
b. St. Macdara’s Church, St Macdara’s Island, Connemara, Co. Galway.

DID YOU KNOW?

On the temptation page of the Book of Kells (folio 202v), microscopic examination of the figure of the devil which stands to Christ’s left, has revealed a series of 25 stab-marks. The apparent attack on the devil on this page (which has the hallmarks of exorcism) took place soon after the book was made and it suggests that people had proximity to the book for personal use.
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES 5: MEANING

Junior Cycle: Seek and you shall find

**Teachers’ note:**

For this activity you can divide the class into groups and provide each group with a copy of the list of symbols in Factsheet 5: Meaning. Show the Virgin and Child page of the Book of Kells (folio 7v) to the class. You can view the Book of Kells online at: https://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/index.php?DRIS_ID=MS58_003v and navigate to folio 7v or use the colour copy of the image which is provided in the appendix.

1. Look at the Virgin and Child page and find as many symbols as you can.
2. Match these symbols with the appropriate column. Symbols: chalice, lion, triple dots, lozenge, fish, vine, designs grouped in three, circular elements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jesus</th>
<th>The Trinity</th>
<th>The Eucharist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Draw one symbol from each column above.
4. Spot the difference.
CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES 5: MEANING

Senior Cycle: Hidden depth

Teachers’ note:

For this activity you can divide the class into groups and provide each group with a copy of the list of symbols in Factsheet 5: Meaning. Show the Virgin and Child page of the Book of Kells (folio 7v) to the class. You can view the Book of Kells online at: 
https://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/index.php?DRIS_ID=MS58_003v
and navigate to folio 7v or use the colour copy of the image which is provided in the appendix.

1. Describe the figures on the Virgin and Child page, giving consideration to:
   a. Treatment of the human figure and how its representation here compares with that in other works you are familiar with from the ninth and tenth centuries.
   b. Possible influences.
   c. Your observations on style, pose, size and position and your opinion on what the artist may have wished to communicate through his choices.

2. Use the list of symbols to read the meaning of this page:
   a. Find as many symbols as you can.
   b. Make a note of the meaning of the symbols you find.
   c. With the help of your teacher, have a class discussion on the meaning of the page. Perhaps it has a hidden meaning. Is there more to it than meets the eye?
      Can you find any more clues as to what the artist wished to communicate through this image?
      Look at things like the context in which the symbols are used e.g. the Virgin Mary has a halo which bears three crosses while Christ has no halo. Could this be a celebration of Mary as the Mother of God and a means of emphasising Christ’s humanity?
      Note any instances where multiple symbols are used together, perhaps to strengthen the message. Also look at non-symbolic elements of the image.
Post-Visit Activities

Ask your class to **imagine** that they are scribes and they are creating a very rare, important book. What would it be about? What materials would they use to make it? What would the illustrations be? Who would they want to read this special book? Ask them to write out their ideas. Alternatively, maybe they can make a book as an art project. They can base this project on what they know about book-making from the exhibition.

Divide your class into groups, without using the same group divisions that toured the exhibition. Ask your students to make a map of the exhibition as they remember it. What were some of their **favourite** things in the exhibition? Have them describe these in their map.

Divide the class into groups and have them **create a poem** using their experience of and information from the exhibition. Have each member of the group write one line. Ask each group to read or perform the poem to the rest of the class.

Ask your students to **create a diary** of a week in the life of a scribe. Where is the monastery located in which he lives? What is his daily routine? What is his job within the monastery? Ask them to try and include at least one piece of information that they didn’t know before visiting the exhibition.

Ask your students to **create an illustration** for a special manuscript. Ask them to use some of the techniques they saw in the exhibition such as ‘interlace’. You can enhance the project by buying calligraphy pens for them to try out. These are easily purchased in any arts and crafts shop.

Have your students create a **short story** by asking them to pretend that they are a group of monks who are travelling from the island of Iona to Kells in Co. Meath, having had to leave Iona because of terrifying Viking raids. Ask them to tell you what they experienced during the raids, how they felt about leaving Iona, what they took with them, what the journey is like. Perhaps you could choose one of the students’ stories and have the students dramatise it through **role play**.

Open a **science discussion** with your students. You can discuss the minerals used in the exhibition by playing the following game.

The minerals you saw in the exhibition were used by the monks to create pigments. Today we have very different uses for these minerals. Minerals consist of chemical compounds which themselves are made from elements. An element is a thing which cannot be decomposed chemically and which constitutes all matter. See if your students can correctly match the elements listed here with the questions below:


1. Which element does the body take in when it breathes?
2. Which element is used to make household pipes that carry water?
3. Which element is found in milk and is good for your teeth and bones?
4. Which element has been removed from petrol to make it more environmentally friendly?
5. Which element is combined with oxygen to make water?
6. Which element is found on the tip of a match?
7. Which element is used to make cooking foil?
8. Which element is a poison?
Learn to draw the Foundation Knot

Start big, with a square about the size of the palm of your hand. Then, each time you repeat the exercise, start smaller, till you can draw the knot the size of your little finger nail, or as small as your pen or eye allows.

Foundation Knot construction*:

TEACHERS’ ANSWERS

Provided here are answers relating to some of the activities in this pack i.e. those that are based on fact rather than opinion or creative tasks.

Classroom Activities 2, Junior Cycle: ‘Work as a historian’

Source One

a. To mark the position where scribes intended to score lines when ruling the manuscript for calligraphy.
b. Meticulous about their work, prepared to put in the time to get the desired result.
c. To score the page with a stylus.

Source Two

a. The vellum was patched rather than discarded.
b. It could withstand being patched and stitched ( unlike paper ) and survived 1200 years despite this alteration.
c. Writing was done after the patch was added. The patch was added while the book was being made, and not afterwards e.g. to repair damage caused while the book was being read.

Source Three

a. Quill in his hand. Ink pot at his foot ( both items used by scribes ).
b. Quill pens had a pointed tip. We see the shape that an inkwell might have been.
c. Red lead, orpiment, indigo or woad, gypsum, orcein.

Sources One, Two and Three

Primary sources.

2. In the box provided, match each letter from Box X with the number of its pair in Box Y.
   A 6 - B 8 - C 7 - D 3 - E 4 - F 1 - G 9 - H 2 - I 5

3. Put the stages of the vellum-making process in the correct order by numbering them from 1 to 5.
   4 Re-wetting and scraping on both sides of the skin was repeated.
   2 The skin was scraped with a knife.
   1 The skin was soaked in lime or excrement.
   5 The surface was rubbed smooth with a pumice stone.
   3 The skin was stretched on a frame to dry.

4. Word Puzzle
   1 FLAKE - 2 WOAD - 3 IRONGALLINK - 4 SCRIPTUS - 5 COW - 6 FOLIO
Classroom Activities 2, Senior Cycle: ‘Quick Quiz’

1 = c - 2 = a - 3 = blue - 4 = verdigris - 5 = cows - 6 = c
7 = X-ray fluorescence and micro Raman spectroscopy - 8 = arsenic
9 = c - 10 = cut to form individual folios

Classroom Activities 3, Senior Cycle: ‘Five-minute finds’

1. Possible answers include La Tène motifs such as the triskele, spiral, pelta, concave-sided triangle, comma shape, ying-yang comma, trumpet shape, trefoil, palmette, lotus bud, petal and boss.

4. Some examples are included in the ‘Artists and their decoration’ fact sheet.

Classroom Activities 5, Junior Cycle: ‘Seek and you shall find’

2. Jesus
   - Lion
   - Lozenge
   - Fish

   The Trinity
   - Designs grouped in three
   - Triple dots

   The Eucharist
   - Vine
   - Circular elements
   - Chalice

4. Spot the difference:
   1) Semi Circle - Located at top of image
   2) Jesus’s head – Located at the centre of the image
   3) Decorative jewels - Located on the seat at the bottom of the image

Classroom activities 5, Senior Cycle: ‘Hidden depth’

1a. Representation in other works e.g. figures on the base of the North Cross at Ahenny, Co. Tipperary and on the Cross of Moone, Co. Kildare are very simple and in some cases have no arms (the Moone figures are often compared to the figure of Matthew in the Book of Durrow while the Ahenny figures are less abstract). Figures carved on Muiredach’s Cross, at Monasterboice, Co. Louth are more realistic with proportions which are almost accurate and details of hair and clothing (such as the brooch on Jesus’s cloak) are apparent. The figures on Muiredach’s Cross are more modelled than those in Kells. The crucified Christ on the tall cross, which has stylised patterned drapery is a reasonable comparison for some of the figures in Kells.

b. This is one of the earliest depictions of the Virgin and Child in a western manuscript and probably takes its influence from a Byzantine icon. Columban devotion to Mary was strong - hymn composed c. 700 AD ‘she is the most high, the most venerable virgin’. Comparable images at Iona (St. Oran’s cross) and St Cuthbert’s coffin at Durham Cathedral.

Post-visit activities, Science discussion

1 (d) - 2 (e) - 3 (a) - 4 (h) - 5 (c) - 6 (b) - 7 (g) - 8 (f)
### GLOSSARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Calligraphy</td>
<td>The art of writing in a beautiful script</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colophon</td>
<td>Inscription recording information relating to the circumstances of production of a manuscript (the people and/or place involved)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curvilinear</td>
<td>Contained by or consisting of a curved line or lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enigmatic</td>
<td>Mysterious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelist</td>
<td>The writer of one of the four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke or John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exegeses</td>
<td>Explanations of scriptures in the Bible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folio</td>
<td>A sheet of writing material (from the Latin for a leaf), one half of a 'bifolium'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iconography</td>
<td>The imagery/symbolism of a work of art or the conventional images/symbols associated with a subject, especially a religious or legendary subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illuminated manuscript</td>
<td>A handwritten book that has been embellished (decorated) with radiant colours, especially gold and silver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illumination</td>
<td>The embellishment (decoration) of a manuscript with luminous colours (especially gold and silver). The word comes from the Latin <em>illuminare</em>, ‘to enlighten or illuminate’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insular</td>
<td>Refers to a period of close cultural interaction between Britain and Ireland from around 550 to 900 AD. Elements of Celtic, Germanic, antique, Early Christian and Mediterranean culture fused together to form something new, entirely the product of the islands of Britain and Ireland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liturgical</td>
<td>Relating to liturgy or public worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manuscript</td>
<td>A manuscript is a document that was written by hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medieval</td>
<td>Relating to the Middle Ages. In Ireland, this relates to the period spanning roughly 400 to 1600 AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monastery</td>
<td>A building or buildings occupied by a community of monks living under religious vows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oak apple</td>
<td>(Also known as oak gall). A round growth which forms on oak trees and contains the larva of certain wasps. (A larva is a newly hatched, often wormlike form of an insect at the stage of its life after it has developed from an egg and before it changes into its adult form).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pigment</td>
<td>The colouring agent in paint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psalter</td>
<td>A book of Old Testament psalms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scribe</td>
<td>A person who writes by hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>Not subject to or bound by religious rule; not belonging to or living in a monastic or other order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sulphide</td>
<td>A compound of sulphur with some other chemical elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolism</td>
<td>When an object represents something very different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vellum</td>
<td>Vellum is prepared calf-skin. It is the material that the folios (pages) of the Book of Kells are made from</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Acknowledgements

Text: Sinéad Fox, Visitor Services Department, Trinity College Dublin.

Special thanks to Dr. Rachel Moss and Dr. Angela Griffith of the Department of History of Art and Architecture, Trinity College Dublin.
**FURTHER READING**

**Bibliography**


**Online Resources**


