

Gold Glass activity

This activity introduces pupils to early Christian gold glass and lets them design their own.

For this activity, you will need:

- Gold paper
- Tracing paper
- Pencils
- Scissors
- Laminator pockets
- A laminator
- Worksheets

Introduction

Circles of glass with intricate golden designs sandwiched inside have been found stuck to the walls of Rome's catacombs. These were once the bases of glass cups and bowls used for celebrations. They are decorated with portraits of real people, as well as good luck messages and religious motifs.

Gold-glass cups and bowls were a popular way to celebrate friendships and religious beliefs. They are beautiful objects that tell us what was important to their owners. They were given as presents by the early Christian Romans, on special occasions such as weddings or religious festivals.

Gold-glass images were made by engraving a picture, often with text, onto a sheet of gold leaf. This was then placed between two pieces of glass which were fused together by heating. Decorated pieces of glass were stuck onto plain glass vessels.

When the owner of a gold-glass bowl died, the vessel was smashed to show that the deceased could not use it anymore. The decorated base was stuck onto the wall of the dead person's tomb as a sign of his/her faith and to celebrate the friendships he/she used to have.

You can find out more about the gold glass on the Ashmolean Latin Inscriptions catalogue:

<http://latininscriptions.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/featured/theme/?t=3>

and podcast:

<http://blogs.ashmolean.org/latininscriptions/2015/12/23/drink-may-you-live-early-christians-and-gold-decorations-in-ashli-christmas-podcast-2015/>

Warm Up exercise

Do the matching activity on the worksheet as a warm up. Answers are:

First picture: Paralysed man

Second picture: Woman prays

Third picture: Eve and the Serpent

Fourth Picture: Abraham

The images in the matching activity are traced from real examples of gold glass. They can be used as examples of how to make a silhouette.

Making an inscription

Pupils then design their own gold glass pattern. Encourage them to make a self-portrait with simple silhouette shapes. They can add shapes to represent things that are important to them or copy one of the authentic phrases on the worksheet.

Trace the designs onto gold paper and carefully cut out. Arrange them on a laminator sheet and carefully pass through a laminator.

You can pierce the finished pieces with a hole punch and hang them up on a piece of string to make festive decorations.