Object of Devotion:
Medieval English Alabaster Sculpture from the Victoria and Albert Museum

Ways to use this Educator’s Guide:

♦ Familiarize students with the content and themes of the exhibit before attending.

♦ Incorporate the background information, suggested activities and resources into a lesson plan that corresponds with curriculum benchmarks.

♦ Give copies to chaperones for use during the visit.

Exhibition Sponsors

KIA Tours Sponsors

A Resource Guide for Educators
Acknowledgements

This resource guide was created by intern Caitlin Murphy in coordination with the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts Museum Education Department. Thanks to Art Services International and the Victoria and Albert Museum for permission to use information from their exhibition materials.

All photographs featuring the alabaster sculptures were provided by Art Services International.

Object of Devotion: Medieval English Alabaster Sculpture from the Victoria and Albert Museum was organized by Art Services International in cooperation with the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Did You Know?

♦ Observing, discussing and interpreting works of art instructs our understanding of our society and culture as well as the society that created them.

♦ Common human experiences and ideas, conflicts and themes can be explored in visual, written, and oral texts.

♦ Looking at art objects increases visual literacy and the ability to articulate meaning.
Before the Visit (2-3 weeks)

- **Recruit chaperones!** One adult is required for every 15 students (2nd-12th grade) and every 10 students (pre-K-1st grade). Please share the enclosed *How to be a Great Chaperone* handout with your adult volunteers so they know what will be expected of them.

- **Transportation!** Groups must arrange their own transportation. Ask us about busing stipends.

- **Name Tags!** It is so helpful when docents and museum staff can call each student by name. Use large, bold printed letters.

- **Pre-visit student preparation!**
  - Try to visit the KIA to familiarize yourself with the museum’s layout, including restrooms, classrooms, etc. Note where the exhibitions are located. A personal visit is crucial if you have any concerns about exhibition or tour content. Please call 349-7775, x 3162 for an appointment with KIA staff.
  - Read through the pre-visit/post-visit activities listed in this packet and decide which are best suited for your students.
  - Work with students on completing assignments before visit. Review Museum Manners.
  - Please inform the KIA Museum Education staff if your group has an assignment or will need extra time in the galleries following their tour.
  - Familiarize chaperones with any assignments so they can assist as needed.
  - Please bring the proper materials for students to complete their project: pencils only and paper with something hard to write on. Students may sit on the floor or stools can be made available with advanced notice.

Day of Visit Checklist

- **Name Tags!** Have them? Are your students divided into the number of groups as specified on the tour confirmation?

- **Chaperones!** Make copies of *How to be a Great Chaperone*.

- **Camera?** You may take photos outside or in the lobby. Photography is not allowed in the galleries.

- **Gallery Shop!** Remind students that the KIA Gallery Shop is not included as part of the visit.

- **Museum Manners!** Please review one more time.

- **Coats, backpacks, umbrellas and roller shoes** are not permitted in the galleries. Please leave them on the bus, weather permitting or in bins located in the lobby.

- **Let’s be early birds!** Please arrive at the South St. entrance at least 5 minutes before the tour begins and have students organized into the proper number of tour groups. A docent or KIA staff member will greet your group, review Museum Manners and then each small group will be assigned a docent and dismissed into the galleries.

- **Oops! We’re late!** Please call the KIA at 269/349-7775 if you will be late. As groups may be scheduled back to back, a late arrival could shorten your visit. Docents will wait no more than 20 minutes. After that time we reserve the right to cancel or shorten your tour.

- **Don’t forget! Name tags, chaperones and museum manners!**

After the Tour

- **Discuss** the tour with your students. Round out the experience with some post visit activities.

- **Evaluate!** Fill out the Tour Evaluation form and return in the envelope provided. Let us know what did or did not go well.
How to be a Great Chaperone

To be a great chaperone, you don’t need any special knowledge—just common sense and a willingness to jump in and get involved. Here are a few tips to make this visit successful:

- Introduce yourself to your group and your docent (tour guide).
- Stay with your group during the tour and assist the teachers and docent.
- Follow and help remind students of the KIA’s Museum Manners.

Classes tour in small groups of 10-15 students. Each group is led by a museum docent, a specially trained volunteer tour guide.

As tours move through the museum, chaperones help keep the group together. They remind students of their Museum Manners if needed and are good role models during the tour. Chaperones are ready to help the docent if asked.

Thanks for being part of your group’s guided tour. Your participation will help make your school’s visit to the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts fun and educational. We invite you and your family to visit the KIA again!

KIA Museum Manners

1. Do not touch any of the art because it is fragile and the oils on your fingers (even if your hands look clean) will make the work of art dirty. If everyone touched, the art would be ruined, and now one would be able to enjoy it. We want it to last as long as possible.
2. Please walk in the museum. We do not want you or the art to get hurt.
3. Use quiet voices during your tour; other people are trying to enjoy their visit too.
4. Stay with your group. Be ready to look carefully and think about what you see. Your docent will ask you to share your ideas about the works of art.
5. Gum, food and drinks are not allowed in the galleries because spills could damage the works of art.
6. Please do not lean on walls/cases as you might lean into a work of art or mark the walls.
Object of Devotion Exhibit Content

Object of Devotion features sixty alabaster sculptures made and used in England for private and public worship during the fourteenth, fifteenth, and early sixteenth centuries. The following information will familiarize students with the exhibit’s contents and themes.

Making and Selling Holy Images: The English Alabaster Industry

The pieces included in this exhibit are united by their place, material, and time of production. All were made in England from alabaster, a form of gypsum that looks similar to marble, during the later Middle Ages. Alabastermen, the men who created these sculptures, usually carved and painted them according to designs and themes that had been used for generations, such as the Christian Trinity. Even though men were responsible for creating these objects of devotion, some women participated in selling alabasters, and a few even rented their own shops to continue the family business. The production of English alabasters, while not a dominant force in the English economy, did result in trade within England and between England and continental Europe.

The Holy Trinity with the Virgin, Saint John and Symbols of the Four Evangelists.

Public and Personal Devotion

Religious expression was an important aspect of medieval life for all levels of society. In England, most people attended Mass and other religious festivals at local parish churches. Elaborate alabaster altarpieces served two purposes in a church setting. (see Big Ideas)

BIG IDEAS: Alabaster altarpieces showed specific religious scenes to keep the parishioners engaged during the service. They also helped teach the congregation about Christianity at a time when many people could not read.

Sculptures ranging from expensive to easily affordable were also available for private purchase. One of the least expensive and therefore most popular images was of Saint John the Baptist. According to Christian tradition, Saint John the Baptist was a preacher who baptized Jesus.

Head of Saint John the Baptist
Subject Matter: the Saints

As in Catholicism today, during the Middle Ages people prayed to saints for assistance in a variety of matters including health and protection. Alabaster images provided medieval people with visual representations of the saints at important moments in their lives. These sculptures were particularly popular in everyday society, and thus were less expensive and more roughly made than items crafted for wealthy patrons among the Church and the nobility.

Saint Catherine of Alexandria was the single most popular figure depicted in alabaster sculptures of the saints. Saint Catherine was an Egyptian noblewoman known for her intelligence and purity. Her legend states that at her death, she asked God to answer the prayers of anyone who should ask for her help. Medieval people believed that honoring Saint Catherine was a way to have their spiritual as well as earthly needs met. This belief, coupled with her status as a role model for medieval women, explains her massive popularity during the Middle Ages.

Style and Technique: The Life of Christ

Sculptures displaying scenes Christ’s life highlight how artistic style changed over the roughly 150 years of English alabaster production, even though the themes remained largely the same. Alabastermen initially emphasized Christ’s frailty, but eventually portrayed his strength and power.

The Reformation

The Reformation, a political and religious movement that began in Germany and came to England during the reign of Henry the VIII in the 1530s, brought a quick end to the alabaster industry. Reformers believed that worshipping images was inappropriate, and therefore sought to get rid of religious art. The alabaster sculptures that survive today owe their existence to the alabastermen who sold them to Catholic countries in Europe as well as the individuals who hid them within their homes. Others survived despite being found; these show attempts at destruction.
The creation, distribution, and use of English alabaster sculptures serve as examples of broader aspects of late medieval society. Alabastermen and those who used sculptures as devotional tools dealt with the same economic, social, artistic, and religious realities as the rest of Europe.

Farming and Feudalism

The alabaster industry formed a small part of the late medieval English economy. In fact, farming was still the most prominent economic activity in the Midlands, the primary area of alabaster sculpture creation. Land was a valuable commodity in medieval Europe largely because of the importance of agricultural production. Lords often provided land and protection to their followers called vassals, which included knights, in exchange for promises of loyalty and military assistance. This social network based on the exchange of services is known as feudalism. Both lords and vassals needed people to work their lands. Peasants, known as serfs, were allowed to live on and farm the land in return for a certain amount of crops and sometimes even currency.

Rise of Town Life and the Economics of Alabaster

While owning, granting, and farming land were central to life in the countryside, towns brought a new focus to the medieval European economy. The production and exchange of goods for money, as with English alabaster sculptures, allowed for the emergence of a new class of people: merchants. Within each town across Europe, merchants formed organizations called guilds based on their specific trade.

Artisans, weavers, masons, and others were able to gain power, independence, and control over their industries by banding together into their own guilds. The medieval economy was not controlled solely by men, as women contributed both in the countryside and in towns. Women, especially weavers, even formed entire merchant guilds.

The Effects of the Black Death

In 1348, the plague, also known as the Black Death, came to Europe and disrupted life among wealthy and poor alike and in both the countryside and towns. Over the next few years, almost one-third of the European population died because of the illness.
The English alabaster industry arose quickly in the wake of the disease, which was not unusual. The Black Death had a massive impact on European society and the economy. Because many people did not survive and there was a shortage of available workers, those who did survive were able to demand better living conditions and compensation. Townsfolk and especially peasants began to take more control over the course of their lives and their contribution to the struggling economy.

Within fifty years of the Black Death, two Englishmen helped make it easier for people to have access to literature like the Bible, although literacy was still not widespread at this point, either in England or on the continent. John Wycliffe created quite a stir when he translated the Bible into English, and Geoffrey Chaucer made literature more accessible when he wrote his *Canterbury Tales*, a series of stories told by men and women on pilgrimage, in the same language.

John Wycliffe’s translation of the Bible was also an early step in changing how religion was practiced in England. In the early sixteenth century, a much larger movement called the Reformation would impact medieval society to a more permanent degree. Reformers, beginning with Martin Luther in Germany, accused the Catholic Church of being corrupt. Many leaders across Europe, including King Henry VIII of England, agreed for a variety of reasons and began to turn away from the pope. In fact, Henry became the head of a new church, the Church of England, following his split with the Catholic Church over his desire to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon. Before the Reformation, the medieval world had been mostly united by following Catholicism. The Reformation, which brought an end to the English alabaster trade, also serves as a major dividing point between medieval and early modern times.
Curriculum Connections

The educational activities on the following pages satisfy Grade Level Content Expectations, content standards and benchmarks for the state of Michigan as outlined below:

Educational Activities:

Canterbury Tales

**English Language Arts Grade Level Content Expectations:**

*Reading* - R.NT.06.01 and R.NT.07.01 - Describing and analyzing aspects of classical, multicultural, and contemporary literature recognized for quality and literary merit

*Writing* - W.GN.06.01 and W.GN.07.01 - Write a cohesive narrative piece that includes appropriate conventions to the genre

*Writing* - W.PR.06.01 and W.PR.07.01 - Set a purpose, consider audience, and replicate authors’ styles and patterns when writing a narrative piece

Medieval Feast

**English Language Arts Grade Level Content Expectations:**

*Writing* - W.GN.06.02 and W.GN.07.02 - Write an essay using organizational patterns to support key ideas or a research report based on a variety of resources

**Social Studies Grade Level Content Expectations:**

*History* - H1.4, Historical Understanding - Use historical concepts, patterns, and themes to study history

*Geography* - G2.2, Human Characteristics of Place - Describe the human characteristics of places

*Economics* - E3.1, Economic Interdependence - Describe patterns and networks of economic interdependence, including trade

Sculpt a Statue

**Elementary and Middle School Visual Arts Content Standard 2** (ART.II.VA.EL.1-6 and ART.II.VA.M.1, 3, and 4)
All students will apply skills and knowledge to create in the arts.

Crossword Puzzle

**English Language Arts Grade Level Content Expectations:**

*Reading* - R.WS.06.05 and R.WS.07.05 - Acquire and apply strategies to identify unknown words and construct meaning

*Reading* - R.WS.06.07 and R.WS.07.07 - In context, determine the meaning of words and phrases including regional idioms, literary and technical terms, and content vocabulary using strategies including connotation, denotation, and authentic content-related resources

Visiting the Object of Devotion exhibition

**Elementary and Middle School Visual Arts Content Standard 3** (ART.III.VA.EL.2-3 and ART.III.VA.M.1-3) - All students will analyze, describe and evaluate works of art
Students can utilize the resources listed at the end of this packet to assist them in completing these activities that focus on learning about medieval life and society.

**Canterbury Tales**

◊ Have students read one of the tales from Barbara Cohen’s young-adult version of Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* (listed in the resources section of this packet).
◊ Ask students to write their own tale in the style of Chaucer using characters and themes appropriate to the Middle Ages.
  *Suggest that each student write about an artisan, merchant, or craft guild member to align with the themes of the exhibit.*
  *Some themes worth considering are how people dealt with the plague and how social class and/or occupation influenced ways of life.*
◊ Or students could write a play based on one of the Canterbury tales and act it out for the class.
◊ Discuss what might be considered a pilgrimage today. Where do masses of people travel for a transformative experience? Does it have to be traditionally religious pilgrimage or could it be a more secular experience?

**Medieval Feast**

◊ Set aside a day for students to engage in activities related to medieval life that centers around a lunchtime feast.
◊ Before the feast, assign students different societal roles, such as King, Queen, nobleman or woman, merchant, church official, or peasant.
  *Students can create identifying pieces of a costume out of construction paper and other basic art supplies to identify their place in society (for example, a crown).*
◊ For the feast itself, have students prepare by researching what type of food was popular in the Middle Ages and how it was prepared.
  *Students can either bring dishes from home or you can schedule the feast around an appropriate cafeteria offering.*
◊ After the feast, have students divide themselves into several groups to form craft guilds.
  *Ask the students to decide on an occupation, a name for the guild, and guild rules and regulations (including setting prices)*
  *Have the students design and create a sign for their guild’s shop*
  *Let the students alternatively act as guild members peddling their wares and customers engaging in commerce*
◊ Before or after the feast, have the class create a basic timeline of medieval Europe, focusing on the later Middle Ages.
  *Students should focus on important events while making sure to name the people and location(s) involved*
◊ Before or after the feast, have students sculpt a statue and complete a crossword puzzle (see the handouts on pages 11-13 of this packet).
◊ At the end of the day, ask the students to write an essay outlining what they learned and comparing and contrasting aspects of medieval society and culture to modern ways of life.
**Sculpt a Statue**

Artists created statues to decorate churches. They used wood, metal, ivory, or stone to make tiny figures, or very large ones. You can try your hand at making a small statue.

**Materials:**
- Plaster of Paris
- Mixing container (plastic bucket or coffee can)
- Stirring stick or spoon
- Water
- Quart milk carton
- Sculpting tools: serrated plastic knife, spoon, toothpick, paper clip, old toothbrush, or nail
- Sponge or paper towel

**Directions:**

1) Mix the plaster following the directions. (Note: Do not pour plaster down the sink drain.)

When cleaning up, let the extra plaster harden in the bucket, then knock it out of the bucket and throw it in the garbage.

2) Pour plaster into a clean milk carton. When it hardens, peel off the carton.

3) After removing the carton, outline your design. You might want to make a sketch of your design on paper before you work on the plaster. Place your design on the plaster by sketching the outline of your figure with a toothpick.

4) Carve away the plaster and smooth it into a sculpture using your sculpting tools.

   Note: Work on old newspapers so that you can roll up the plaster crumbs when cleaning up.

5) When your sculpture is finished, smooth the surface with a wet sponge or folded paper towel.

Object of Devotion exhibit crossword KEY

Please complete the crossword puzzle below

Across:
1. upper class of society who had others owe them military and agricultural service (Nobility)
3. translucent white or yellowish mineral used to make devotional sculptures in late medieval England (Alabaster)
4. English author of the Canterbury Tales (Geoffrey Chaucer)
6. disease that spread across Europe in the mid fourteenth century, devastating the population and economy (Black Death)
7. medieval men and women who sold and traded goods both locally and internationally (Merchants)
11. A system of medieval government and economy based around lords and their lands and followers (Feudalism)
14. expression of religious belief and dedication (Devotion)
16. historical time period during which alabaster sculptures with religious themes were made (Middle Ages)
17. artwork meant for and accessible to everyone (Folk Art)
18. an elaborate work of art taking up a central, easily-viewed place in a medieval church (Altarpiece)
19. lower members of society who often worked on land belonging to the elite (Peasants)

Down:
2. craftsmen who made devotional alabaster sculptures for public and private use (Alabastermen)
5. a movement targeted at fixing the problems in the Catholic Church (Reformation)
8. country where many alabaster sculptures were produced during the Middle Ages (England)
9. an organization made up of a group of people from the same area who participated in the same business (Guild)
10. medieval individual who went on a journey to a specific holy place to worship (Pilgrim)
12. wealthy individual who paid others to produce artwork (Patron)
13. a three-dimensional piece of art that was primarily used for religious purposes during the Middle Ages (Sculpture)
15. saints holy men and women who were often the subject of alabaster sculptures (Saints)
Object of Devotion exhibit crossword

Please complete the crossword puzzle below

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabaster</td>
<td>A translucent white or yellowish form of the mineral gypsum that is soft and easy to sculpt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabastermen</td>
<td>Craftsmen who created sculptures of Christian scenes and saints out of alabaster for devotional purposes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altarpiece</td>
<td>Artwork placed on or around a church’s altar; the table used to celebrate Mass.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Death</td>
<td>The plague that swept western Europe from 1348 to 1350, resulting in the loss of approximately 1/3 of the population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craftsmen</td>
<td>Individuals who created goods for sale during the later Middle Ages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geoffrey Chaucer</td>
<td>The author of the <em>Canterbury Tales</em>, a collection of poetic stories told by a group of fictitious pilgrims traveling to Canterbury, England to honor Saint Thomas A Becket. Chaucer wrote his work in Middle English, the popular language of the time, instead of in formal Latin, the language of the Church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folk Art</td>
<td>Artwork made for an everyday audience instead of the wealthy nobility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feudalism</td>
<td>A medieval form of government based on the relationships and exchange of loyalty and services between lords and their followers, known as vassals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guild</td>
<td>A local organizations of men, and sometimes women, who were involved in a particular industry, such as craft-making or weaving. A guild set regulated prices for products and had an established system of advancement within the trade.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King Henry VIII</td>
<td>King of England from 1509-47. He officially banned the common Catholic practice of worshipping religious imagery, including alabaster sculpture, during the Reformation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lords</td>
<td>Wealthy and powerful noblemen or women who gained power by granting land and protection to their followers in return for faithfulness and military support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchants</td>
<td>Men and women who manufactured, sold, and traded goods (or services) and participated in town guild made up of others in their industries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patron</td>
<td>Wealthy individuals who paid craftsmen to produce artwork of high quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasants</td>
<td>Poorer members of medieval society who often lived on and worked the land of the wealthy class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilgrimage</td>
<td>Taking a journey to a place associated with a holy event or person to express devotion and for the spiritual benefit of the individual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reformation</td>
<td>A religious and political movement that started in Germany in 1517 that sought to correct what reformers considered abuses within the Catholic Church, including showing devotion to images.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saints</td>
<td>Holy men and women who performed great and even miraculous deeds during their lifetimes and served as examples of upstanding behavior.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vassals</td>
<td>Individuals who received land and protection from lords in exchange for the promise of loyalty and by providing military service.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Resources

Resources are available at the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts library (KIA), Kalamazoo Public Library (KPL), Waldo Library at Western Michigan University (WMU), or through MelCat.

Books for Research


Books for Children


Activity Guides


DVDs


Websites

*History Learning Site: Medieval England*-http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/england_medicieval.htm

*Interactives: Middle Ages*-http://www.learner.org/interactives/middleages/

*An Internet Book on the Medieval/Renaissance/Reformation World*-http://www.omnibusol.com/medieval.html

*Metropolitan Museum of Art, Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History*-http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/