



Medieval Mile Museum, 2 St Mary's Lane, Kilkenny, R95K276
Open Daily from 09:30 – 17:00

MEDIEVAL COLOURS

Primary School Educational Resource Pack

Let's Explore Medieval Colours!

In this activity, we will be talking about the different colours people used in the medieval era. Things in the Middle Ages were bright and colourful. Rich people painted their houses and castles with bright colours and decorated them with frescoes of animals, plants, and stories! They used dyes to make colourful clothes and pigments to make paints for art and illuminated manuscripts.

Dye: A dye is a substance that gives colour to materials like cloth. Plants like woad were boiled over a hot fire to make a blue coloured dye for clothes.

Pigment: Pigments come from minerals that are used to make colours for paint and ink. Different rocks and bugs ground up make different pigment colours!

Illuminated Manuscripts: Illuminated manuscripts are books made out of animal skin or parchment and decorated with bright colours, animals, plants, and sometimes real gold! Books were normally for rich and religious people in the Middle Ages. Illuminated Manuscripts were beautifully decorated to show off wealth and status.

Medieval: Also called the Middle Ages, medieval was a time period usually between 500 AD to 1500 AD, which includes the Vikings, knights, the Black Death, and lots of sword fights!

Read and Review

The medieval period was sometimes called the Dark Ages, but that isn't accurate at all! Medieval people had lots of different colours that they used to make colourful clothes, paintings, books, and decorate houses.

Some of these colours are like the ones we have now, but others were different. Colours like black and purple were very rare and expensive, so they were only used by rich people like kings and bishops.

Other colours were much more common, like blue, red, green, and brown and used by people of all classes. These colours came from plants, rocks, and even bugs! It was hard work making colours in the Middle Ages. If you wanted to make a blue dye for your clothes, you would have to find a plant called woad, grind it up, and boil it over a hot fire before putting it in your fabric.

For red, you could use a plant called madder, or a bug called a cochineal, to make shades of pink and red.

Pigments were used for painting and ink, and came from grinding up different rocks and bugs to make colours for your books and wall painting. These were used to make Illuminated Manuscripts which held histories, bible stories, and important information like town charters.

Colours came from all over the place! Medieval people travelled a long way and merchants brought different colours from different parts of the world. Some were very expensive and hard to get, others were very common and could be found all over the place. Medieval people used a lot of different colours just like us, but we have more colours to choose from and it is much easier to make them now! Could you get your school colours in the Middle Ages?

Luckily, today we can go buy the things in the colours we need, instead of having to dye everything we wear.

So, think about your school colours. Where do they come from? Could people long ago have those colours? What do your colours make you think of?



Write Your Answers

1. What were the most expensive colours in the Middle Ages?

2. Why was making dyes and pigment hard work?

3. How did different colours get to Ireland?

4. What were dyes and pigments used for?

5. Why might your school colours not be the same as colours in the Middle Ages



Answer Key

1. What were the most expensive colours in the Middle Ages?

Black and purple were the most expensive colours in the Middle Ages

2. Why was making dyes and pigment hard work?

It took a long time because people had to grow certain plants, or find certain rocks and bugs to grind up and then boil to make dyes and pigments

3. How did different colours get to Ireland?

Merchants travelled around and traded with people all over the world, bringing colours to Ireland

4. What were dyes and pigments used for?

Colouring clothing, and making paints for decoration and things like Illuminated Manuscripts

5. Why might your school colours not be the same as colours in the Middle Ages

We have more colours today than the medieval people did, but some of them are still the same