

First Quarter  
Optional Assignment: The Cloisters

Value: 100 points

Due: Anytime before Monday, 4 November 2013

Tucked away on the cliffs of northern Manhattan lies a museum devoted entirely to the art and architecture of Medieval Europe. As an optional assignment this quarter, I would like you to visit The Cloisters, a branch of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and write a brief report, or create a presentation, about your day there. The museum itself is a magnificent, castle-like structure comprised of four Medieval French cloisters. This assignment offers you an opportunity to surround yourself with some of the most beautiful art and artifacts from a time period we have spent a good deal of time discussing. One of the best traits of the museum is the museum itself; its structure is a thing of antiquated beauty, which gives it a feel unlike anything in America. Enjoy the gardens, the ancient walls, and the views of the Hudson River. I suggest going on a weekend and spending several hours. Open your minds to a time long past, and yet so near.

The entire property is worth your time. Specifically, however, I want you to...

- Check out the Nine Heroes Tapestries Room. Find anyone you know?
- Absolutely see the Unicorn Tapestries, some of the most celebrated art to emerge from this period.
- Find a religious structure in the Gothic Hall.
- In the Treasury, find an ivory structure and an illuminated manuscript.
- And, of course, go to each of the four cloisters (Bonfont, Trie, Saint-Guihem, and Cuxa). Cloisters were constructed in monasteries as a place of peace and reflection from monks who were separated from the “everyday world.” The four cloisters here are immaculately maintained and rich with plants that were written about in medieval manuscripts and found in medieval art and tapestries.

Once you have found your piece...

I. Give some information about it and its surroundings.

- a. What is it called? Who made it? When? Where? Out of what is it made?
- b. What does the piece depict?
- c. Why was it made?
- d. What are some of the items around it?
- e. How is the item positioned (on a pedestal, on the wall, etc.)?
- f. Is it in a frame or case? Describe the frame or case.
- g. Anything else you want to add.

II. React to it.

- a. Do you find the piece interesting? Inspiring? Dull? Silly? Some other adjective? Why?
- b. Has it, or what it might represent or depict, appeared in anything we’ve read? Does it remind you of anything we’ve read?
- c. Note its intricacies, composition, and/or meaning in relation to a comparable modern item.
- d. Anything else you want to add.

Do the same with the cloisters and gardens. Give a bit of pertinent information, but also describe your experience there. Sit. Reflect. Feel. Each of the cloisters has a specific and unique background. Connect this history with your own experiences.

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Try not to think of this as just another boring, stuffy report. Enjoy the experience, but also construct a creative, interesting, and informative project about it. How you do this I will leave entirely up to you.

However, I would like you to follow these guidelines...

I. No matter how you construct the project, you must include

- A picture of yourself in front of the museum
- Your admission receipt (or a copy of it)
- Your admission sticker/ticket (or a copy of it)
- Photographs (not images from the internet) of each required piece or area

II. With the exception of some of the background information, all work (thoughts and words) must be your own. Do not use the internet. The descriptions should be in your own words. As always, dishonest work will receive a zero and the perpetrator will receive an honor code violation.

III. You may go to the museum in groups. However, each student must construct his or her own project.

Remember...

This is an optional assignment. It is not straight extra credit. Therefore, you do not receive credit simply for turning in the assignment. If you choose to do it, you will receive a grade based on the effort indicated by the completed report. Lackluster effort will receive a poor grade. If you're going to do it, do so honestly, thoughtfully, and well.

The museum is located in northern Manhattan. Make sure you explore ways to get there, and plan your day accordingly. It is open every day from 10:00 until 5:15 (or 4:45 in November). The price of admission is optional. I suggest you give something, but you are not required to pay the full price. On their website, you can find out everything you need to know: <http://www.metmuseum.org/visit/visit-the-cloisters>