

Precious Objects, Precious Boxes



Front



Back

Reliquary Châsse, ca. 1180

French (Limoges)

Copper gilt with champlevé enamels and cabochon crystals

Loyola University Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Eugene Raymondau in memory of Commandant Raymondau, 1973-04

Grades: 4 – 7

Subjects: English Language Arts, Social Science, Fine Arts, Foreign Languages

Time Required: 2 – 4 class periods, 45 minutes each

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Lesson Overview

Students will learn that a reliquary châsse (pronounced shass [rhymes with mass]) is used to hold the relic(s) of a saint. In the Middle Ages (ca. [approximately] 5th to 15th centuries), pilgrims journeyed to churches to visit saints' relics. Students will discover that, because the contents are important, châsses are made of expensive materials. Students will then decorate their own reliquary châsses and create panels that simulate an enamel surface.

LUMA

Materials

- Reproduction of the *Reliquary Châsse*
- Empty shoe boxes (one for each student)
- Drawing supplies: metallic and regular markers
- Collage materials: magazines, paper, ribbon, wrapping paper, plastic jewels, stickers, shiny paper or aluminum foil
- Pushpins, tacks, and glue
- Other art materials

Lesson Steps

1. Tell students to look closely at the *Reliquary Châsse*. See how much they can figure out about the work when they take time to look at it, think about it, and share ideas.
2. Use a brainstorming technique, such as Pair Share, to get them started before sharing with the whole class.
 - Pair Share: Students turn to a partner and take turns naming one thing that they notice about the reliquary. After naming some of the most obvious things, they will soon begin to look more deeply and notice things that their partners did not. They should remember to share these ideas in the discussion later.
3. Use the following questions to begin a discussion.
 - What do you see? What more can you find?
 - What colors do you see? What do you think this work is made of?
 - Attached to a wooden core, the metal plates are decorated with blue and green enamels made from a glass-like paste that turns hard when fired at a high temperature. Once polished, the surface rivaled stained glass in its brilliance. Cabochon (cab-OH-shawn) crystals—unfaceted, highly polished crystals—decorate the crest along the top of the châsse.
 - Although we do not know the identity of the artist(s) who made LUMA's reliquary (a container or shrine in which sacred relics are kept), we do know it was made in Limoges, France. The craftsmen in Limoges were famous for their enamel châsses.



France

LUMA

4. What is the purpose of this object? If you owned this box, what would you put inside of it? Why do you say that?
 - Artisans honored saints by making precious containers for their relics. Such a box is called a *châsse* in French. Many, like LUMA's example, took simple church-like forms and featured copper plates over a wooden core.
5. Châsses contained relics. Do you know what a relic is?
 - A relic could be a body part or an article associated with a saint, like a piece of cloth. People believed that relics had the power to heal, protect, and bring good fortune.
6. Where were relics displayed?
 - In the Middle Ages, people went on pilgrimages to visit the relics of saints preserved in cathedrals and churches across Europe and the Holy Land. On a saint's feast day, which occurs once a year, his/her relics would be paraded through the streets of the town in an elaborate ceremony.
7. What figures and scenes do you see on this box?
 - On the top, Christ is seen in heaven seated on a rainbow. At the bottom, Christ is depicted on the cross. A pair of saints flanks both scenes. Could they be the same saints whose colorful images once filled the two end panels? (Over the centuries, one panel came loose and was lost.) Or do the figures simply represent some of the Twelve Disciples? It is now impossible to say.
8. Why were these châsses created?
 - Many châsses were specially commissioned to carry the relics of a particular saint. The enamel panels on these reliquaries often have scenes from the saint's life or martyrdom (death suffered because a person refuses to give up his or her beliefs). Others, as in this instance, were made ahead of any commission and were sold around Europe by travelling merchants, who moved their wares along the pilgrimage routes throughout France and Spain.

Activity

1. Remind students that châsses held precious objects and were decorated elaborately so that people would know something important must be inside.
2. Give each student an empty shoe box, which will act as the student's châsse. They will then decorate their boxes with available materials and adorn them as if valuable objects would be placed inside.
3. To simulate the enamel surface of a châsse, have students use oil pastels to create patterns on color paper.
4. Laminate the students' oil pastel patterns to give them rich, shiny surfaces.
5. These panels can then be attached to the surface of the shoe box.

Expanding the Lesson

- Tell students to choose objects that are precious to them to put inside their decorated boxes.
- Ask students to explain to the class why they chose these particular objects.

Vocabulary

cabochon crystals: unfaceted, highly polished crystals.

châsse: a French word meaning a box used to hold the relic(s) of a saint; a reliquary.

circa / ca.: approximately; used especially with dates.

enamel: a glass-like paste that turns hard when fired at a high temperature.



martyrdom: death suffered because a person refuses to give up his or her beliefs.

relic: a body part or an article associated with a saint, like a piece of cloth. People believed that they had the power to heal, protect, and bring good fortune.

reliquary: a container or shrine in which sacred relics are kept.

Illinois Learning Standards

English Language Arts

4 – Listening and Speaking

Social Science

16 – History

17 – Geography

18 – Social Systems

Fine Arts

26 – Creating and Performing

27 – Arts and Civilization

Foreign Languages

29 – Culture and Geography