



## Art History

### Gothic Stained Glass

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Section: \_\_\_\_\_  
Score: \_\_\_\_/5

Directions: Read the following article about Gothic stained glass and answer the thought questions below.

### Gothic stained glass

Imagine standing in a medieval church. As your eyes adjust to the darkness, you notice colored light streaming down from above.



*The Virgin and Child, Master of Klosterneuberg, Austrian, active about 1335*

Some of the most powerful art produced in the High Middle Ages were stained-glass cycles, or visual stories, in French cathedrals. Among the most famous of these is in Reims Cathedral, from which this arresting lunette (a half moon–shape) originally came. The seraph, one of the six-winged angels that were thought to stand in the presence of God, is frighteningly formal, with thick strokes of black vitreous paint used to render its commanding eyes and facial features. Vitreous paint is paint that contains tiny glass particles mixed in a liquid.

This panel (left), comes from the important medieval Abbey of Klosterneuberg outside Vienna and shows the great achievements of medieval stained glass. The painting demonstrates how pure, supple lines communicate tenderness and delicacy, even when viewed from a distance, as was often the case with medieval church glass. Simple fields of color (including the silver stain used in the yellow halos) complete the radiant effect.

This window was originally meant to go up high, in the windows of a cloister, and even though the piece itself is rather small, the tremendous clarity of the line-work that makes it quite legible from a distance. The beautiful curls of the hair, the facial features, are all painted in a black line of vitreous paint by an individual who expresses himself just as surely in this art form as a painter of oil or tempera would express him or her self in

a panel painting or a fresco painting. The paint, which is applied to the glass surface, adds detail and a sense of three-dimensionality to the image. Another unique aspect of stained glass is that it's enhanced by daylight, which changes with the weather, the season, and the time of day. When a glass panel is shot through with a strong ray of light, you can see the colors floating off the top of the panel, and this is what makes it such a moving, and almost mystical, art form.

The emotion-filled panel to the right eloquently demonstrates the essential means of expression of medieval glass painters.

The delicate modeling of the face and hand was done by applying vitreous paint to clear glass and then stabbing it with a broad brush to create points of light. It was then contoured with a pointed brush, creating expressive, almost calligraphic linework, as seen in the tousled hair and distraught facial features of Saint John. Originally, this would have been part of a larger Crucifixion scene.

We take windows for granted. But there was a time when glass panes were too expensive for most people, only in the late 1400s, did glass panels become wider-spread, so that middle class and wealthy people could have



*Saint John (from a Crucifixion), possibly South German, c. 1420*

them in their homes—and they started setting into their clear glass windows, smaller panels that would be amusing or instructive or celebrate their family histories.

*"Stained Glass: History and Technique." Khan Academy. The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2014. Web. 16 Nov. 2014.*

### Thought Questions

1. How did artists use different colors to portray different emotions and convey different messages? Provide an example to support
2. What makes stained glass such a unique art form compared to traditional paintings?



Heraldic Panel with the Arms of the Eberler Family, Swiss, possibly from Basel, c. 1490

3. Using your own ideas explain two reasons why churches would spend so much money on these windows?