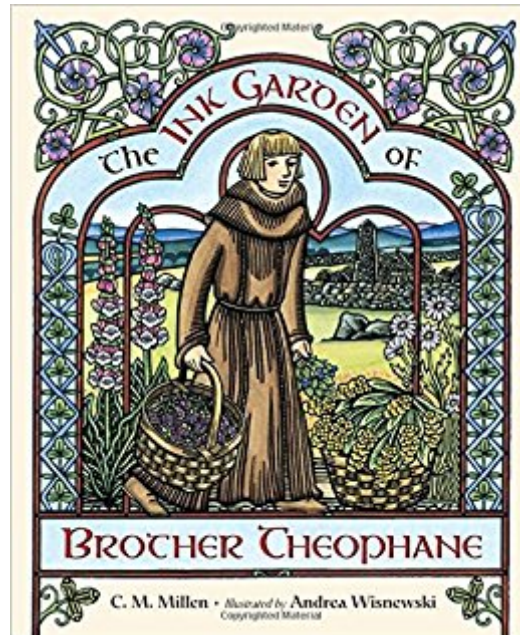




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# The Ink Garden Of Brother Theophane



## Synopsis

Winner of the 2011 Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award. In a monastery in the mountains of Mourne during the Middle Ages, one young monk struggled to focus on his task: copying the Bible and other scholarly books with plain brown ink made from wood bark in plain brown books in his plain brown robe at his plain brown desk. Brother Theophane was soon transferred from the scribe's room and assigned to make the ink that the brothers used. With his natural curiosity, Theophane discovered that inks could be made from other plants besides the wood bark. Berries and leaves produced other beautiful colors. And soon, the books the monks made were illuminated with colors and drawings. C.M. Millen's charming story of a young monk who defied the discipline of the monastery and found his own way to express the beauty of the world will inspire young readers to explore their own world and find their own voices. Andrea Wisniewski's illustrations, inspired by the illuminated letters that the medieval monks created in books like the Book of Kells, bring to life the colors and beauty that surrounded Brother Theophane amidst the plain world of the monastery.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: AD1090L (What's this?)

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Best Sellers Rank: #78,223 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #34 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Medieval #125 in Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > Books & Libraries #283 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Poetry > Stories In Verse

Age Range: 5 - 8 years

Grade Level: 1 - 3

## Customer Reviews

Gr 2-5 In the mountains of medieval northern Ireland, holy men live, work, and pray in

plain gray stone buildings. There the monks are seen inking brown words and designs onto parchment sheets. The poetic text, written mostly in rhymed even lines with some touches of humor, tells the story of young Theophane, who reacts to the sights and sounds of nature by noting what he sees on torn parchment pieces, which appear on the illustrated pages of this book. He is reprimanded by the eldest brother and assigned the task of making brown ink. When his supply of bark dwindles, he goes to the woods to find more, returning with berries, flowers, roots, and leaves from which he makes colorful inks that he applies to his own doodles using brushes made from donkey-tail hairs. And so, Theophane illuminates both the lives of his brothers and their calligraphy. His own inspiration comes from the lush plants and bright flowers in the garden that he tends,

“But the best yields of all,/for Theophane’s part,/were the peace in his mind/and the joy in his heart.”

• Wisniewski’s exquisitely detailed illustrations consist of a framed, bordered rectangle of text resembling a stained-glass panel set into or facing a colorful print. An author’s note speaks of the monks from whose poems Millen’s story was adapted. Using her short list of books and websites, youngsters can read some medieval monks’ poems and learn about illumination, how to make a writing quill, extract colors from plants and leaves, or make a book. This gentle tale is a real treasure to read and behold.

Susan Scheps, Shaker Heights Public Library, OH

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In a small medieval Irish monastery, the monks quietly work side by side, copying and illuminating manuscripts in brown ink. Theophane, the youngest monk, is so easily distracted by the beauty of the world outside his window that he is given an outdoor task: boiling bark to make ink. Inspired by stains from blackberries, he begins to experiment, making colored inks from berries, leaves, roots, and twigs. Soon the monks are illuminating their manuscripts with the brilliant hues of nature. Words and pictures alike are infused with a sense of the monks’ joy in their faith and work as well as Theophane’s delight in the natural world. Written in rhythmic, rhyming, and near-rhyming verse, the simple story unfolds in a satisfying way, accompanied by short poems inspired by the writings of medieval Irish monks. The richly detailed illustrations were created by using a paper-cut design to print bold, black lines and brightening the pictures with watercolors. The book concludes with lists of recommended books and Internet sites as well as an author’s note related to her research on medieval monasteries. Grades 2-4. --Carolyn Phelan

The Ink Garden of Brother Theophane is stunning for both its illustrations and story line. Young and

old children will be fully entertained by the lovely, bright illustrations and flowing writing throughout, while being captivated by the underlying history lesson. (The Author's Note and list of resources at the end are a great bonus!) Five stars for sure!

Nice woodcarving effect in illustrations reminding me of austere life in a monastery. Love medieval manuscripts and story was entertaining with lots of information about the artist colors.

Unique story and absolutely beautiful illustrations. Little artists will love it.

Beautiful book in great condition. Very pleased.

This is a wonderful story and a beautiful book! It inspired us to make our own ink!

Such an adorable story book. Beautifully illustrated with a lovely story -- the perfect bedtime story.

Nostalgic, informative, and fun! This book gives a beautiful explanation and corresponding story on how illuminated texts were written and how the ink was made. My daughter loves to read this book over and over. Makes a nice gift...

During the Dark Ages, monks in medieval monasteries painstakingly copied the Bible and other scholarly works by hand, writing on parchment or vellum with inks made from boiled tree bark. Author Millen imagines a young monk who experiments with other natural materials to create the first brightly colored inks. The story is told in rhymed text. Interspersed with the author's narrative are English translations of genuine medieval poems written by anonymous Irish scribes. Unfortunately the narrative itself is fraught with forced rhythm and awkward rhymes. The plot would have been better served by prose, which could also have created a pleasing contrast with the translated poems. The story itself, however, rises above the text, in a warm and enlightening exploration of the book as a work of art. Richly detailed illustrations created from papercut prints and hand-colored with watercolors suit this beautifully designed picture book. An author's note offers additional information, a book list, and web sites where readers can learn to make plant-based inks and see how an illuminated manuscript is made. Children who enjoy reading about Brother Theophane may be inspired to create illustrated books of their own.

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