

Prescripts

CURSIVE PASSAGES AND ILLUMINATIONS

AMERICAN DOCUMENTS

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*Classical
Conversations®*
MULTIMEDIA

Prescripts Cursive Passages and Illuminations:
American Documents

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PreScripts Cursive Passages and Illuminations: American Documents

The word “prescript” comes from the Latin words *prae* (meaning “before” or “in front of”) plus *scribere* (“to write”). The PreScripts series from Classical Conversations MultiMedia is designed to precede—to come before—writing. Just as we learn to speak by mimicking our parents’ words, we can learn to write well by copying the words that others have written. Even though coloring, drawing, tracing, and copying are simple tasks from an adult perspective, imitation is at the heart of a classical education. Rather than resorting to mindless busywork that isolates handwriting from the rest of education, the PreScripts series is designed to complement the world of knowledge students inhabit as they mature.

How to Use This Book

Each book in the PreScripts series combines a functional design with excellent content. The goal of *PreScripts Cursive Passages and Illuminations* is to refine the basics of cursive writing through practice with longer passages of writing. As your students gain muscle strength and coordination, they will be able to move from writing that is functional to writing that is worthy of being called an art. For this reason, this book in the PreScripts series can be used as either a consumable or a non-consumable resource. Students who still have difficulty with the cursive letters can trace over the writing in the book and practice drawing the letter illuminations in the space provided, while those who are ready for a challenge can copy the passages in a separate notebook or on blank paper.

Our job as classical educators is to teach students to make the effort to be neat but even more, it is to encourage them to aim higher by teaching them to write beautifully. Many schools no longer teach cursive writing, claiming that it is too difficult to master. Teaching a child to write in cursive does require diligence and patience, but it has a number of compelling benefits. Research suggests that cursive writing more effectively develops manual skill and dexterity. Cursive may also aid students struggling with dyslexia or dysgraphia because 1) capital and lowercase letters are distinct; 2) each word is one fluid movement, so the child’s rhythm is not disrupted by frequent pauses; and 3) letters like “b” and “d” are more difficult to reverse.

When children are learning to write, what they study matters as much as how they study it. Parents are more likely to give up on cursive when the content seems frivolous, so Classical Conversations is pleased to offer cursive writing books that give the student plenty of practice using rich, meaningful content. With PreScripts cursive writing books, your student can become a confident writer while learning or reviewing important subject matter, such as history sentences, passages of literature, and proverbs.

In this book, we focus on passages taken from great historical American documents and speeches ranging from Christopher Columbus’s “Apologia” and the Mayflower Compact to the Marshall Plan and John F. Kennedy’s Inaugural Address. (If you wish to study these documents in full, an excellent companion book is *Words Aptly Spoken: American Documents*, also by Classical Conversations MultiMedia.) Each passage gives your student an example of admirable rhetorical skill that is grounded in the context of important events from the history of the United States.

To provide variety for your student and to enhance the fine motor skills necessary for writing, drawing lessons accompany the copy work. This book focuses on illumination, an art form dating back to the classical and medieval periods, when manuscripts were written by hand and each one was treated as a valuable work of art. The word “illumination” comes from the Latin verb *illuminare*, which means, “to light up.” In the most luxurious illuminated manuscripts, an artist would take sheets of real gold or silver that had been beaten into extremely thin layers called “leaves,” and he would incorporate the precious metals into his drawings and lettering. When light hit the gilded page, the manuscript would seem to shine with its own matching light.

In addition to the cost of materials, illuminated manuscripts required an immense investment of time and effort. A single book could take as few as two years or as many as fifty to produce. To give you a sense of an illuminated book's resulting value, one buyer in 1453 is said to have sold a small estate to pay for a single copy of Livy's *History of Rome*. King Louis XI of France not only had to pay a deposit in silver but he also had to give his personal guarantee and that of another nobleman before he was allowed to borrow a book from the Faculty of Medicine in Paris. Imagine if today's libraries were so stringent!

Although many artists were associated with monasteries, others were members of the nobility or independent craftsmen, both male and female. Their illuminations included ornate borders, miniature drawings, elaborate initial letters, and full-page images. They used lines, curves, dots, flowers, leaves, branches, animals, and people in their art—in short, all the elements of drawing. This book will focus on initial letters, but you should encourage your student to experiment with his own artwork, giving a personal touch to each passage he copies.

Although variety is important, the key to mastering cursive is to practice every day. For best results, set aside a specific time each day for cursive practice. You choose the pace appropriate for your child. You can assign one page a day to a beginning student or assign two to four pages a day to an older or more experienced student. A student who struggles with writing might even do half a page a day until his or her fine motor skills become stronger, working up to a page or two a day. The pace is completely up to the parent.

If you choose to do one page a day, there are enough pages for a complete school year, working on approximately four or five pages a week. If you participate in a Classical Conversations community, you can do four pages a week while your community meets, and five pages a week the rest of the school year. Older students might do two pages a day and complete two books a year. If you would like your child to memorize the passages in this book, you can read through them weekly to review or have your student do the same book twice.

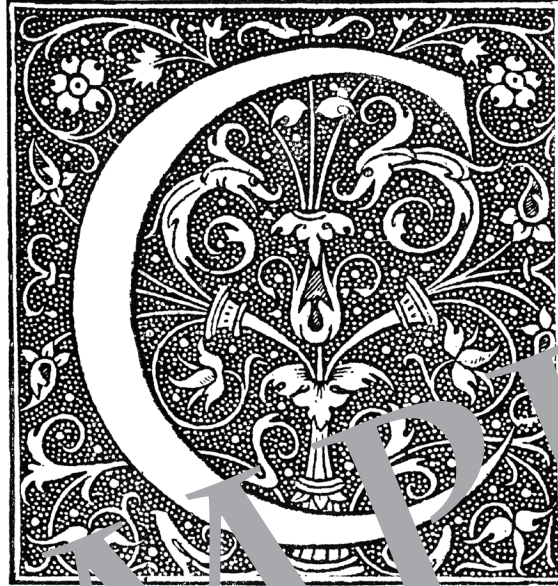
The Journey in Perspective

The key to good writing is daily practice. The key to a heart that seeks truth, beauty, and goodness is providing quality content to copy. We hope you will find both in *Prescripts Cursive Passages and Illuminations*.

The medieval scribes and artists who practiced illumination often did so in the service of the Church. As such, they believed that words, particularly sacred texts, were worthy of honor and respect, and they used their art to exalt the words they copied. Likewise, the goal of the PreScripts series is for your students to master the skills of copying and writing in the context of a biblical worldview, building on a second meaning of the word “prescript.” A prescript can also mean a command, rule, or moral guideline. The Bible instructs parents to remember the commandments of God and teach them to their families.

Deuteronomy 6:6–9 reads, “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” As this Scripture reminds us, writing, drawing, memorizing, and reciting are all forms of worship that we model for our students.

Let's get started!



**For more information about the practice of illumination, the following copyright-free resources are available in e-book form.

- Bradley, John William. *Illuminated Manuscripts*. Little Books on Art. Ed. Cyril Davenport. Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co., 1909.
- Middleton, John Henry. *Illuminated Manuscripts in Classical and Mediaeval Times*. London: C.J. Clay & Sons, 1892.
- Quaile, Edward. *Illuminated Manuscripts: Their Origin, History, and Characteristics*. Liverpool, UK: H. Young & Sons, 1897.

If you and your student wish to undertake a more detailed, contemporary study of illumination, you might consider purchasing a book such as Michelle Brown's *Understanding Illuminated Manuscripts: A Guide to Technical Terms* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 1994).



he art of sailing is favorable

for anyone who wants to

pursue knowledge of this world's secrets...

I found our Lord very well disposed toward

this desire, and he gave me the spirit for

it. He prospered me in seamanship and

supplied me with the necessary tools

of astronomy, as well as geometry and

arithmetical and ingenuity of manual skill

to draw spherical maps which show cities,

rivers and mountains, islands and ports—

everything in its proper place.



SAMPLE

Practice your own illuminated letter here.

W W

who can desire more content,

that hath small means;

or but only his merit to

advance his fortune, than to tread, and

plant that ground he hath purchased by

the hazard of his life. If he have but the

taste of virtue and magnanimity, what to

such a mind can be more pleasant, than

planting and building a foundation for

his posterity, got from the rude earth,

by God's blessing and his own industry,

without prejudice to any?



SAMPLE

Practice your own illuminated letter here.

MAYFLOWER COMPACT (c. 1620)

*H*aving undertaken for the Glory
of God, and Advancement of the
Christian Faith, and the Honor of our King
and Country, a Voyage to plant the first
colony in the northern Parts of Virginia. Do
by these Presents solemnly and mutually
in the Presence of God and one another,
covenant and combine ourselves together into
a civil Body Politick, for our better Ordering
and Preservation, and Furtherance of the
Ends aforesaid.

SAMPLE



SAMPLE

Practice your own illuminated letter here.



eing thus arrived in a good

harbor, and brought safe

to land, they fell upon their knees and

blessed the God of Heaven who had brought

them over the vast and furious ocean, and

delivered them from all the perils and

miseries thereof again to set their feet on

the firm and stable earth, their proper

element.

SAMPLE



SAMPLE

Practice your own illuminated letter here.



or two years together after the
 beginning of the colony, whereof
 he was now governor, the poor people had
 a great experiment of "man's not living by
 bread alone;" for when they were left all
 together without one morsel of bread for
 many months, one after another, still the
 good Providence of God relieved them, and
 supplied them, and this for the most part
 out of the sea.



SAMPLE

Practice your own illuminated letter here.
