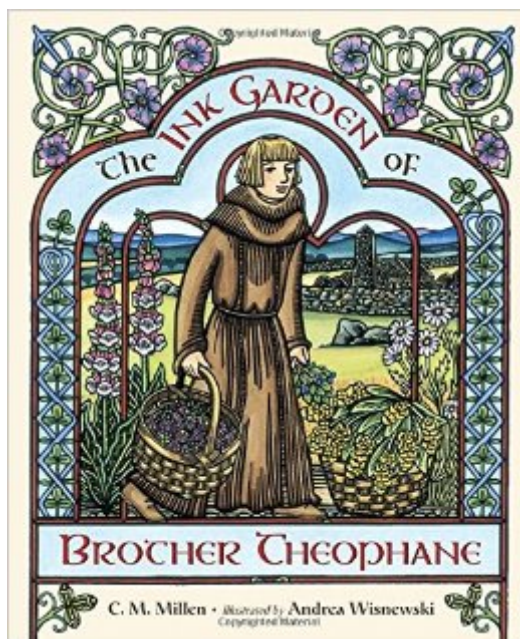


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# The Ink Garden Of Brother Theophane



## 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?)

Hardcover: 32 pages

Publisher: Charlesbridge; New edition (July 1, 2010)

Language: English

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Product Dimensions: 9.4 x 0.4 x 11.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (10 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #413,614 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #128 in [Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > Medieval](#) #352 in [Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > Books & Libraries](#)

Age Range: 5 - 8 years

Grade Level: 1 - 3

## Customer Reviews

Like other monks at the monastery, Brother Theophane sat at his desk copying text from scholarly materials onto brown parchment using brown ink. The work, all done by hand, proved tedious, and Theophane fought the boredom by feeding crumbs to the birds in the windowsill and scribbling

poems on scraps of paper. His imaginative streak yielded greater returns when, asked to cook up more brown ink, he experimented with other ingredients from the woods and created a range of hues. The monks could henceforth enhance their copying work with colorful sketches and designs. Based on actual practices of copying books during medieval times, this picture book has both a unique story and exuberant illustrations. It also presents an interesting economics lesson about how innovation can make people better off. Children will see how thinking in unconventional ways can lead to interesting outcomes even in unexpected places.

What a beautiful book! The story of Brother Theophane is so sweet, and the illustrations are amazing and just saturated in vibrant colors. My children loved it, and while I initially checked it out of our local library, I am now buying it so that we can have it in our own personal library. Perfect for ages 4+.

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.

This beautifully illustrated book is a delight to look at. It is like a combination of a Celtic illuminated manuscript and a stained glass window. The thick black outlines emphasize the colors within, and

there are many eye-capturing intricate Celtic style designs surrounding the text and the illustrations. The book tells the story of young "Brother Theophane", a fictionalized conglomerate of the early monks and scribes who brought their plain brown writing to vivid life by adding colorful and intricately detailed illustrations. While the other monks diligently tend to their scribe work, young Theophane would daydream, feed the birds with leftover crumbs, and write of the beauty outside the scriptorium. Eventually, the older monks give Theophane the task of mixing the brown ink. Although the task is hot and exhausting work, it turns into a godsend for Theophane as he experiments with leaves, roots and berries until he learns to make brightly colored ink in many hues. With these inks, Theophane is able to bring the colors of the outdoors to life on the written page. And soon the other monks also write and illustrate with the new "heavenly hues." The final page is a brief explanation and history of monastery life in the Middle Ages. Millen tells us that when the monks were bored, they often doodled or scribbled short poems in the margins of their books or on spare scraps of parchment. These anonymous poems were translated by Thomas Kinsella and serve as the basis for the poems that appear in the book as "Theophane's" work. While younger children might appreciate the bright bold colors, this book will probably appeal more to older children who might have some knowledge and understanding of monastic life in the Middle Ages.

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