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# Mary in Miniature: Hands-on Learning with Medieval Books

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# Mary in Miniature: Hands-on Learning with Medieval Books

Jillian Ewalt, Librarian for Visual Resources



University of Dayton

Libraries



## Institutional Context

The University of Dayton is a top tier, private Catholic research university in Dayton, Ohio with 11,000 undergraduate and graduate students.

The Marian Library is a special library at the University of Dayton devoted to the study of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Collections document the history, spirituality and ecclesial foundations of Marian studies. Holdings include circulating books, periodicals, rare books and incunabula, artwork, visual resources, and archival materials.

## The Course: Social History of the Later Middle Ages

This course introduces students to the social and economic history of the Middle Ages and beginning of the Early Modern period and historiographical approaches and methods.

The specific topics covered include the life of the peasantry, the life of the bourgeoisie and gentry, the life of the aristocracy, the history of manners, approaches to economic history, narrative history, and theories of cultural change.

## Library Instruction Session: Analyzing Late Medieval Books in the Marian Library

**Goal:** Engage undergraduate History majors in analyzing, interpreting and thinking critically about medieval books and what they tell us about the social history of the later Middle Ages.

**Session development:** The lesson included a brief introduction to the Marian Library, show and tell with rare books related to course content, and a hands-on activity in which students analyzed Books of Hours (popular Medieval devotional books centered around a series of prayers to the Blessed Virgin Mary). Students had ample time for discussion, questions, and reflections on the experience. Please see the lesson plan for more information!

**Pedagogy:** Pedagogical approaches offered students opportunities to engage in experiential learning, intuition, critical thinking, and discussion. While students had context from the course and library introduction, the focus of the session was the student-centered, hands-on activity.

Please take a lesson plan for more information!

## Outcomes and Reflection

Students had the opportunity to analyze 500-year old books from the Marian Library's collection. They thought critically about special collections while connecting objects to course themes. Future sessions could include assignments using rare books from the Marian Library's collection and additional activities (as opposed to show and tell) to increase student learning and engagement with rare materials.

