

How did monks make the Lindisfarne Gospels?

The Monks' Light • KS2 History • Years 3 to 6

1 One book, ten years

MATHS LINK

When	What happened
AD 635	The king of Northumbria gives some monks an island called _____
about _____ years	About how long it took the bishop Eadfrith to make the book

1. Six materials made about **90** colours. On average, how many colours came from each material? about _____ colours
2. The book took about **150** calf skins. If a farm had **30** calves each year, how many years would it take to collect enough? _____ years

2 Words to know

VOCABULARY

a. Draw a line to match each word to its meaning.

monastery	a coloured powder that is mixed to make paint
bishop	a hard brown lump that grows on oak twigs
oak gall	a place set apart where monks lived, prayed and copied books
pigment	a senior leader of the Church in an area

b. Finish these sentences using three of the words above.

- Eadfrith was the _____ of the island.
- The ink was made from crushed _____s stirred together with iron.
- Every _____ came from something found on or near the island.

3 Why there, and why so beautiful?

CAUSE AND EVIDENCE

Twice a day the sea walks out and leaves a path across the sand. Twice a day it walks back in, and whoever is there cannot get away.

1. Why did the monks choose an island that the sea cuts off twice a day?

Other famous books of the time used materials carried thousands of miles. The Lindisfarne Gospels did not, and there is gold in the book, but barely any.

2. So what made the book look so beautiful?

4 Write about the monks' work

ENGLISH LINK

The film is called *The Monks' Light*. The apostrophe comes **after** the **s** because the light belongs to more than one monk. Write three sentences about life and work on the island.

Use the apostrophe for more than one owner at least twice — for example **the monks' island** or **the calves' skins**.

Answers and teaching notes

How did monks make the Lindisfarne Gospels? · The Monks' Light

1 · One book, ten years

Lindisfarne · about 10 years (an estimate — nobody wrote down how long it took)

a. $90 \div 6 = 15$ **colours** for each material, on average.

b. $150 \div 30 = 5$ **years**. The farm is made up for the sum; the 150 calves is from the film. Worth saying aloud: a whole herd went into one book.

2 · Words to know

a. monastery → a place set apart where monks lived, prayed and copied books · bishop → a senior leader of the Church · oak gall → a hard brown lump on oak twigs · pigment → a coloured powder mixed to make paint

b. bishop · oak galls · pigment

3 · Why there, and why so beautiful?

a. So that nobody could walk in and the work would never be interrupted. Accept *quiet*, *safe* or *alone* if the child says why that helped the work.

b. How it was painted, not what it cost. Around ninety colours mixed from six local materials, and knotwork so tight it looks like a pattern until the birds appear.

4 · Write about the monks' work

Not marked for content. Look for the **apostrophe for plural possession** (Year 4 statutory): *the monks' island*, *the monks' ink*, *the calves' skins*. The common slip is *monk's*, which means one monk. The film title is the model answer.

Curriculum

National Curriculum KS2 History — *Britain's settlement by Anglo-Saxons and Scots*: Christian conversion (Canterbury, Iona and Lindisfarne) and Anglo-Saxon art and culture. The film covers Canterbury and Lindisfarne. Question 1 links to Maths (division) and question 4 to English (apostrophes for plural possession, Year 4 statutory).

Where each question comes from in the film

Chapter 1 — The Island That Vanishes · Sutton Hoo, Canterbury, the monastery, AD 635, the tide, Eadfrith (Q1, Q2, Q3a)

Chapter 2 — A Hundred and Fifty Calves · calf skin, oak gall ink, materials from far away (Q1b, Q2, Q3b)

Chapter 3 — Colour from the Ground · six materials, ninety colours, barely any gold, the knotwork birds (Q1a, Q3b)

Three things the film is careful about

No lapis lazuli and almost no gold. The deep blue stones on screen at 2:50 are what *other* famous books used. The Lindisfarne colours came from local materials, and the film says so straight after.

Eadfrith's name comes from a note added long afterwards. The film says so rather than stating it as fact.

The Sutton Hoo spoons carry Christian names. That shows the new religion had reached the king's world, not that the king was a Christian.