

2017 Higher Level Mock Exam Question

Large stained glass windows in Gothic cathedrals allowed light to illuminate the cathedral and served narrative and decorative functions. Discuss this statement with reference to the illustration on the accompanying sheet. In your answer name the stained glass window and refer to the theme, composition, use of colour and the techniques used in its production AND briefly describe and discuss the main architectural features of a named Gothic church or cathedral.

[Image of North Rose window at Chartres cathedral]

As Gothic cathedrals were erected across Europe in the 12th century, change came in the form of stained glass windows. Although they were not a Gothic invention, they only became so popular and magnificent during the gothic period. They originate in France at the Abbey of St Denis under Abbot Suger, known as “the creator of Gothic”. Suger believed that this new decoration of light and colour would be a nice change from the dark interiors of Romanesque cathedrals and would help in lifting souls closer to God. Stained glass windows did as he had hoped and aided the development from grim and gruesome Romanesque imagery to a much more forgiving form of religious education in Gothic imagery. The stories told in these windows were invaluable to the worshippers of the time. One such window is the north rose window at Chartres cathedral.

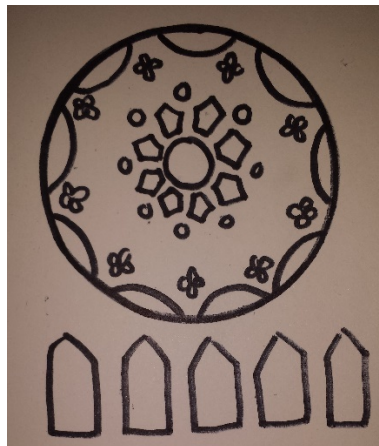
Theme

The theme of the north rose window at Chartres is a common one in stained glass windows of Gothic cathedrals; the glorification of the Virgin. This theme allowed for great creativity and imagination whilst also ensuring that the artist could rely on hopeful imagery. This combination meant that the glass could serve both decorative and narrative functions, illuminating the interior of the cathedral and teaching illiterate worshippers about the life of the virgin.



Composition

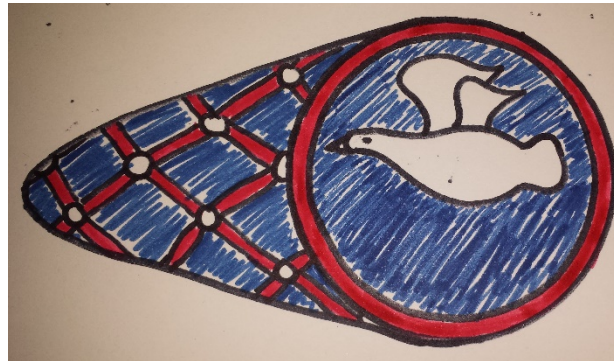
This particular rose window is composed of 49 smaller windows in total and five lancet windows below. The central window is surrounded by 12 petal-shaped windows, followed by a ring of 12 diamond-shaped windows, another ring of smaller lozenge shapes and then a ring of semi-circular windows. This arrangement is important because it allowed the light to flood the cathedral in a way that would not simply just illuminate it, but decorate it too. The pattern created by the composition of stained glass windows in gothic cathedrals reflects on the interior in a way that would have astonished those who visited them first.



Colour

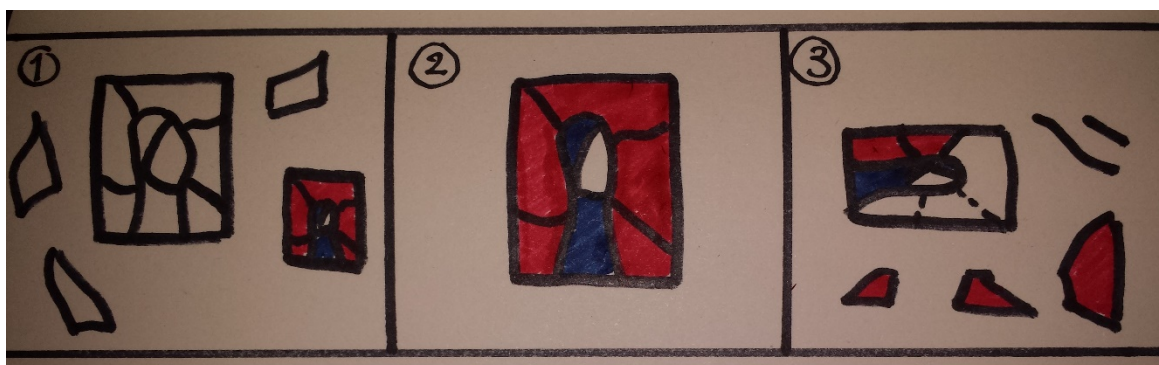
Colour was important for decorative and narrative purposes because it added a sense of tranquillity to interior spaces and attracted worshippers who were so used to darkness. In this window at Chartres, like many others, the main colours are bright blues, reds and yellows. Such colours were popular because when diffused by light they created a satisfying and relaxing purple on interior walls. This would have encouraged cathedral visitors of the time to educate themselves because it would have been unlike any other kind of religious art they had previously

seen. The colours also helped in identifying certain characters, as can be seen clearly in this rose window and lancets with a strong emphasis on blue for the Virgin Mary.



Techniques used in production:

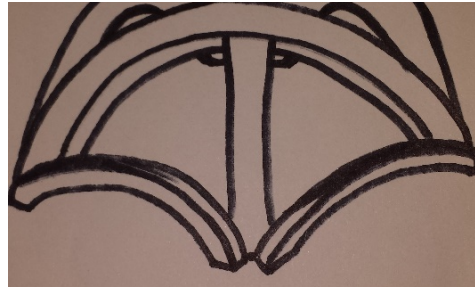
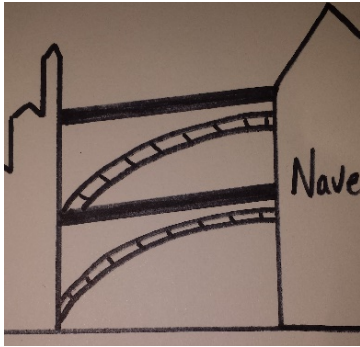
1. The artist makes a coloured design. A full-sized drawing (called a cartoon) is then made. The glass pieces are cut.
2. Pieces are fitted and the glass is fired in a muffle kiln to fix the pieces in place.
3. Painted glass is laid back on the cartoon and leading is fitted around it to hold in place as a complete piece.



Main features of Gothic architecture

Notre Dame cathedral in Paris was built in the 13th century and is a Gothic cathedral. Its main

features include thin walls, pointed arches, deep portals, flying buttresses and rib vaulting. All of these are typical of Gothic cathedrals.



Flying buttresses are external arches that are high up on the cathedral. They support the walls and prevent the problem of outward thrust.

Rib vaulting was a new form of vaulting invented in the Gothic period in which extra strips of stone (ribs) were added to create crosswise vaulting. This was much more effective than barrel or groin vaulting.

Conclusion

Stained glass windows played a huge role in Gothic cathedrals by illuminating the interior with colourful light, educating illiterate worshippers with narrative and creating an overall positive atmosphere in cathedrals.