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A Beautiful Stain - Stained Glass

By Colleen Messina

When you have a blob of grape jelly or some other stain on your clothes, you try to get rid of it. But in the artistic world, there is one kind of stain that is beautiful. It comes in all colors of the rainbow. You would want to keep this kind of stain. It is called stained glass.

Stained glass looks vivid when sunlight shines through it, and it creates dots of color across the floor. You may have first seen stained glass in a church. No one knows who created stained glass for the first time, but early stained glass was created for Christian churches. Mosaics may have inspired this art form.

Glass artists of the Middle Ages developed the ability to make large pieces of colored glass. They first used a gold frame to hold pieces of glass together to use as a decoration. Then, these artists had a new idea. They decided to make a lead framework to hold these pieces of glass together. They thought this was a splendid way to create stunning new windows that was not as expensive.

Glass is a delicate and mysterious substance. It is fragile, but it is made from a coarse, natural material. It comes from sand! In ancient times, artists learned how to add metallic salts and oxides while they were making the glass to create vivid colors. Gold added to the glass made a cranberry color. Cobalt made blue. Silver made yellow and gold, while copper made green and deep red.

Medieval artists discovered another way to add more detail to the glass. They found that if they mixed iron filings with powdered glass, they could create a paste. They used this paste to paint right onto clear glass. They could paint all kinds of pictures with this paste. When the glass was fired at a high temperature, the paste became a permanent part of it. They could then paint faces, hands, and folds of cloth in their religious pictures. Stained glass was used to depict scenes from the life of Christ, saints' lives, and other holy images in their churches.



A monk named Theophilus wrote about how to make stained glass in 1100 A.D. He said, "If you want to assemble simple windows, first mark out the dimensions of their length and breadth on a wooden board, then draw scroll work or anything else that pleases you and select colors...Cut the glass and fit the pieces together...Enclose them with lead carnes...and solder on both sides. Surround it with a wooden frame." Sounds a bit complicated, doesn't it? As strange as it may seem, Theo described the same technique that is used to create stained glass windows today.

During the Gothic age, artists created many stained glass windows in the cathedrals of Europe. Seeing a stained glass window might have been quite an experience in the 15th century. Remember, no one had television, computers, or movies with computer graphics. By this time, the pictures on stained glass windows filled the whole window rather than just one section. The paintings of Bible stories became much more realistic.

The Gothic style received a great boost from a sweet man named Abbot Suger of St. Denis. He rebuilt his church with amazing stained glass windows. He hired special craftsmen to do the job. He kept a journal of everything that was done. He believed with all his heart that stained glass windows would bring men closer to God. Abbot Suger ran St. Denis from 1122 until 1151.

Centuries later, Americans also became interested in stained glass. Louis Comfort Tiffany was an American painter who brought the art of stained glass to a new level in the 19th century. You might have seen pictures of his famous Tiffany windows or lamps. Another painter named John LaFarge also made stained glass, and the two men became competitors. Even though LaFarge copyrighted opalescent glass in 1879, Tiffany made it popular. So Tiffany won the race because his name is associated with stained glass today.

Tiffany stained glass became famous because of its intricate cuts and rich colors. It had flowing lines and mystical themes. Often, the glass had layers, which made it look like it had a texture and greater depth. Tiffany stained glass was used in churches and in private homes. His windows had scenes of colorful gardens, fountains, and exotic birds.

Tiffany also had a new idea. He used thin strips of copper instead of lead in his stained glass. He decided this kind of framework could make lampshades for those newfangled electric lights. Many of his customers were rich, like the Vanderbilts. They decided that these dazzling electric lamps with the glowing colors were just the thing for

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their elegant drawing rooms!

People lost interest in stained glass after World War II, but today there is a new wave of interest in stained glass art. Artists now use stained glass for everything from decorative stained glass panels to bathroom windows. Today, stained glass is the kind of stain that many people want to have around!

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Questions

- _____ 1. What kind of stain is mentioned in the first paragraph of the article?
- A. coffee
 - B. grass
 - C. ketchup
 - D. grape jelly
- _____ 2. What substance makes glass?
- A. sand
 - B. wood chips
 - C. gravel
 - D. seashells
- _____ 3. Where did artists originally put stained glass?
- A. cemeteries
 - B. supermarkets
 - C. shipyards
 - D. churches
- _____ 4. Which time period produced elaborate stained glass windows?
- A. the Industrial age
 - B. the Gothic period
 - C. the middle ages
 - D. the Renaissance

- _____ 5. What did the artists put around the glass to hold it together during the Middle Ages?
- A. lead
 - B. aluminum
 - C. steel
 - D. copper
- _____ 6. Who was the American painter who became famous for his stained glass?
- A. Andrew Wyeth
 - B. John LaFarge
 - C. Louis Comfort Tiffany
 - D. Norman Rockwell
- _____ 7. What kind of furniture did Tiffany create especially for his wealthy clients?
- A. lampshades
 - B. countertops
 - C. desktops
 - D. bathtubs
- _____ 8. Which of the following sweet words is a homonym for the name of an abbot who had many stained glass windows in his church?
- A. caramel
 - B. sugar
 - C. chocolate
 - D. licorice

If you had a Tiffany lamp in your room, what kind of picture would you like on it?
