

ST BRENDAN AND THE UNHAPPY JUDAS

Harry Clarke RHA (1889-1931)

Harry Clarke was born in 1889. He was the son of a Dublin craftsman and he worked with his brother in the family studio from an early age. At a time when medieval-style stained glass was enjoying a revival, Clarke was one its greatest innovators. He was a member of **An Tur Gloinne**, a studio established by Sarah Purser which raised the standard of stained glass design in Ireland.



Clarke won many awards and commissions for both clerical and secular work. The windows of the Honan Chapel in Cork and *The Eve of St. Agnes* are just some of the one hundred and thirty glass pieces he created. As well as stained glass, Clarke also illustrated six major books.

St. Brendan and the Unhappy Judas shows St. Brendan and his men in their boat just as they encounter Judas. Judas is being punished for his betrayal of Jesus. Part of Clarke's technique was to make the leading (this joins the pieces of glass together) become part of the drawing. The strong painterly look of the panel, the texture of the waves and intense colours show Harry Clarke's skill.

DISCUSSION

- The heavy lines in stained glass are made of lead. These lines hold the individual pieces of glass together. How many individual pieces of glass with hands on them, can you find?
- The best place to look at stained glass is in front of the light, what do you think would happen to this piece with strong light behind it?
- What are the two main colours in this stained glass panel?
- With stained glass, when the light shines through the glass, the light in the room glows with the colours of the glass. How do you think this would feel?
- Stained glass windows are often to be found in buildings such as churches and cathedrals where they create an atmosphere different to the outside world. Have you ever seen stained glass in other places?
- Where in your school or town would you like to see stained glass?
- In this panel St. Brendan and his men have just come upon Judas as he stands on his rock in the middle of the ocean. Look at their faces, how would you describe their expressions?
- Which man on the boat is St. Brendan? Why did you pick this one?
- Judas is on the rock as part of his punishment for betraying Jesus, how can you tell that he is suffering?
- What do you think the flames on his body represent?

- Is it calm or stormy at sea? How can you tell?

In the gallery there are drawings and paintings by the artist Harry Clarke. These are designs for one of his most famous stained glass windows called *The Eve of Saint Agnes*. Do the pictures look very like the stained glass?

From the paintings, can you find the finished panels in the poster of the completed window? Do they look similar? How do they look different?



HANDS ON

The *Pit and the Pendulum* is a drawing that Clarke made to illustrate a book of poems. Spooky poems by the poet Edgar Allen Poe. He draws in pen and black ink and uses decorative swirls, celtic spirals and patterns. The figures are elongated and skeleton-like.

Harry Clarke designed many of his stained glass pieces and drawings to illustrate stories and poems. Think of a story or poem you like, then think of one very important part of the story. Plan a drawing that tells as much as possible; try to get all the action in. Draw in black pen to get a look similar to that in *The Pit and the Pendulum*.

Get some coloured plastic gel sheets and hold them up to the light to see how the colours look, overlap the sheets and see how the colours combine to make new colours. You are going to make a stained glass window so decide what colours you want to use. (If you want a warm look use warm colours like reds, yellows, oranges. Blues and greens will give a cooler look.)

Draw your pattern on paper and cut out your colour gels to fit the pattern. Join the gels with thin pieces of tape and put a strip of tape around the outside edge. Hang in front of window.