

Beyond Book Repair: Expanding the Role of Conservation at the Yale University Library

By Christine McCarthy, Chief Conservator, Conservation Services, YUL Preservation Department

Academic research libraries continue to respond to rapid and expansive changes brought about by advances in computing and information technologies. Much has been written about these revolutionary changes and the ways in which libraries must reinvent or retool services and staffing models to continue to meet user expectations and access needs. These trends and changes influence the ways in which traditional analog collections are viewed. Again, much has been discussed and published about the interplay of analog and digital collections as well as the tensions sometimes created between the mandates to preserve collections and to digitize collections.

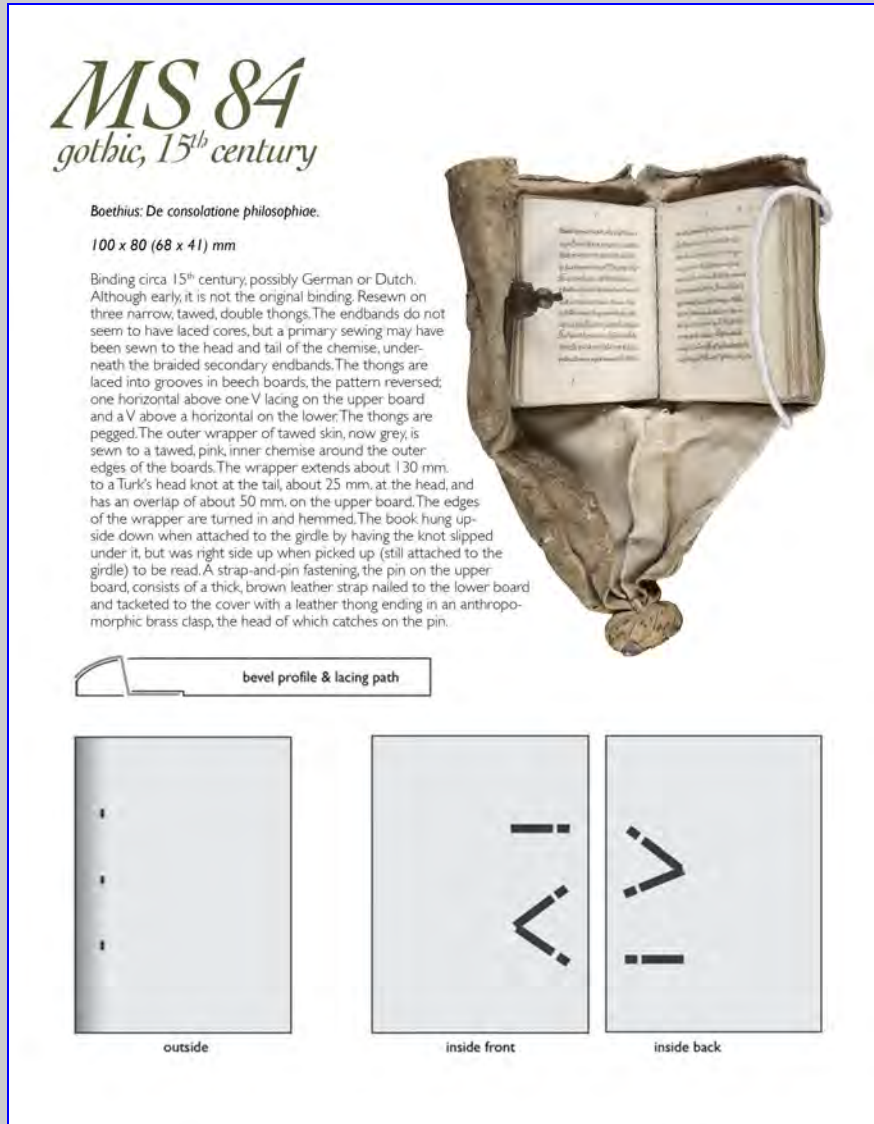
In the midst of this ongoing transformation or revolution in research libraries, Yale University Library’s Conservation Services took advantage of a renewed campus focus on materials culture to market its expertise more directly in the service of learning and teaching. The typical treatments carried out by library conservators on rare materials were and remain very familiar to our librarians and collection curators. What is less clearly understood is the full breadth of the knowledge that supports those treatments, and the possibilities for leveraging that knowledge in the use of the collections for teaching.

Through a series of outreach projects and collaborations with curators, faculty, and other conservators on campus, Yale University Library’s Conservation Services, using its expertise in the areas of book history, materials and techniques, and scientific testing, has reintroduced itself to the campus and community as a partner in promoting teaching and enhancing learning through the study of objects. Reintroducing conservation as a discipline was a non-linear, opportunistic process that culminated in the creation of the Library’s first material culture teaching kit, the ***Traveling Scriptorium***.

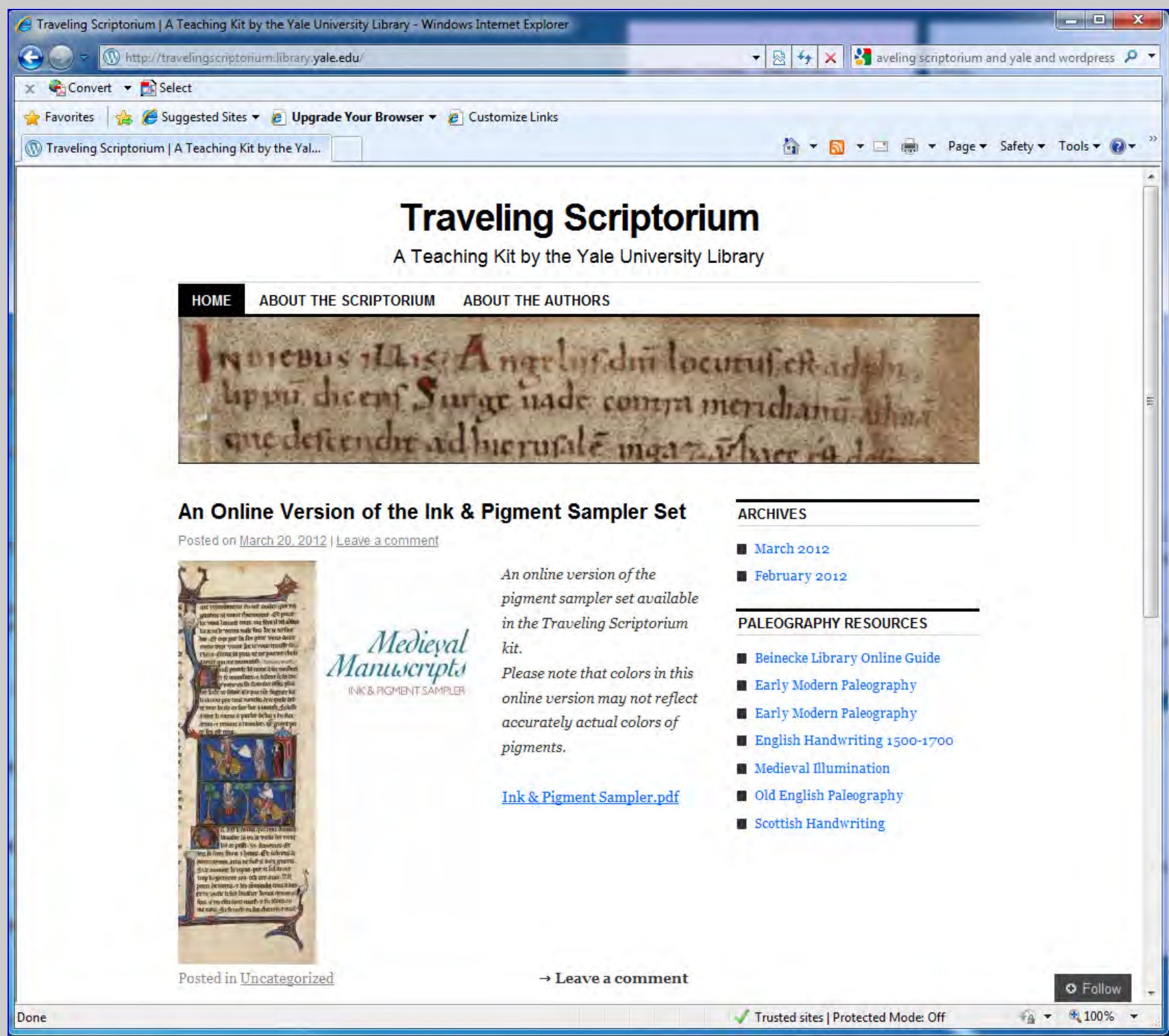


The kit includes a set of historical models representing bindings typically used in the medieval period.

Each binding model was based on a manuscript from the Beinecke Rare Book Library’s collections.

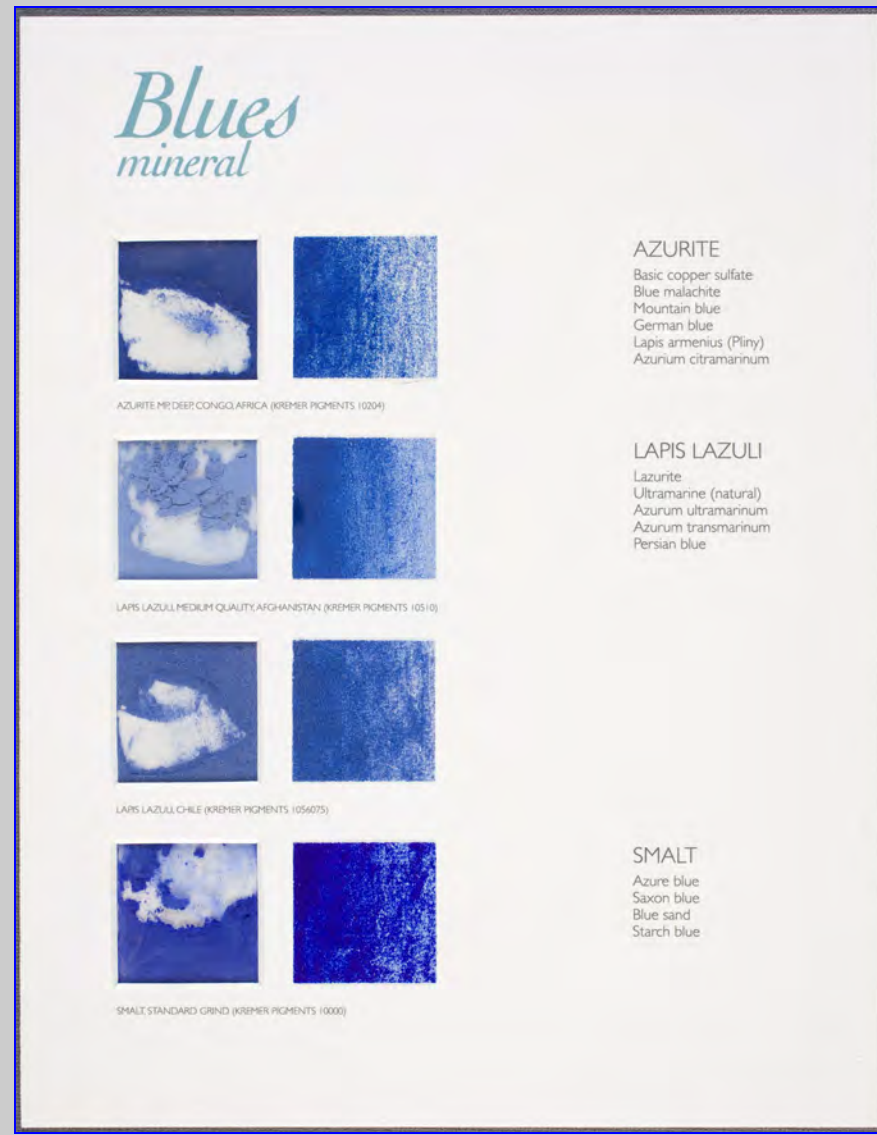


The binding models are supported by a series of didactic panels that focus more specifically on the characteristic features of the bindings such as sewing structure (supports and patterns), boards (material used, shaping and lacing channels), and covering materials (leather, parchment, tanning, and toning of covering material).



In 2010, the Conservation Services team partnered with curator Kathryn James to seek funding to create a material culture kit based on medieval manuscripts. The kit was envisioned as a teaching tool and will be used in class sessions for library staff, undergraduate, and graduate students, and others. The Scriptorium’s blog site provides the opportunity to collect audience responses, while also acting as a forum for information, further resources, and an introduction to the kit itself.











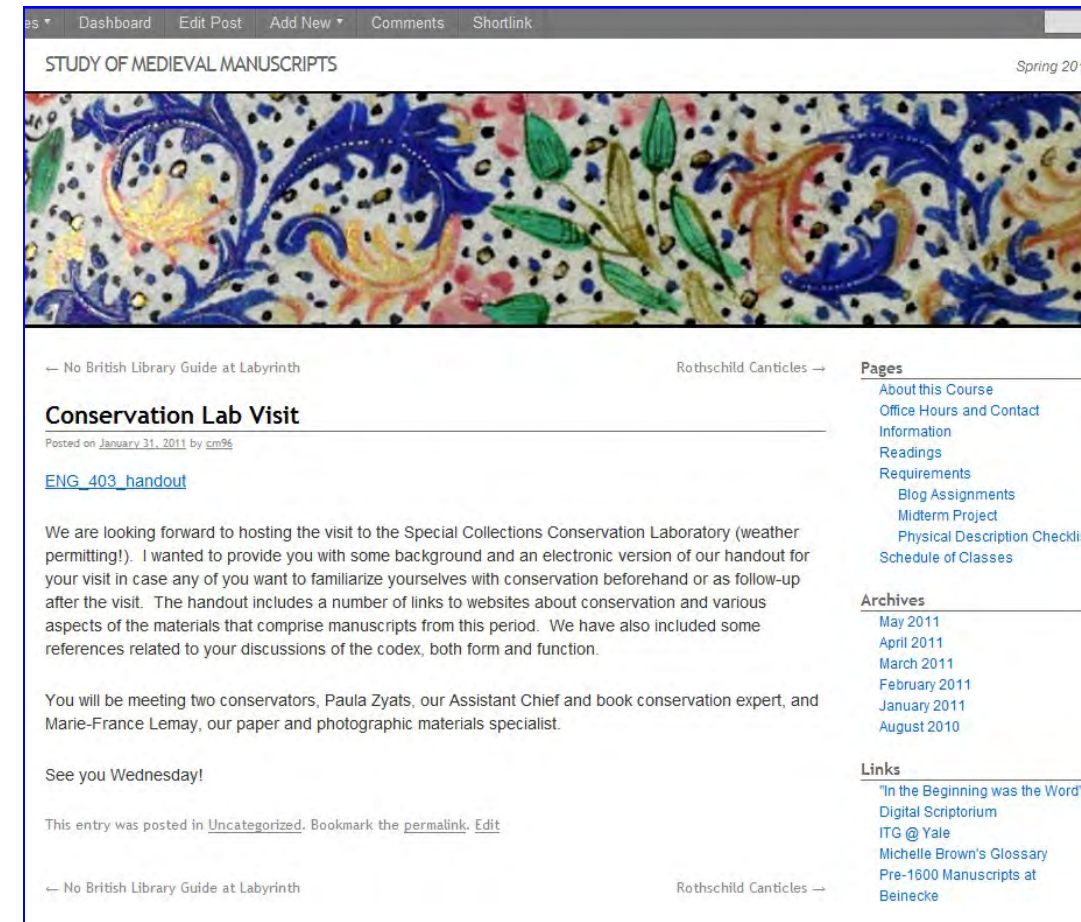




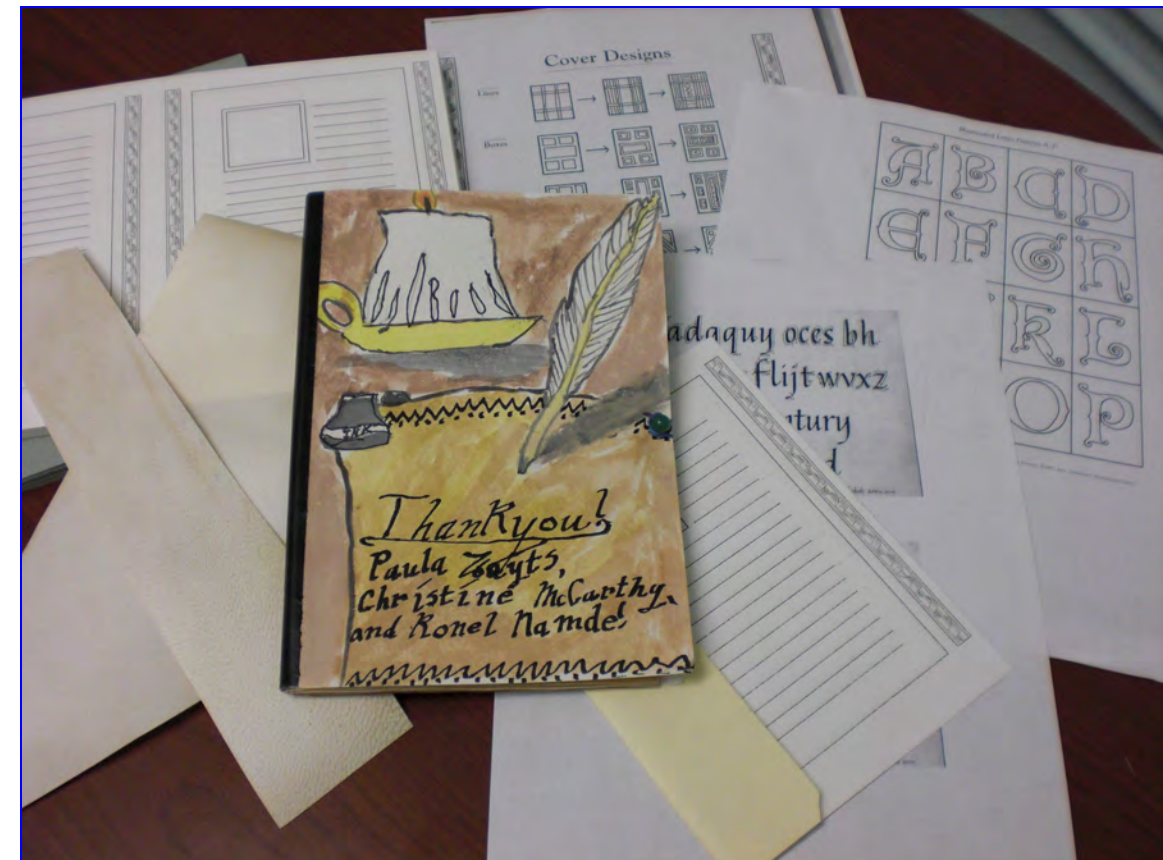

The project team solicited input from and worked closely with Yale’ English Department faculty to develop something that would enhance their teaching and use of collections. Each user of the kit can approach integration into learning, teaching and course curriculums in different ways. Faculty advisors for the project were excited to use the kit in their classrooms but still wanted the option to visit the lab with their students to explore the kit with the Library’s conservators.



The Traveling Scriptorium provides samples sets and didactic panels related to medieval inks and pigments. The kit includes examples of many raw materials used to create inks such as oak galls, plant matter, minerals, and insects. There is also a guide with historical ink and pigment recipes.

SCOPA grant awarded for creation of the *Traveling Scriptorium*

Traveling Scriptorium is completed and formally presented to faculty, library staff and student groups to fulfill the grant requirements.

2005-2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<p>Conservation Lab offers "Job Chats," monthly Department Tours, and Open House events.</p>  <p>Yale Library's Conservation Services outreach efforts, pre-2008, focused primarily on staff education and public outreach. Topics covered included good care and handling techniques and general preservation tips for personal collections. In addition, to raise awareness for the lab, conservators participated in "job chats" and cross-training initiatives sponsored by the Library.</p>   <p>The craft aspects of conservation are always of interest to others outside the lab. Outreach efforts often capitalized on craft - highlighting hand skills, the tools and equipment used, and the final products or treatments executed.</p> <p>Techniques such as washing or mending are obvious crowd-pleasers, as are treatments that produce dramatic physical transformation. Treatment method-based laboratory tours had been effective tools for cultivating donor interest and raising general awareness of conservation with alumni groups. For students and faculty, however, Conservation Services felt that they might need a different approach.</p>	<p>Voynich Manuscript, Documentary Film Project</p> <p>In the instance of the cipher manuscript, the Beinecke Rare Book Library's Voynich Manuscript, curators were approached by an Austrian film production company about making the manuscript the focus of a documentary. Curators were concerned about the physically handling and its potential impact on the manuscript and sought the advice of conservators.</p>  <p>The film's producers also asked for analytical testing to be carried out on the manuscript to identify and date the pigments, inks, and parchment leaves. Curators were unaware prior to the condition discussion of the extent to which conservators could offer insights into how this testing might be accomplished.</p>  <p>Cu-</p>  <p>In May of 2008, James was appointed interim curator for the medieval Collections. In this capacity, she began working with the Lab's conservators on projects to facilitate scholars' research and support faculty's teaching.</p> <p>James was the obvious choice as a curatorial partner when the Lab began thinking about creating a material culture kit to be used in conjunction with the BRBL's medieval manuscripts.</p>	<p>Students from the Housatonic Waldorf School visited the lab as part of their study of bookbinding and writing.</p> <p>Using show and tell displays, lecture, and hands-on exercises, conservators taught the students binding and printing history and answered questions about conservation.</p>  <p>Conservation Assistant Karen Jutz showed students how multiple folded paper gatherings are traditionally sewn together to form a textbook.</p>  <p>Students examined paint samples made by the conservators for the lab visit. More complete and refined versions of these samples were created as part of the <i>Traveling Scriptorium</i> kit.</p>  <p>A 2nd grade student showed her handiwork during a public school session entitled, <i>Make Your Own Pop-Up Treasure Map!</i></p> <p>In 2010, conservators applied for an internal Library SCOPA grant to fund a K-12 outreach program focused on material culture literacy and highlighting careers in preservation and conservation. The project was not funded, but</p>	<p>In 2010, Conservation Services hosted tours and class sessions for two Yale English Department courses <i>Manuscripts to New Media</i> and <i>Study of Medieval Manuscripts</i>. Former Director of Undergraduate Library and Research Education, Barbara Rockenbach directed professors, Jessica Bramley and Jessica Pressman to Conservation Services following an unrelated conversation with Chief Conservator, McCarthy, about class use of the Library's exhibition spaces.</p>    <p>Conservator, Paula Zyats, discussed the preparation of parchment in the medieval period using a skin to help students to visualize the process and relate the final appearance to that of the original animal.</p>  <p>Conservator, Marie-France Lemay presented students with samples of the materials used to create the palette and inks of the medieval illuminator and scribe.</p>  <p>Undergraduate students tried their hand writing with quills and iron gall ink. The final components of the Traveling Scriptorium were greatly influenced by these class sessions, follow-up with students on class blogs, and working directly with the faculty to better understand their curriculum.</p>	<p>"Make Your Own Medieval Manuscript," New Haven's Hooker School</p>  <p>Conservator taught 5th grade students how to make their own illuminated medieval manuscript. Students learned about historical methods for producing inks and pigments and they had the chance to try to write on parchment with iron gall ink and quills.</p> <p>The hands-on manuscript making exercise was based in part on the work of book artist and educator, Susan Kapuscinski Gaylord.</p>  <p>To visit the YUL <i>Traveling Scriptorium</i> blog, use your smart phone to scan the code below.</p>  <p>The <i>Traveling Scriptorium</i> Team Christine McCarthy, Paula Zyats, Ronel Namde, Marie-France Lemay, Karen Jutz, and Kathryn James Conservation Services, Preservation Department and The Beinecke Rare Book Library</p>	