This illuminated sheet shows a scene from a famous Persian (Iranian) poem, the Shahnama, or Book of Kings, completed in A.D. 1010. The king’s son Isfandiyar must defeat the Simurgh, a powerful bird strong enough to lift an elephant in its claws and so old that it had seen the world destroyed three times. In this illustration, Isfandiyar has just spotted the Simurgh flying above and is ready with his sword. The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art has twenty sheets from this vibrant manuscript that tells of Isfandiyar and his friend Rustam, who together fight Persia’s supernatural enemies, including witches, dragons, and of course, the Simurgh.

Artist Unknown (Persia) Rostam and the White Demon Esfandiyar in His Armored Car Encounters the Simurgh, from the Shahnameh (1600-1625) Tempera, Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art, The University of Oklahoma, Norman; Wentz-Matzene Collection, 1936
Persia

...the Simurgh

Watercolor Pencil

Watercolor
Persia

...the Simurgh

For Lower Grades:

1. Have the students lay their paper horizontally, called landscape.
2. Using the blue pencil, draw a heart on the paper. Not too small - you need room inside to draw. Don’t cover the whole paper - you need room for the flames. Fill in the heart with the blue and then run a wet paintbrush over the marks to create the watercolor effect.
3. We will let that dry while we use the yellow pencil to draw the flames on the outside. Fill them in and add water just like in step 2.
4. If the blue is dry (if not, we have blow dryers in the art room), make a yellow circle in the middle. Then using red, make the petals. They are just loops starting and stopping at the yellow circle. Fill in both colors and add the water.
5. Add any other decorations

For Upper Grades:

1. Have the students lay their paper horizontally, called landscape.
2. Using the red pencil, you will draw the beak, head, neck, and frills. The beak is the same shape we usually use for fire, and the frills are simply circles.
3. Use a yellow pencil to draw and fill in the teardrop shape eye area. Afterward, fill in the red areas with red.
4. Blue is next. Add a bit more to the next, then make the body. Mine is usually a bit plump, like a turkey. Fill it in.
5. Next is the wings. These are three stripes that are in a stretched out S shape.
6. Using the red, add spots to his hips. Then use the red to start the tail. You will add long pieces curling away from his body and shorter tail feathers as well. Add more feathers using green and yellow. (You can change up the colors if you wish. I’m just following the original.)
7. Now for the water. Using a smaller brush, add water to the pencil to create the watercolor effect. Just don’t soak it!
8. Use a black pencil to add the feet, eye, and whiskers.
Persia

...the Simurgh
Persia...the Simurgh