



0. ROBERT LANGDON and HIS AMBIGRAMS - Story
Preface

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Ambigram by [João Franco](#), online courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

Dr. Robert Langdon, fictional Harvard professor, is about to step outside his field of symbology and religious iconology to learn more than he ever cared to know about antimatter. Actually ... Robert Langdon isn't quite the fictional character he appears to be.

Meet ... [John Langdon](#), from Drexel University in Philadelphia. Langdon is a professor of media arts and design who specializes in ambigrams - those artistically styled words which look the same whether they are viewed right-side-up or upside-down.

In addition to his work on ambigrams (including a book called [Wordplay](#)), Professor Langdon paints and creates fine art incorporating language, type and philosophy. Highly imaginative, his work is fun to explore ... but ... how does he create an ambigram? And ... what does he do when a word or phrase isn't cooperating?

I write a word in front of me, upside-down, in all caps. I then begin to try to see the same word (or another word) in the inverted forms of the one I wrote down. Some letters invert into themselves or others easily. Some must be wrestled down and convinced to behave the way I want them to ... And some letters simply refuse and I lose the wrestling match.

How long does it take to create an ambigram - like that of "Illuminati" or "Angels and Demons?"

The amount of time required to determine whether and how an ambigram can be done can vary greatly. City of Brotherly (Love) Philadelphia took me about 15-20 minutes to figure out (!), while YOU/ME and Angels & Demons took many, many hours each ... (Interview with John Langdon, online courtesy Design Interviews.com.)

So ... what is the actual connection between the real, and the fictional, Professor Langdon? Dan Brown (the author of *Angels and Demons*) answered that question in a December 21, 2005 [Witness Statement](#) which he gave to Britain's High Court:

Robert Langdon is an amalgam of many people I admire. In the early 1990's, I first saw the art work of John Langdon. John is an artist and philosopher, a close friend of my father and, I think, one of our true geniuses. He is most famous for his ability to create "ambigrams" ... John's art changed the way I think about symmetry, symbols, and art - he looks at [everything] from different perspectives.

One perspective, also different (depending on whom one asks), concerns a group called the Illuminati (scroll to the bottom to view, and rotate, the ambigram). Who were (or are) they?

See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/ROBERT-LANGDON-and-HIS-AMBIGRAMS-Angels-Demons>

See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](#)

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/ROBERT-LANGDON-and-HIS-AMBIGRAMS-Angels-Demons>



John Langdon - Inspiration for Fictional Robert Langdon

Image online, courtesy Drexel University.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/John-Langdon-Inspiration-for-Fictional-Robert-Langdon>



Ambigram - A Rotating Example

Splarka created this rotating (public-domain) ambigram from scratch, using Arial Black font in Adobe Photoshop. The ambigram is online, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Ambigram-A-Rotating-Example>



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