

An Introduction to Islamic Art and Architecture

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This lesson is the first part of a four part series that is under development based on experiences gained during the Summer 2004 Egypt Teacher Training Seminar held in Cairo, Egypt under the auspices of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, UCSB, and the U.S. Department of Education.

Goals of Lesson 1:

Students will identify the 4 major classifications of Islamic art.
Students will understand and be able to use the following vocabulary terms:

Geometric
Organic
Figural
Medallion

Students will deduce that Islamic culture spread into western Europe and will understand that it left its influence in the arts.

Succeeding lessons will:

- allow students to recreate an Islamic geometric tiling design based on designs taken from historic buildings in Cairo and Alexandria, Egypt.
- study and understand the architecture of a mosque and compare it with the architecture of churches
- learn about the cross-cultural influence from China through the Silk Road trade routes.
- design and create an original culminating project based on the tenets of Islamic art. Culminating projects may be two-dimensional or three-dimensional.

Lesson 1: Building background knowledge: developing an art history vocabulary and building familiarity with pieces of Islamic art from various countries and periods.

Goal: Students will identify and classify art pieces into the four major categories:

Geometric designs
Calligraphic designs
Figural/organic designs
Medallion designs

Special Equipment: Computer Lab, computer-TV hookup, or computer projection equipment to show Powerpoint presentations to the whole class

Materials: Powerpoint presentations
Sorting cards –sets of 56 cards per small group
Assessment answer sheet, 1 per student

Time: 1 class period; an additional half period for assessment activity.

Organization: whole group for Powerpoint presentation; groups of 4 for the sorting activity

Teaching the Lesson: Use Powerpoint Presentation #1: Islamic Art, Basic Principles to introduce the major categories of design and familiarize students with several examples of each type.

Guided Practice: Divide students into small groups (suggest 4 students maximum per group) and pass out sorting cards. Challenge students to classify the art works into the four categories. If they feel an artwork might have characteristics of two categories, they should place it in the category they feel it matches most strongly. When groups are done sorting, compare answers and discuss any differences of opinion.

Additional sorting activities: Tell students to place their art works in chronological order, using the provenance information on the back of each card. Ask students to make generalizations about how the art changed over time.

Ask students to organize the art work geographically (atlases or a world map will help with this part of the activity). Again, ask them whether they can make any statements.

Assessment: If assessment is desired, show Islamic Art Assessment powerpoint. This powerpoint presentation shows unlabelled examples of Islamic Art. Students take the quiz by circling the correct category on the answer sheet. If your school has computer lab facilities that allow you to show the powerpoint on multiple computers at once, take them to the lab and let them do the test there.

Name: _____

Islamic Art, Basic Principles
Assessment

Directions: You will look at some slides of Islamic art. Use what you know about the 4 major styles of Islamic art to classify each object. If an object combines more than one kind of style, choose the style that describes the most important design elements for the piece. Circle your choice on the answer sheet.

- | | | | |
|---------------|-----------------|--------------|------------|
| 1. Geometric | Organic/Figural | Calligraphic | Medallions |
| 2. Geometric | Organic/Figural | Calligraphic | Medallions |
| 3. Geometric | Organic/Figural | Calligraphic | Medallions |
| 4. Geometric | Organic/Figural | Calligraphic | Medallions |
| 5. Geometric | Organic/Figural | Calligraphic | Medallions |
| 6. Geometric | Organic/Figural | Calligraphic | Medallions |
| 7. Geometric | Organic/Figural | Calligraphic | Medallions |
| 8. Geometric | Organic/Figural | Calligraphic | Medallions |
| 9. Geometric | Organic/Figural | Calligraphic | Medallions |
| 10. Geometric | Organic/Figural | Calligraphic | Medallions |
| 11. Geometric | Organic/Figural | Calligraphic | Medallions |
| 12. Geometric | Organic/Figural | Calligraphic | Medallions |
| 13. Geometric | Organic/Figural | Calligraphic | Medallions |
| 14. Geometric | Organic/Figural | Calligraphic | Medallions |
| 15. Geometric | Organic/Figural | Calligraphic | Medallions |
| 16. Geometric | Organic/Figural | Calligraphic | Medallions |
| 17. Geometric | Organic/Figural | Calligraphic | Medallions |
| 18. Geometric | Organic/Figural | Calligraphic | Medallions |

19. Geometric	Organic/Figural	Calligraphic	Medallions
20. Geometric	Organic/Figural	Calligraphic	Medallions
21. Geometric	Organic/Figural	Calligraphic	Medallions
22. Geometric	Organic/Figural	Calligraphic	Medallions
23. Geometric	Organic/Figural	Calligraphic	Medallions
24. Geometric	Organic/Figural	Calligraphic	Medallions
25. Geometric	Organic/Figural	Calligraphic	Medallions

Background Information for teachers:

Islamic art, like art everywhere, encompasses many styles. It has been influenced by the pre-existing cultures of the peoples living in areas where Islam has spread. Therefore, Islamic art cannot be seen as a form of purely religious art, but as an expression of people living in lands where Islam has an influence on daily life. People often think that Islam does not allow representations of the human figure. This is a myth. Islam, as a religion, does not believe that Allah can be represented as a human being; nor does it promote figural representations of Mohammed or other saintly persons inside mosques. Secular art, however, abounds with human figures, as well as animals and plants.

In spite of the variety of Islamic art that exists, most traditional art fits into one of four general categories. The first lesson in this series helps students identify and classify art into these categories, and exposes them to objects from different parts of the Islamic world and from different periods in time.

The four basic classifications are:

- Geometric designs, including tiling and tessellating designs
- Organic and figural designs including plants, animals, and human figures
- Calligraphic designs which use Arabic script in decorative ways
- Medallion designs, often seen in carpets, which have a central design element surrounded by borders

As you look through the powerpoint slides, the classification of most objects is fairly straightforward. Difficulties for students many include being unfamiliar with the vocabulary, or being unable to distinguish which part of a design is dominant in cases where two styles are combined in one object. A discussion of these issues during the initial powerpoint lesson and during the card-sorting activities will help to reinforce vocabulary and clarify any misunderstandings.

This lesson will build a foundation upon which the re-creation of geometric designs will rest.

Bibliography:

Horn, Diane Victoria. *Islamic Designs*. Stemmer House Publishers Inc. 2627 Caves Rd., Owings Mills, MD 21117

www.lacma.org several good articles on Islamic Art, including photographs from their permanent collection, and a virtual catalog of the Genghis Khan exhibition which focused on intercultural influences. Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

www.metmuseum.org beautiful photographs and very good explanations of many pieces from their permanent collection of Islamic Art. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

www.louvre.fr/anglais/collec/ai/ai Louvre Museum site in English good photos of more Islamic art, limited explanations

www.dartmouth.edu/~matc/math5.pattern/lesson5art.html excellent site with links that combines teaching of Islamic design with mathematics. Requires at least high school geometry to understand the theoretical math concepts, but there is good art history information and photographs, too.











