

Lesson Plan: *Mosque Lamps: The Beauty of Light*

Subjects: art, social studies

Grade level: fourth grade and up

Time needed: two forty-five-minute class periods

Goal

Incorporate patterns, letterforms, and calligraphy to create a structure resembling an Islamic mosque lamp

Objectives

- Students will learn practical and symbolic reasons why hanging glass oil lamps were an integral component of mosques and create their own versions.
- Students will recognize some of the ways works of art reflect and support religious beliefs.
- Students will understand the significance of the “light verse” from the Qur’an.

Vocabulary

Enamel: a shiny, smooth decorative surface created by applying crushed minerals of various colors to an object’s surface and then using heat to make the color set

Gilt: gold covering

Motivation and Discussion

Review with the class information about the art of the mosque found on pages 26–33 of our online [teacher’s guide](#). Then, present a digital or print image of a [mosque lamp](#) from the museum’s collections, discussing the following questions.

Identify

- What is this object, and what might its purpose be?

Describe

- What is this object made of?
- How has this object been decorated?
- How did it function as a lamp?

Analyze

- How is the decoration positioned on the lamp?

Interpret

- Since plain glass would have functioned just as well to illuminate the mosque, why might this lamp have been decorated?
- Why do you think the mosque lamp has a patterned design?
- Why does the name of a sultan appear on the lamp?
- Why do you think the “light verse” decorates this lamp?

Activity

Materials

Map showing the spread of Islam, photographs of interior and exterior views of a mosque, examples of Islamic calligraphy

For the studio activity: 12 x 18 inch sheets of dark construction paper, gel pens or light-colored crayons, scissors, 12 x 18 inch sheets of colored cellophane or tissue paper, glue

Day One

Review with students the development of the Islamic faith and world. You can use the resources on pages 5–19 of our [teacher's guide](#) or *The Art of the Qur'an* website to help determine which aspects are most relevant to your class. Present the image of the [mosque lamp](#), and conduct a discussion using the guiding questions in the Motivation and Discussion section.

Instruct students to fold a 12 x 18 inch sheet of construction paper lengthwise into quarters and to cut non-figural decorative or symbolic shapes into the two folded edges.

Day Two

Have students use gel pens or crayons to embellish the areas surrounding the cut patterns with designs or written messages. Instruct them to place cellophane or tissue paper on the back of their cut and drawn creations. Place the finished works on windows to have the sun illuminate the classroom with colored light, or roll them into cylinders and suspend them from the ceiling like mosque lamps.

Assessment and Evaluation

- Did the student participate in the analysis of the mosque lamp?
- Did the student complete the project by folding, cutting, and drawing to create infinite, non-figural patterns?
- Did the student use colored cellophane or tissue paper to back the cut paper design so that the object resembled a mosque lamp?

Lesson Extensions (Optional)

Language and Imagery in the Qur'an

Because mosque lamps hung high above the viewer, glassmakers and artists inscribed them with only a fraction of the famous Qur'anic "light verse." The citation comprises a full verse in the Qur'an chapter (*sura*) titled Nur (The Light). It reads as follows:

Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The parable of His Light is as if there were a Niche and within it a lamp: the Lamp enclosed in Glass: the glass as it were a brilliant star: lit from a blessed Tree, an Olive neither of the East nor of the west whose Oil is well-nigh luminous though fire scarce touched it: Light upon Light: Allah doth guide whom He will to His Light. Allah sets forth Parables for men: and Allah doth know all things.

(Qur'an sura 24, "The Light," verse 35, Yusuf Ali translation)

Poets and Sufis—Muslims who use mystical practices to achieve spiritual union with God—have pondered the deeper meaning of the “light verse.” Instruct students to write a paragraph on the layers of imagery in this verse, considering what they might mean about light as a metaphor for faith, knowledge, or the spiritual journey to enlightenment. Alternatively, students could write a poem inspired by this text and/or imagery.

Compare this metaphor from the Qur’an to poetic or scriptural descriptions of light and darkness in other cultures and religions. Think about the symbolic meanings related to good and evil, knowledge and ignorance, and the seen and unseen.

History of Technology

Using various resources, have students research which raw materials are needed to make glass, as well as which substances are added to make colors for enamel and stained glass. How is heat related to glassmaking and colored glass? Which world cultures produced glass, and when did they do so?

Geography of Glassmaking

Ask students to use dictionaries, atlases, and online resources to find the answers to these questions:

- What is faience, and which civilization first produced it?
- How long has glass been made in Syria?
- What are rose windows, and how are they similar to or different from Islamic geometric designs?
- Where is Chartres, and what does it have to do with glass?
- Why is West Virginia important in traditional glassmaking? (Hint: Have you lost your marbles?)
- What is high-tech glass, and what are some of its uses?

Additional Resources

Books

Blair, Sheila, and Jonathan Bloom. *The Art and Architecture of Islam 1250–1800*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

Farhad, Massumeh, and Simon Rettig. *The Art of the Qur’an: Treasures from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts*. Washington, DC: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2016.

MacDonald, Fiona, and Mark Bergin. *A Sixteenth-Century Mosque*. New York: P. Bendrick Books, 1994. (ages 9+)

Online

[Open FJS](#)

Search, download, and create resources for your classroom using our digitized collection, which includes examples of secular and sacred objects from the Islamic world.

[The Art of the Qur’an: Treasures from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts](#)

Explore resources related to the special exhibition *The Art of the Qur’an: Treasures from the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts*, on view at the Freer|Sackler from October 22, 2016, to February 20, 2017.

Freer|Sackler, Smithsonian Institution, 2016.

Note to the Reader

“Qur’an,” “Quran,” and “Koran” are all English-language transliterations of the original Arabic name for the Holy Book of Islam. The Freer|Sackler uses “Qur’an,” as it is the most accurate transliteration of the Arabic word.

This lesson plan has been adapted from one originally developed by art teacher Cynthia Hicks in collaboration with the Freer|Sackler Education Department.