



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2002 Volume II: Exploring the Middle East: Hands-On Approaches

Islamic Art; Exploring the Visual Arts of the Middle East

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This unit shows how some of the traditional arts of the Middle Eastern region can be studied and illustrated for young students through adapting them to hands-on projects that can readily be done in the classroom. Although trained art teachers can implement more complex art projects, simpler versions can also provide for students to experience these art forms and appreciate their history.

Intent of the Unit

This unit is intended for middle school (grades 5-8) ESOL students. My school, East Rock Global Magnet, is a K-8 school of approximately 750 students. Within the school is a New Arrival Center, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), with approximately 75 students from 30 countries, at all levels of English proficiency. Many of the students are Muslim, some from Middle Eastern and North African countries. This year we have students from Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt and Morocco. Muslim students come from some African countries extending further south on the western side of Africa, such as Guinea, Senegal and the Ivory Coast, and reaching as far east as Bangladesh. This unit is intended to be an instructive, interactive and meaningful area of study for these new arrivals. Many of our students come with a remarkable knowledge of their history and also bring artistic skills from their countries of origin. Although these students come from different traditions and speak different languages, they have a common heritage in Islam and an appreciation for the traditional art forms, which they take pride in sharing with the rest of the students. They are able to make meaningful contributions that enrich the curriculum. This unit is also appropriate for all students, including native English speakers, as we become increasingly aware of both the necessity and the enjoyment of a growing awareness of other cultures.

Within this unit we will explore the background of Islamic art- what it is, how it developed, how it was shaped by the Islamic faith and the Arab expansion, as well as the defining features of Islamic art. Four characteristic media will be discussed: calligraphy, miniature paintings, carpets, and metalwork. With each, there is a suggested lesson plan, which consists of art projects simple enough to do in the classroom, over a period of many days, or for a single class lesson.

These lessons develop language skills through planned art projects. For example, a painting project based on Persian miniatures would work in the following way. Students often draw naturally in a way similar to the miniatures and to other folk art. They happily fill their pictures with scenes rich with detail. ESOL classes of students contain varied levels of English proficiency and projects like painting of small detailed scenes are successful with this group. When new students enter the school with no English, they do not yet speak but the learning process has begun, they comprehend key words and can respond through art. After just a few weeks to a few months, they are able to name the objects in their pictures. They can draw and label pictures, make lists and write short phrases. They can recall, retell and explain information using simple grammar and syntax. They learn color words through the mixing and applying of the various rich hues of paint. They learn to follow directions and the many verbs they will understand through actually performing them- mixing, sketching, explaining, painting, showing, etc. Some students will be further along in their English skills. They are able to comment and react using more complex sentences. They can explain problems and complain. They use descriptive details and can read simple passages. When students reach intermediate fluency, they can describe their projects using extensive vocabulary. They can research and report on their projects. All will enjoy the painting and will increase their English skills.

Through this unit the students will also learn an important part of world history, relevant generally and personally. They will have hands-on experiences in creating projects which reflect or illuminate the arts of the Middle East. They will learn how these art forms contribute to the richness of today's artistic culture.

Background Information on Influences on Islamic Art

Islam was proclaimed by Mohammed, a Prophet of God and founder of Islam. He lived from 570-632 in Arabia. It was a time of political inequities and social injustice. Just prior to this time, two competing empires ruled the settled lands of the Middle East: the Roman- Byzantine Empire in the west and the Sasanian Empire of Iran in the east. The Byzantines had a culture that blended Greek learning, Roman administration, and Greek Orthodox Christianity. In the early seventh century, its territory stretched from Italy across southern Europe to its capital city of Constantinople, and the Middle Eastern provinces included Egypt, Palestine, and Syria, as well as parts of Iraq and Anatolia. The Sasanian Empire of Iran, with its capital city of Ctesiphon on the Tigris River, vied with the Byzantium for control of the territories between Iraq and Egypt.¹

In less than a century after the death of Mohammed in 632, the Arab Empire, united under the rule of the Caliph, stretched from Spain to India. In the two hundred years before Islam, Arabia had been becoming important as a trade route between the Middle Eastern empires and Yemen. Mohammed was a merchant, living among pastoral Arab tribes in the Arabian Peninsula in the early seventh century. Most of the Arabs were nomads; these nomads raised their camels, sheep, or goats on a harsh land of scarce resources. ²

“There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is His Prophet.”

This was the faith that inspired the Arabs as they rode out from the borders of Arabia to conquer the world. Their faith was the driving force as they spread north into Syria in 633, capturing the rich cities of Syria; they defeated both the Byzantine Empire to their west and the Empire of Persia (Sasanian) in the east. They invaded Egypt and from there made their way across the northern part of Africa. By 642 the Arabs in the east

defeated the Persian Armies and pressed ever further over the plains of central Asia. By 712, the Arab armies had reached the border of India and the lower valley of the Indus River. Meanwhile, from North Africa, a raiding party crossed the channel to the Mediterranean at what is now Gibraltar, into Spain. The raid was successful and the raiders remained in Spain, overcoming the Visigoths, then in control of Spain.³

As the Arabs expanded their empire, the Arabic language, the language of the Qur'an, traveled with the conquerors and became the common language of the empire. It was a language well suited to poetry and story-telling that the Arabs were historically adept at. Because of their nomadic existence, the Arabs had traveled lightly and songs and stories could readily be carried with them. Therefore, these stories and poems, handed down in the oral tradition, were the early artistic tradition of the people of the Middle East.⁴

With their conquests, the nomadic Arabs encountered the wonders of craftsmanship and art in the new territories that had been unknown in their desert existence. The nomads of the desert suddenly had become rulers of cities. They saw Greek and Roman temples, palaces in Persia and great Byzantine churches sparkling with gold mosaics. They found jewelry, metalwork, and glassware, painted pottery, carved ivories and cloths of intricately designed silks.⁵ Now that they were settling in towns, they could utilize these beautiful and luxurious objects in their homes and the splendid mosques they endeavored to build for the worship of Allah. Beginning with Egypt, Syria, Greece and Persia, countries with long traditions of art, the conquered craftsmen's arts were blended together under the rule of the Arabs to form what we recognize today as Muslim, or Islamic art. Examples of this would include decorated manuscripts, geometric designs, miniature paintings, carpets, textiles, ceramics, and metal work.⁶

The Islamic culture remained until the 18th century a major culture touching nearly every other center of civilization and life in Asia, Europe, and Africa. As the ideas or techniques of other cultures were made available to the Islamic culture, some of these techniques were adapted. The development of ceramics was inspired by Chinese techniques. Inlaid bronzes characteristic of 12th and 13th Arabs were first seen in lands farther to the east, suggesting east to west land trade was responsible for the spread of a way of decorating metalwork. ⁷ Chinese themes were adapted into Persian painting, as seen in the miniatures which were from the present Iran and have become associated with Islamic art. The technique of using intricate mosaic patterns to cover walls and other surfaces was first encountered in the Byzantine art of Constantinople. Although techniques were adopted, uniquely Islamic characteristics predominated.

Tenets of Islam

Because the Islamic religion was so instrumental in shaping the art of the Arab culture of the Middle East, it is important to include a brief summary of the basic tenets of the Muslim religion. These fundamental beliefs have remained unchanged.

The Qur'an was (and is) the sacred book of revelations Mohammed had received from Allah, or God. It had first been written in Arabic and it was an important part of the Muslim faith to continue the use of Arabic in scripture, not to translate it into other languages. Muslims, or believers in Islam, derive their religious beliefs from the Qur'an and the conduct of the Prophet, Mohammed. This is called the Sunna and the narratives thus written are called the Hadith. Within the Qur'an and the Hadith are all the rules from which the ethical conduct of one's personal life as well as a blueprint for the ethical, theological, and legal code.⁸

The Muslim religion is built on Five Pillars of Faith:

The First Pillar is the Shahada, or profession of faith, “There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is His Prophet.”

The Second Pillar is the Salar, or daily worship. Muslims are instructed to pray five times a day and to worship together on Friday.

The Third Pillar is Zakat, an obligation to be charitable and to contribute to the general welfare of the community.

The Fourth Pillar is to fast during the month of Ramadan, a holy time of spiritual renewal.

The Fifth Pillar is the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, which all Muslims must try to make if they can afford it.

A Tradition of Support for the Arts

Arab patrons of the arts ranged from the amirs of Granada to the caliphs of Baghdad. The palace was a center for craftsmen of all kinds, from makers of weapons and leatherworkers to embroiderers and jewelers. It was traditional for the sultans themselves to be skilled in crafts. Some were fine calligraphers. When Baghdad was conquered in 1258 by the Mongols, the center of Arab culture shifted to Egypt where amirs and sultans of the Mamluk dynasty were enthusiastic patrons of art and architecture. After the 13th century, the cultural focus was from Iran.⁹ Turkish-speaking Muslims had begun settling Anatolia after 1071 but with the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottoman Turks dominated the eastern Mediterranean. Rulers from the 13th century to the 20th supported the arts, producing some of the greatest calligraphers. Iranian culture was influential and Persian was the language of the arts, but painters illustrated Ottoman epics, histories, and geographies. Portraiture flourished.¹⁰

Basic Features of Art of the Middle East

Islamic, rather than “Arab”, is the term often used to categorize the art of the Middle East. This is because although the art forms have borrowed from the societies which the Arabs came in contact with, it was shaped by the strictures of the Islamic faith and the Arab oral tradition. The Qur’an was the holy book of Islam. It set rules which were the standard for all Muslim behavior. Decorated Arabic writing became a major Islamic art form. The Islamic faith forbade the portrayal of human or animal images in mosques or in the Qur’an, giving rise to the development of complex geometric patterns and intricate floral or plant designs, which became trademarks of Islamic art.¹¹

There are four basic elements of Islamic decorative art: geometric patterns, calligraphy, highly stylized floral or plant designs, and figural art.

Geometric Patterns

It is said that Islamic artists use geometric patterns to represent their belief in logic and order. Sophisticated designs were created using simple tools such as a ruler and a compass. The circle is the most common shape used in Islamic designs and provides the foundation for complex patterns. The designs radiate from a central point and are symmetrical. Leaf and floral motifs are developed inside the basic circle patterns. Often the designs are in repeated patterns.¹² Geometrical designs are two-dimensional and are therefore thought of as surface decorations. These designs are consistently found in the designs of fabrics, metalwork, ceramics, leatherwork, etc. of the Middle East.

Floral or Plant Motif

Two favorite designs utilizing the floral or plant motifs, are the arabesque and palmette. Arabesques are graceful, intertwining plants, perhaps floral, usually developed within a geometric shape, such as the circle. The design of abstract leaves or flowers radiates out, twists in and then out again to fill the space and create a complex design. The Palmettes are floral or plant forms that face upward and outward. The lotus and the peony are often found in the palmette patterns.¹³ These flowers would indicate inspiration from the flowers often pictured in art of the Far East or India. Also the tulip is used, indicating Turkish origins, as the tulip was a very special flower of that region. Themes, such as these flowers, although of another origin, were reconfigured to the distinctive Islamic style of artistic expression.

These designs were used of surfaces and used to transform objects of daily use-rugs, clothes, lamps, incense burners, plates, into rich and exciting works of art.¹⁴

Calligraphy and Figural Art

These two elements of Islamic decorative art will be discussed in more detail, with accompanying lesson plans. Calligraphy, the art of beautiful writing, arose from the strong oral tradition of the Arabic language and the desire to write the Qur'an in the most beautiful and reverent style. The most renowned figural art is to be found in the miniature paintings originating in Persia.

Calligraphy

In the 7th and early 8th centuries, Islam expanded from its spiritual origins in southwest Arabia to rule over regions such as Andalusia, the Maghrib, Egypt and Mesopotamia, all with ancient cultural traditions. Through the Arabic language, the Qur'an, and the Muslim faith, this vast geographical region was united. Traditional Arab passion for language focused on the written word and on books through its strict focus on the Qur'an. The art of the manuscript brought together the skills of paper-makers, binders, illuminators, calligraphers, and painters. Manuscript patronage on the part of the sultans symbolized power and ability.¹⁵

Calligraphy--beautiful writing-- continued to be the region's most distinctive art. It grew directly from the importance of the Qur'an. Because the Qur'an was the revered word of God, it was to be written in the most elegant and beautiful script possible. As well as being beautiful, the writing style needed to be very clear, so that none of the words would be misread. From the Arab script developed dozens of major writing styles. Scriptures such as the Qur'an and the Hadith were never illustrated with images of human or animal figures, but were beautifully illustrated with abstract geometric and vegetal designs. Later, books with secular content, such as literature, history or scientific ideas, were often figurally illustrated, and the early 11th

century began the tradition of the illustrated Islamic manuscript.¹⁶

Educated Muslims were expected to have good handwriting. However, to become a calligrapher, years of study were required. Women as well as men could become calligraphers. One of the Prophet's wives was known for her elegant writing. Later, women of royalty as well as slave women and scribes would become famous as master calligraphers.¹⁷

Calligraphy was used to decorate mosques, usually with lines from the Qur'an. The use of calligraphy extended to decoration on all kinds of objects. Lines of poetry would be inscribed on a cup or around the edge of a bowl or on the blade of a sword.¹⁸ Passages from the Qur'an or other writings were woven into the borders of the fine fabrics and the carpets of the time. As time went on, the writing became very stylized and purely decorative, rather than intended to be read.

Illuminated Tughras from Turkey

Calligraphy was a highly respected art in Turkey. Whenever the sultan issued a written decree, his monogram, the *Tughra*, appeared at the head of the document. The Tughra was a complex design derived from the letters in his name or signature. It was developed by skilled calligraphers as the sultan's symbol of authority. This monogram was always a masterpiece of calligraphy, elegantly illuminated, which means elaborately decorated, usually with vine and flower scrolls.

A famous illuminated tughra was that of Sultan Suleyman I, who ruled in Turkey in the 1500s. The Ottoman Dynasty was under his rule from 1520-1566. He is sometimes called Suleyman the Magnificent, in part because under his patronage, thousands of books, paintings, and objects of art were created.¹⁹

Lesson Plan 1: Creating a Personal Monogram,

based on the Illuminated Tughras of Turkey

Objectives:

- To create a monogram, based of the idea of a Turkish Tughra.
- To understand the connection between writing for communication and writing as an art form.
- To provide an introductory activity; to prove a means for students to get to know each other.

Materials:

1. art paper, 5x5 or 6x6 squares
2. markers or colored pencils
3. fine black felt-tipped markers

4. pencils/scrap paper to sketch monograms
- 5.oaktag templates of circles, squares, triangles.

Procedure:

1. Demonstrate the creation of a monogram by using one's own initials to create a design within a given shape, such as a circle, triangle or square.
- 2.Students experiment on scrap paper, using their own initials or short name.
Show students how to achieve different effects with their monogram by a. filling in the background with black.
b. making the letters black on a white background.
c. filling in either the background or the letters with geometric or floral designs.
3. Complete the monograms on art paper, choosing a shape and creating the monogram within it, using black thin markers and a variety of colored markers or pencils.

Conclusion:

Students share their monogram designs with the class. They can then use these monograms for identification and to decorate their personal property, such as notebooks, or compile them in a class book, combining them with painted miniatures and other Middle Eastern art.

Notes: Use a picture of Sulyman's Tughra and others, if possible, to show how they are highly decorated. One example of Sulyman's Tughra is found in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art. It is pictured in several of the resources in the bibliography, including *The Story of Moslem Art* by Christine Price. (p.112)

Miniature paintings

The Qur'an was not the only book carefully and lovingly transcribed and decorated. Other books followed, on literature, philosophy, history, and many branches of science. Miniature paintings illustrated these manuscripts. They included both landscapes and portraits and showed both nature, usually pictured as a lush

garden, and also portrayals of people and animals. Some scenes showed famous battles and other historical events, or life in the Sultans' palaces. These paintings were done with such naturalism and attention to detail they are often considered historical documentation of events which took place.

Ancient Persia is famous for books illustrated with small, detailed paintings. These paintings sometimes illustrate poems, stories, or historical events. Others of them show landscapes in ideal springtime settings. The gardens in these scenes are lush, filled with vegetation. The decorative element is strong, a profusion of figures and designs. Miniatures are flat paintings, with no depth of perspective. The colors are pure and vibrant with lots of green and blue. Gold decorations are used extravagantly. The picture is surrounded by decorative borders.²⁰ These borders, too, are ornate and decorated with gold.

Lesson Plan 2 : Creating a Miniature Painting

Objectives:

- To learn about Persian Miniature paintings.
- To create a miniature painting.
- To learn the vocabulary related to the use of art media in the classroom.
- To acquire technical skills in painting.
- To increase verbal skills through the sharing ideas, listening to directions, and explaining our finished products.

Materials:

1. poster paints, a variety of colors
2. a variety of small and medium round and flat brushes
3. a color-wheel, to help instruct in the mixing of colors
4. small paint containers, such a mini-muffin pans or pans borrowed from the art department
5. heavy white paper, poster or watercolor, relatively small squares or rectangles
6. fine, black felt tipped pens
7. metallic gold paint or markers
8. paper and pencils for initial sketches
9. examples of Persian Miniatures

Procedure:

1. Show students examples of the art, reviewing its characteristics.
2. Provide practice in using the paints. Show how to mix colors, how to apply the paints, how to make a “wash” by thinning the paint with water. Allow time for experimentation with colors and brush strokes. Caution the students to allow time for adjacent colors to dry so they won’t run together.
3. Students select a story to illustrate and make a sketch. Explain that just as the Persian miniatures illustrated poems, stories or historical events, the students will select a fairy tale, poem or even a special event in their own life to portray. Make a pencil sketch to include very precise details, as shown in the samples.
4. Choose your best sketch and draw it lightly on poster paper.
5. Use “washes” of paint for the largest parts of the background.
6. Paint the smaller areas of your picture. Paint the smallest details with very small brushes and possibly thin black felt pens.
7. Now the fun -- highlight selected details with the metallic gold paint, using small brushed or gold markers.
8. Create a decorative border to surround your picture. Decorate it with arabesque or geometric designs, and use more gold paint for a finishing touch.

Conclusion:

Students can display and tell about their paintings, explaining the story behind their creations.

Notes: Begin the lesson by showing examples of Miniature paintings. There are examples in several of the resource books, but for many wonderful examples, use an illustrated art book such a *Falk’s Treasures of Islam* or *Islam and Muslim Art* by Alexandre Popadopoulos. It would also be worth showing how artists immersed in the art of other cultures also produce art with many similarities to the miniatures Carmen Lomas Garza, a Mexican artist and illustrator of children’ s books, is an excellent example as her paintings are scenes showing meticulous detail in figural depictions and in nature, using vibrant colors. Like the miniatures, her painting is flat, with no attempt made to create the illusion of depth. Her paintings show life in all its tiniest detail, just as in many of the Persian miniatures. The students will be encouraged to include such details in their own paintings.

Tempera paints, also known as poster paints, is a good choice of paint to use for these paintings. It is a water-based paint and usually is opaque, although it can be thinned with water. When very thin, it becomes a “wash” and is used to cover relatively large background areas with light color. Because they are water-based,

the bright colored tempera or poster paints mix and clean up easily. They are readily available through your school's art department. It is desirable to have a variety of small containers to store paint hues that can be saved to continue the lesson over a period of days.

Carpets

A famous art form from Iran, as well as other regions of the Middle East, is the Persian (Oriental) carpet. These are beautifully designed carpets and have been important in the daily lives of all levels of society. In the days of royalty, rulers sat on thrones covered with a fine Persian carpet. As they met with guests outdoors, all would sit on carpets spread upon the ground. Ordinary people, too, covered their floors with carpets to make a comfortable place to kneel in prayer, to sit, to eat and sleep. Carpets also were hung on the walls for warmth and decoration. They were very convenient for a nomadic way of life, as they could be rolled up and transported easily.²¹

Each region had its own style of work. Weavers used wool, cotton and silk fibers. Persian carpets have a raised surface, called the pile. The weaver forms the pile by tying a series of knotted threads. Traditionally weavers work on a simple upright loom. In a flat weave, the crosswise weft threads pass over and under the lengthwise warp threads, row after row. Inserting a row of knotted threads between rows of weft threads makes the pile or raised surface of the Persian carpet.²²

The two principal types of knots are the symmetrical or "Turkish" knot and the asymmetrical of "Persian" knot. Carpet-knotting lends itself well to pattern-making because each knot makes a colored spot in the pile as the weaver uses threads of different colors.

The designs of the rugs are of several varieties. One pre-Islamic tradition that has continued to be used is the idea of the carpet as a stylized landscape of either a garden of flowers or a park with real or mythical birds and animals. Another design embodies stylized architecture, such as the arch often found on the prayer rugs of devout Muslims. The stylized lamp hanging in the center represents divine illumination. Another style of carpet design is related to the arts of the book and has a large medallion in the center and part-medallions in the corners. Again, it is essential to show the students examples of the various styles. *Treasures of Islam* is a wonderful book of examples to show. ²³ Even Oriental carpets, or reproductions, found in our homes and carpet shops illustrate the various styles.

There are several generalizations that can be made about Persian rugs. They are usually rectangular in shape, seldom round or square. Authentic Persian rugs are knotted by hand on a frame loom. Reproductions are made by machine. A very good carpet has 300 to 400 knots per inch. The number of knots per inch is one of the things that determine the quality of the rug. Persian carpets are usually made from wool in a cut-pile. That means after the knots are made, the loops are cut to make a smooth finish. A high quality of wool used to make to rug is another determinant of the rug's value. Rug making takes a great amount of time and patience. One person can work of a narrow rug, but for wider ones several weavers can work side by side. It can take several months to make a rug. Each hand-woven carpet, made up of thousands or even millions of knots, is unique. Quality dyes for the wool are also important. The dyes must not fade quickly as the rug ages.
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Two types of projects are suggested. One is to create a Persian-style carpet design on graph paper with felt markers or pencils. The other project uses the design created on the graph paper to cross-stitch a small rug.

Lesson Plan 3 : Creating a Persian Carpet

Objectives:

To learn about Persian rugs

To design a rug on graph paper, incorporating typical patterns

To create a small rug or wall hanging

To increase in English language proficiency:

To understand and follow directions

To learn prepositions- over, under, through

To learn vocabulary relating to color, design, and location (corner, border, center)

Materials, Part A:

1. graph paper
2. thin markers or colored pencils
3. rulers
4. pencils

Procedure:

1. Show the students many examples of Persian carpets.
2. Explain the common design elements of the carpets, allowing students to identify these features in the examples shown.
3. Students use ruler and pencil to design their carpets on the graph paper.

4. Students color in their designs, taking care to fill each tiny square of the graph paper with only one color.

The lesson can be concluded at this point, or the graph paper rug design may be used to continue to Part B.

Materials, Part B:

1. the students' rug designs on graph paper
2. counted cross-stitch fabric, cut to the size of the graph paper carpets
3. embroidery needles
4. assorted colors of embroidery cottons (thread)
5. pencils
6. colored pencils
7. scissors

Procedure:

1. Using the graph paper design, sketch the same design on the cross-stitch fabric.
2. Lightly mark out the design on the fabric with colored pencils.
3. Cross-stitch the design onto the fabric
4. Leave one inch at either end of the fabric to tie off and trim to make the fringe.

Conclusions:

Display and share the finished little carpets:

1. Create a small shop or "bazaar" at a festival or market where the rugs are displayed. Students

become “merchants” describing their wares and “customers” with lots of questions.

2. Use as rugs in a miniature setting.

Notes: There are many good sources of Persian and other types of Oriental rugs. They can sometimes be borrowed from a rug shop or from your own home. *The New York Times* often has advertisements clearly depicting the traditional design elements. Books, particularly illustrated art books such as Falk’s *Treasures of Islam* or *Islam and Muslim Art* by Alexandre Popadopoulos, are good. An on-line resource is www.persian-rugs.org.

Metalwork

Metal objects were very important in medieval Muslim society. People cooked in metal pans and basins. Sometimes spices and herbs were pounded in heavy metal mortars. Food was cooked and then served on various types of metal dishes that would be then placed on a large metal tray. The round tray would be set off the ground on a metal or wooden stand, making a low serving table. Drinks would be stored in metal bottles and jugs. From these they were poured into metal drinking cups. After a meal, both hosts and guests would wash their hands in metal basins. Incense might burn in metal incense burners. Lamps, candlesticks, and torch stands, all of metal, would help light the rooms and courtyards. The upper classes had further useful and decorative objects: pen cases, mirrors, tweezers, and jewelry boxes, and pails for bathing were all made out of metal. Predictions of good or ill fortune might be made at momentous times, such as at the birth of a child, or before an important battle. These predictions would be made using a metal astrolabe. Battles, of course, would entail extensive use of metal- swords, armor, decorative and protective devices for the horses, as well.

In all cultures, including the Near East, craftsmen imitated the most precious materials with less expensive media and techniques. The fashion for inlaid bronze or brass is based on silverwork. In precious silverwork, areas of niello inlay and gilding gave a three-color palette; in the plainer copies, brass was used instead of gold, the silver inlay used much smaller amounts of the precious metal, and niello, a combination of silver and sulfur, was replaced by a black bituminous compound. Some of the designs of the metal objects can be traced to Quranic illuminated manuscripts. Examples might be circles inscribed with arabesques. Other motifs were from illustrated astrological texts. Figures of horseback, warriors and hunters derive from wall-hangings. Inscriptions, originally meant to convey literal messages, became more decorative the instructive, and become a part of the over all design. Gold, silver and precious stones were valued, but the most prestigious craft was quality woven or embroidered textile. Therefore, textiles themselves were the inspiration for the designs on the metalwork. 25

Many objects such as dishes and goblets were made of high tin bronze, an alloy of about 80 percent copper and 20 percent tin. High tin bronze was well known in Iran from pre-Islamic times, but became very popular under Islam, possibly because its color shines like silver, but does not have silver’s association with luxurious living.. This would have been important to early followers of Mohammed, less important with the passage of time. The areas where this was produced were Khurasan, Transoxiana, and northern Jazira. These places had large deposits of copper, although the tin had to be brought in from South-East Asia.26

Lesson 3: Making a “Metal” Tray

Objectives:

1. To demonstrate how simple household objects, such as a plate or tray, can be a decorated art form.
2. To create a tray or wall hanging for display or to use in a “fair” of Middle Eastern crafts.

Materials:

1. aluminum foil trays. Choose any shape that has very shallow sides to facilitate working on the flat, bottom surface.
2. dull pencils.
3. lightweight paper, cut to the size of the foil trays.
4. rulers, pencils, round templates or compasses to create designs, tape.
5. soft, old dish or hand towels, one for each student.

Procedure:

1. Show the students a finished tray or a “work in progress” so they can visualize what they will be making.
2. Review elements of geometric and stylized floral/vegetal designs.
3. Provide paper and other listed material and encourage students to draw designs which will completely fill the paper.
4. Students select one from among their designs and tape it to the inside of the foil tray.
5. Place folded towel under the tray.
6. Press heavily around all lines of the design with a dull pencil. Caution students to press hard enough so the lines will show on the foil, but not so hard as to puncture the foil.
7. Remove the paper.
8. With the tray still on the towel, chose portions of the design or the background to press into the foil with the dull pencil or any rounded instrument.
9. When the embossing of the design is completed, either use as a tray or reverse it for an attractive wall hanging.

Culminating Activity:

These trays/wall hangings make an attractive display and could be part of a collective “market” of Middle Eastern wares. To carry the project a step further, a group of students could use the same techniques on the larger, round foil “pizza” tray, also available at supermarkets. These trays are ideal on a small tripod to make a small table.

Note: The designs could also be painted with clear metallic paints to replicate the use of various metals to create an “inlaid” design.

Standards

These lessons are appropriate for ESOL students of all proficiency levels and reflect the literacy skills for grades 5-8 of the New Haven Bilingual and English as a Second Language Programs. I selected to list the relevant 7th grade Social Studies and Language Arts Standards because the New Haven curriculum for the 7th grade is based on world history and geography.

Grade 7 Social Studies Content Standard 1.0 Diversity²⁷

Examine the development of language and writing.

- Discuss the development of art, -- Middle Ages through the Reformation.
- Discuss the cultural interrelation among people of Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas.
- Discuss the influence of selected world civilizations on our way of life and the lives of others.

Grade 7 Social Studies Content Standard 3.0 Geography²⁸

? Read a map, view and listen to multiple sources concerning geography.

? Explain how the geography affects settlement.

? Locate major urban centers.

Grade 7 Social Studies Content Standard 5.0 History²⁹

- ? Read, view and listen to multiple sources concerning history.
- ? Identify the contributions in art during the Renaissance.
- ? Discuss the impact of religion on society.

Grade 7 Language Arts Content Standard 4.0 Listening30

- ? Share and discuss what they know about the topic.
- ? Develop questions prior to listening.
- ? Look at the speaker and ask relevant questions.
- ? Show understanding by responding through art,
- ? Listen and respond to presentations by others.

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Cleveland, William. *A History of the Modern Middle East. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press., 1994* . Historical background of the Middle East, rise of Islam.

Bloom, Dwila. *Multicultural Art Activities Kit* . NY: The Center for Applied Research in Education, 1994. Background information on Islamic art and projects.

Bourgoin, Jules. *Arabic Geometrical Pattern and Design* , Dover Pictorial Archive Series. New York: Dover publications, Inc., 1973. 190 plates of linear geometric patterns for classroom use.

Ettinghausen, Richard, Oleg Grabar, and Marilyn Jenkins-Madina. *Islamic Art and Architecture 650-1250* . New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001. Good overview of all aspects of art in the Middle East.

Falk, Toby. *Treasures of Islam* . London: Chambers, 1985. Large photos, covers all the most important periods of Islamic Art history, source of many examples of Persian miniatures to display for the students.

Glassie, Henry. *The Spirit of Folk Art* . New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., NY: 1989.

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Popadopoulos, Alexandre. *Islam and Muslim Art* . Translated from French by Robert Erich, 1979. Large, beautiful photos of examples of all the art forms included in the lessons.

Rice, David Talbot. *Islamic Art* . London: Thames and Hudson, 1965. Art history, useful pictures for use with students.

Sachedina, Abdulaziz. *What is Islam? The World & I* . NY:September 1997. An explanation of the Muslim faith.

Shultz, Fred. *Multicultural Education 94/95* . Guilford, CT: The Dushkin Pub.Group, 1994.

Winchester, Faith. *Muslim Holidays* . Mankato, Minnesota: Bridgestone Books, 1999. Historical information.

Reading List for Students

Bartak, Mira and Christine Ronan. *North Africa: Morocco* . Glenview, Ill.: Good Year Books, 1997. Stencils, folktales and art ideas.

Billings, Melissa. *Mosaics, Art and Music from Around the World* . North Billerica, MA:Curriculum Assoc., 1993. Part of a series of instructional books for children, this one contains information about Iran, history, Persian carpets.

Dunn, John. *The Spread of Islam* . San Diego, CA: Lucent Books, 1996. A comprehensive history, for children and also informative for the teacher.

George, Linda. *The Golden Age of Islam* . New York: Marshall Cavendish, 1997. Part of a series, Cultures of the Past, historical background of the characteristics of Islamic art.

Kasser, Carol and Ann Silverman. *Stories We Brought With Us* . New York: Pearson, 2002. Folktales, ESOL, easy reading.

Price, Christine. *The Story of Moslem Art* . New York: E. P. Dutton and Co.1964Historical information , discusses influences of other cultures of Islamic art, advanced reading level.

Sarre, Friedrich and Hermann Trenkwald. *Oriental Carpet Designs* . New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1979. Contains 47 full-color plates representing Persia, India, Turkey.

Seidelman, James and Grace Mintonye. *Creating Mosaics* . New York: Crowell-Collier Press, 1967. Guide to making mosaics.

Notes

- 1 Cleveland, William. *A History of the Modern Middle East* . Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Price, Christine. *The Story of Moslem Art* . New York; E. P. Dutton, 1964.
- 4 Ibid, 12.
- 5 Ibid., 13.
- 6 Bloom, Dwila. *Multicultural Art Activities* . NY: The Center for Applied Research in Education, 1994, 57.
- 7Falk, Toby. *Treasures of Islam* . London: Chambers, 1985, 18
- 8Sachedina, Abdulazizl. *What Is Islam?* The World & I, September 1997.
- 9Ibid.
- 10Ibid., 132.
- 11Bloom, 57.
- 12Ibid., 66.
- 13Ibid.,72.
- 14Falk, 18,19.
- 15Ibid., 33
- 16Ibid.
- 17 George, Linda. *The Golden Age of Islam* . NY: Marshal Cavendish, 1997, 61.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Bloom, 58.
- 20 Ibid, 80.
- 21 Billings, Melissa. *Mosaics, Art and Music from Around the World* . North Billerica, MA:Curriculum Assoc., 1993, 43.
- 22 Billings, 43 and Bloom, 94.
- 23 Falk, 318-319.
- 24 Bloom, 93.
- 25 Falk, 248-251.

26 Ibid., 263.

27 This is the current Grade 7 Social Studies Standard for Diversity used by the New Haven Public School System. Only those parts that apply to this unit are listed.

28 This is the current Grade 7 Social Studies Standard for Geography used by the New Haven Public School System. Only those parts that apply to this unit are listed.

29 This is the current Grade 7 Social Studies Standard for History used by the New Haven Public School System. Only those parts that apply to this unit are listed.

30 This is the current Grade 7 Language Arts, Listening Standard used by the New Haven Public School System. Only those parts that apply to this unit are listed.

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