

## Take One... Set of tiles from Syria

# ASHMOLEAN

These guidance notes are designed to help you use one object from our collection as a focus for cross-curricular teaching and learning. A visit to the Ashmolean Museum to see your chosen object offers your class the perfect 'learning outside the classroom' opportunity.



This set of 48 tiles from a building in Damascus is on display in our Islamic Middle East Gallery (31).

A zoomable image of the tiles is available on our website:

[www.ashmolean.org/learning-resources](http://www.ashmolean.org/learning-resources)

## Starting Questions

The following questions may be useful as a starting point for developing speaking and listening skills with your class.

- What colours, shapes and patterns can you see?
- How many tiles are there? What do you think they are made from?
- Where might the object come from?
- Where do you think the tiles might have been displayed originally? Describe and draw the setting.
- Where are tiles most often used in our homes today?
- Why do you think they are so useful? Think about the properties of the materials they are made from.

During a Take One visit to the Ashmolean children will explore a wide range of objects from our collections that will help them to build knowledge and understanding of Islamic art, culture and religion. They will take part in object handling and craft activities during their visit. They will prepare an EVA foam tile that can be used back at school for printing and as the inspiration for further work in the classroom. After your visit the aim is for your project to be cross-curricular and skills based.

Curriculum links:

What is Islamic art? (Art and Design, Mathematics, Science - materials)

Where in the world does it come from? (Geography)

Who created it and why? (History, RE)

Improved mastery of drawing and printing skills (Art and Design)

Improved speaking and listening skills through enquiry based learning (Literacy)

# TAKE ONE...

Inspired by the National Gallery's  
Take One Picture programme

## Background Information

One of the glories of Islamic art is its architecture. The Islamic world covers a wide geographical area and so the architecture is influenced by the availability of materials and differing climates as well as local skills. However, certain shapes and decorative motifs are shared throughout the Islamic world.

From the very first centuries of Islam, wealthy people paid to build private and public buildings including houses and palaces, mosques, tombs, shrines, fountains, and baths. Great emphasis was given to the architectural decoration of both interiors and exteriors. Stucco, stone, wood, mosaic, painting and tiles were used to cover and embellish the surfaces. Glazed bricks and tiles played a major role in the decoration of Islamic buildings - the variety of the patterns and colours used at different times and places can be seen in the examples from the Ashmolean collection.'



*We saw indeed here so many apartments [and separate chambers], all of which were adorned in tile work of blue and gold with many other colours. . . and all was so marvellously wrought that even the craftsmen of Paris [, who are so noted for their skill,] would hold that which is done here to be of very fine workmanship.'*

*(From the account of the visit of the Castilian ambassador Ruy Gonzales*

This panel dates from the mid-17th century. Elaborate tile compositions were made to decorate garden pavilions and palaces in Iran, especially in Isfahan, then capital of the Safavid empire (1501-1736). Scenes of garden entertainment and hunting, found like this provide a window on the luxurious lifestyles of early modern Iran.

The doors on the right are from Egypt during the Mamluk sultanate (1250-1517), Timber was expensive and not available in great quantities in the region. Buildings were usually made of stone with wood was used for elements such as ceilings, doors, prayer niches (mihrab), pulpits (minbar), and screens (mashrabiyya). Most of these items were built and decorated by assembling small pieces of wood in this case ebony and ivory - rather than using large panels. The doors are a classic example of geometric pattern, a central feature of Islamic art.

Flowers and plants are universally used as decorative patterns. They appear in architectural decoration as well as on all kinds of objects. One particular decoration is the so-called 'arabesque'. The word was coined in Europe to describe an interweaving stem branching into spli leaves and secondary stems. It covers any given surface with a regular and rhythmical network which can extend endlessly.



### Summary

- Geometry and patterns are important.
- Calligraphy is highly valued as an art form. Many objects and buildings are decorated with writing.
- Books are a major art-form.
- People do not appear in specifically religious art.
- All arts and crafts have equal status.



A tray or table top inscribed with good wishes. This object is made of brass, engraved, and inlaid with copper and silver.

## Ideas for creative planning across the KS1 and KS2 curriculum

You can use this object as the starting point for developing pupils' critical and creative thinking as well as their learning across the curriculum. You may want to consider possible 'lines of enquiry' as a first step in your cross-curricular planning. Choosing a line of enquiry area may help you to build strong links between curriculum areas. After using strategies to help children engage with the object and using questions to facilitate dialogue about the object, you can work with the children to develop lines of enquiry that will interest them.

Here are a few suggestions of possible 'lines of enquiry' using this object:

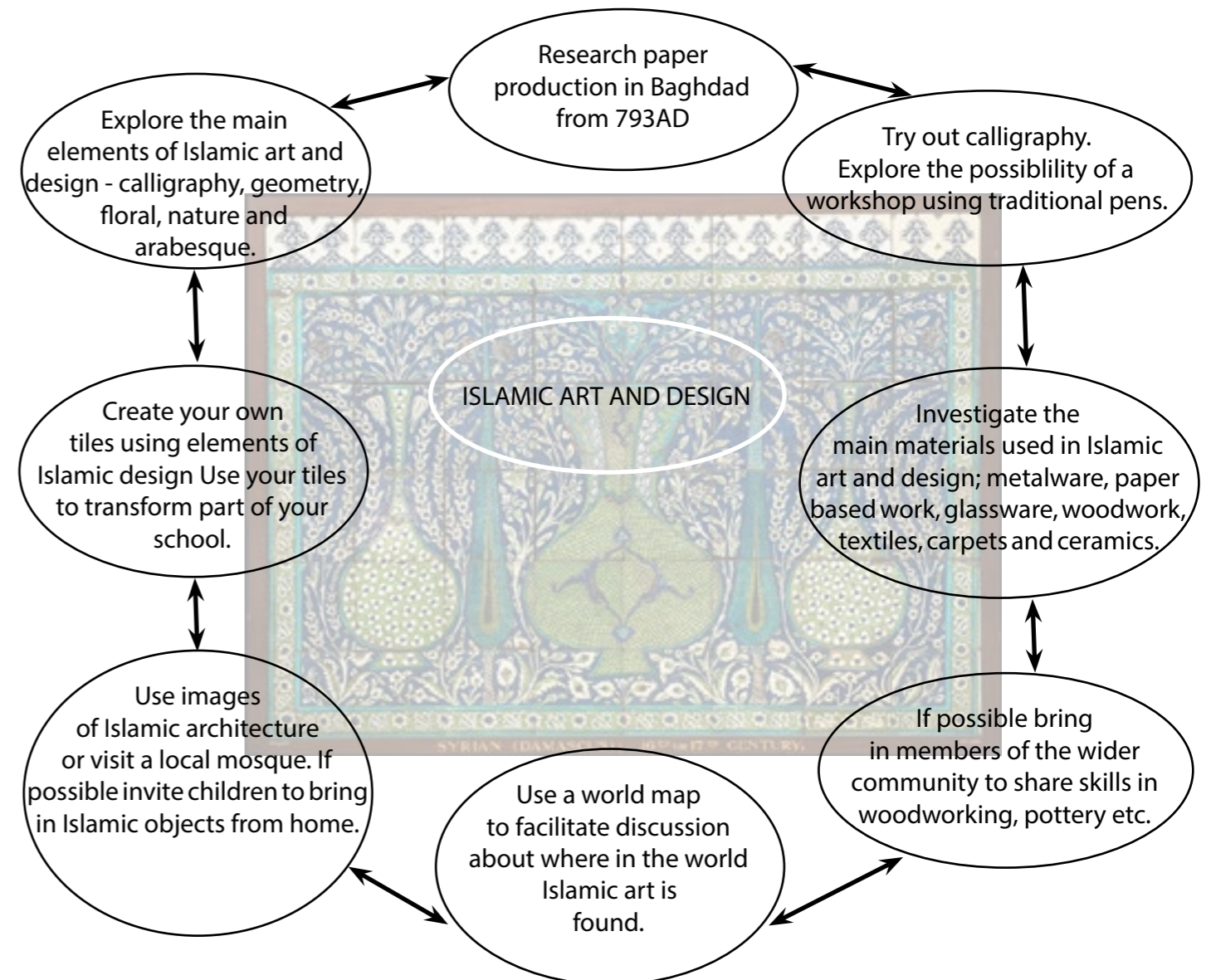
- The Islamic World
- Islamic Art and Design
- Architecture
- Ceramics

Using one or more line of enquiry as your starting point, consider how you can work in a number of curriculum areas to build strong and effective cross-curricular links.

### Using Islamic Art and Design as a line of enquiry

Here are a few ideas of how you can develop a range of learning opportunities to engage pupils with this line of enquiry. Each activity can link with the others to build on pupils' learning across the chosen theme.

Using the tiles as your context



## Take One...Inspires



This double page from a Qur'an is written in Kufic script and dates from AD870. It shows verses 55 and 57 of surat Al'Imran and is one of the earliest datable examples of calligraphy.

Take One... encourages teachers to use an object, painting or other resource, imaginatively in the classroom, both as a stimulus for artwork, and for work in more unexpected curriculum areas. Work in many curriculum areas can be inspired by using a single object as a starting point.

The challenge is for teachers to use objects to develop culturally enriching, relevant and practical learning opportunities across the curriculum.

## Tips for introducing objects to a class

- Display an image of the object in the classroom for a number of days with a tape recorder or 'graffiti wall' for children to add comments or questions about the object. Once the pupils' comments and questions have been gathered a class discussion can follow on.
- Cover an object and allow the children to feel it. Can they work out what it is without seeing it?
- Show the object to the class for a minute or two. Remove the object and see what they can remember.
- Introduce the object to the whole class in a question and answer session designed to develop the pupils' speaking and listening skills as outlined on page one.
- Work in pairs sitting back to back. One child describes the object and the other draws.
- Collect as many pictures or examples of similar objects from different time periods and explore the similarities and differences. Then try to sort the objects according to age.



Hanging oil-lamps were used widely in mosques. They were often decorated with part of a famous verse (Verse 24:35, The Light Verse) from the Qur'an, illustrating the importance of both light and lamps. This lamp was commissioned for a religious building by Sultan Muhammad ibn Qala'un, ruler of Egypt and Syria from about 1294 to 1340 AD. His name appears around the body of the lamp.

The art of glassmaking originated in Syria and it was here that much of the best Roman glass was created.

"Thank you for a wonderful and stimulating day at the Ashmolean. I came away buzzing, full of ideas." Feedback after a recent Take One...INSET

Please contact us or visit our website for more information about our programmes including training opportunities



Inspired by the National Gallery's Take One Picture programme

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