UAE Educators Tour Lesson

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Islamic Art in Transition: Can Architectural Design Time Travel?

This lesson comes in two parts: an iBook for students and teacher resources including an outline, bibliography, hand out for student designs.

The lesson could take a 60 minute period for students in grades 8-9. It could be extended with additional exploration of the types of art. Older students can decorate more intricate templates. There are many, many tessellation outlines on the web.

My experience with 10-12 graders is that they thoroughly enjoy the exercise, and they are thoughtful when sharing how their choices (color…) produce different effects. This can be done with an art class.

A math class can also be integrated into this exercise for tessellations have a mathematical foundation. In addition, the muqarnas require significant geometry skills.

1. Teacher Materials:
2. I Background on the UAE

* To supplement the material in the iBook, I would suggest the
* UAE Connect site for current updates: <http://www.uaeinteract.com/>

1. For historical background on the UAE, the BBC offers a thorough timeline: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14704414>

2. Objectives:

1. To have students recognize core characteristics of Islamic Art and then recognize examples and the use of the art in modern contexts in the UAE.
2. To have students reflection on the intentional use of these characteristics.

* Can modern architecture be anything except international?
* Can modern architecture with cultural decoration avoid looking like a Disneyland affair?
  + Weighing a desire to maintain tradition with a desire to update structures and project a twenty-first century identity.
* Ultimately this discussion could/should lead to a conversation about the role of tradition in a culture.

3. The iBook (37 pages)

* Cover page: Image of Burj Khalifa
* Chapter 1- Geography of the region with short history of the UAE
* Chapter 2- Characteristics of Islamic art

1. Characteristics of Islamic art and architecture with examples:
2. Calligraphy
3. Tessellations
4. Arabesques
5. Linear Repeat Patterns
6. Complex star polygons
7. Arches
8. Domes
9. Minarets
10. Mashrabiyas
11. Muqarnas

* Chapter 3- Traditional Designs on Modern Buildings

1. A series of pictures with traditional designs matched with modern presentations. Students should be able to recognize the design in both images.

* Chapter 4- Applying Islamic Designs

1. There are five outline images that can be enhanced with Islamic design. A pdf of these is included which could be printed. If the iBook can be projected on a Smartboard, students could decorate using an interactive program. If the students could have the images on an iPad, they could decorate using a coloring app.
2. It is also possible to do 3D printing of Islamic design forms and then decorate them. <http://www.yeggi.com/q/islamic+architecture/?s=tx>
3. Suggested lesson plan:
4. Begin class with the geography of the Arabian Peninsula. Have students read the first chapter of the book. It is possible to then go to Google Earth and find the Emirates. By zooming in the Palm Islands are very clear. It is important to stress the rapidity of the growth of the UAE so that students appreciate that the art and architecture leap from traditional forms to international in less than 50 years. The transition is fast, and therefore the choices are challenging.
   * The following link is to a company website promotion in the UAE that promises to provide Islamic style to any new project. This might not be useful for younger students, but older ones will understand the point. In either case, what is on offer is eye popping. <https://vimeo.com/33989162>
   * This can be used to spot the characteristics covered in the next iBook chapter.
5. Students should look at the different traditional characteristics of art/architecture in Chapter 2. There are some embedded links that are worth exploring. Students should be able to identify these. They will be familiar with some.
6. Chapter 3 is a series of images sets where the characteristics are represented in both traditional and modern contexts. This is where students should be asked to recognize the art/architecture. Then the students can discuss whether they think that the traditional fits the modern. There is likely to be different opinions for each comparison. Students should articulate WHY they think the applications are appropriate.
7. Chapter 4 is a set of silhouettes/outlines that students can use to create buildings that incorporate Islamic traditional art. These are very simple and there is no reason why students can’t choose to do additional forms.
8. The lesson can end with the coloring or return back to a wrap up reflection on the importance of maintaining cultural identity through the arts. This can, obviously, segue to conversation about what are traditional forms from their own culture that they would like to preserve.
   * The last two images are another pair of images where an iconic sculpture has been transposed to an amusement at a shopping mall.







