

The Aim of the Pack

This pack aims to support teaching about the Islamic World, both in the classroom and the Islamic Gallery of the British Museum. Suggestions for work before, during and after a visit to the British Museum are included in the pack.

Links with History in the National Curriculum

The materials in the pack support the National Curriculum for History in terms of studies about Islamic Civilizations and the Medieval World. The pack provides object-based suggestions and resources that can be used to highlight key issues in past Islamic societies and to develop skills around historical enquiry – in particular the ability to investigate independently aspects of a period being studied using a range of sources of information.

Pack ethos

The information gathered during the Gallery visit should be viewed as a body of evidence which can be used back in the classroom, alongside textbooks, visual images etc. The museum is a resource, the objects are evidence, and students should be encouraged to question the objects in order to answer their own enquiries into life in the Islamic world until 1600.

Preparing for a visit to the Islamic Gallery

Teachers

We thoroughly recommend that before a class visit, the staff visit the Islamic Gallery themselves to consider the implications for school use. The size and layout of the gallery and the objects themselves need to be examined so that any activities are more effective and enjoyable.

Students

It is very important to prepare students for the visit and they should bring to the Museum some prior knowledge of the history and culture of Islam. This will provide a useful context for the object-related activities in the Gallery. You could emphasise three focuses in particular:

1. The religion of Islam and its origin
2. The basic chronology of Islamic history and events
3. Islamic artistic styles and traditions

Clearly cross-curricular co-operation in the planning and timing of the course with RE, History and Art would prove particularly beneficial to a visit. In any case, teachers should talk through the worksheets in the pack before the visit and emphasise to pupils that they need to keep records of their findings in a form which they can use back in the classroom.

In addition, students should be encouraged to form their own enquiries about Islamic civilisation, which could be collated before the Museum visit and addressed on return.

During a visit to the Islamic Gallery

Worksheet activities

Six worksheets are included for use in the Islamic Gallery. They focus on the following aspects of Islamic Civilisation: Religion and Mosques, Keeping Control, Buildings and Architecture, Courtly Life, Science, Technology and Medicine, Travel and Trade.

Each worksheet provides the student with background information on a specific aspect of Islamic civilisation. The student is then expected to find objects that relate to the focus and make notes based around them. To do this, it is suggested that students are sent around in small groups. The grouping should be done before visiting the Museum during the preparation work. After briefing the students about their tasks in the Islamic Gallery, they should be sent off to find their objects and complete their tasks in the Islamic Gallery, using case and object numbers. Each 'research team' should complete at least one investigation but not more than two – detailed recording in terms of sketching, notes, etc. will be most useful for follow-up work.

Suggestions for general gallery activities

Students could prepare file cards in the gallery with detailed notes on particular objects. Ask the students to compile notes so that if, for example, there were a burglary the object could be recognised, but let them decide which information about the object is important.

You might also like to ask the pupils to think about the limitations of the evidence they are gathering. What other kinds of evidence would they like/expect to see? (e.g. textiles, more armour). Where could they get information about the 'missing' evidence?

Students could choose and list 5 objects which they think give the best idea of Islamic art, Islam as a religion, or the inventions of Muslim culture. The students would need to give the reason for their choices.

Ask the students to consider which objects they would chose to include in a guide to the Islamic Gallery for another Key Stage 3 group. Having gathered the information they could then write the guide back in the classroom.

Following your preparatory visit, provide statements which the pupils could find evidence for and against e.g. 'This gallery gives a comprehensive view of Islamic culture.'

Back in the classroom

1. Feedback to the class

Each group may need to share its ideas and responses with the others. This might be done by splitting them up and creating new groups where there is one 'expert' from each theme per new group. This will obviously need to be handled with care, depending on the needs of the class individuals. Some students with special needs or EAL may not be able to complete the activities so that they could be clearly passed onto others. With this in mind, it might prove more appropriate for individual groups to feed back in turn to the whole of the rest of the class. Students could then decide on particular responsibilities: speaking, producing a display etc. Teachers might also create a grid where responses from each group could be written up. This display or a book of class wisdom about Islamic Civilisations will be the outcome of the visit and a source of evidence for historical study.

2. Timeline

Once back in the classroom, when students have shared their discoveries, they could put together a timeline of objects seen at the Museum. This could either be a simple line or include the main dynasties and events covered.

3. Extended writing

The knowledge gained from the visit may be used to practice extended writing. This could take one of the following forms:

- A simple account of what the group/individual found out.
- A detailed description of a particular theme (including use of other information sources).
- A broad description of Islamic life, using supporting evidence from the Museum and any other information available.
- An evaluation of the sources used in the Islamic Gallery and their relative value for an investigation into the history of Islamic Civilisations.

Written activities will clearly need to be differentiated. A writing frame is an ideal way of providing differentiation (see M. Lewis and D. Wray, *Writing Frames*).

Useful sources

P Bargley & H Bourdillon, *Medieval Islam*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1993

B Brend, *Islamic Art*, British Museum Press, London, 1991

J Child, *The Rise of Islam*, Heinemann, Oxford, 1991

A Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, Faber & Faber, London, 1991

F Macdonald, *The World of Islam up to the 1500's*, Collins Educational, London, 1991

P Mantin & R Mantin, *The Islamic World*, CUP, Cambridge, 1993

C Shepherd et al, *Contrasts and Connections*, John Murray, London, 1991

Your task is to gather information on the importance of religion in the Islamic world.

Provide evidence in your answer from the tasks below or other objects in the Islamic Gallery. Your school textbooks may also provide further information for your answer when you are back in class - but take notes/sketches in detail now.

Look at the **mosque lamps** in case 21.

Note down as much information about them as you can (use sketches if you wish).

Try and find out

- When were the lamps made?
- What country did they come from?
- What were the lamps for?
- How are they decorated?

How do we know that lamps and light were important to Muslims? (Use the written source)

How can mosque lamps also tell us about the people of the time?

Why do you think wealthy people had beautiful lamps made for mosques?



Written Source

*The Sura (chapter) of Light from the Qur'an (24:35) inscribed on many mosque lamps:
"God is the light of the heavens and the earth. His light is like a niche in which is a lamp in glass like a brilliant star. It is lit from a blessed olive tree neither eastern nor western. Its very oil would almost shine forth, though no fire touched it. Light upon light; God guides to His light whom He will."*

Look at the **tile frieze on your right as you enter the gallery.**

Note down as much information about it as you can (use sketches if you wish).

Think about

- When the tiles were made?
- Where they came from?
- What they are made of?
- How the tiles are decorated?



On what type of building do you think the tiles were originally situated?

How do we know that Arabic calligraphy was important to Muslims at this time?

Crucial Information

Religion led the lives of people in the Islamic World. Muslims were expected to behave in a way pleasing to God in everything that they did. The Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, was seen as a guide for all aspects of Muslim life. The Five Pillars: faith, prayer, charity, fasting and pilgrimage also provided Muslims with particular duties in life. Another important guide for Muslims was called the Sunnah which contains details of what Muhammad said or did.

As Muslims need to pray five times a day, many mosques were built. Some early buildings had a simple design, using reeds or sticks for walls. Later mosques were more solidly constructed. The materials used varied across the Islamic world, depending on what was available, such as stone in North Africa and mud in West Africa. They were often beautifully decorated with Arabic inscriptions in honour of God, which also served as a reminder to Muslims of their duties in life. Furniture was kept to a minimum, and lamps, made from glass, pottery or metal, were often hung from the ceiling. Impressive domes, arches and minarets all helped to make people think about the importance of God.

Your task is to try and explain how the Ottoman dynasty was able to create and rule such a large empire.

The tasks on the worksheet will point you in the right direction, but you will need to look at other objects in the Islamic Gallery too. Collect as much information as you can, and continue this work back in the classroom using books you have available there.

Look at the **brass (square-ended) penbox in case 12.**

Note down as much information about it as you can (use sketches if you wish).

Try and find out

- When it was made?
- Where it came from?
- What is it made of?
- How is it decorated?



Looking at the box, how do we know that writing skills were considered to be very important?

What other information would we need to collect to create a more complete picture of the person who owned the penbox?

Written source

From a brass penbox, Egypt, 1304/5:

"Open the penbox of happiness; its pens who receive and red. Made for the servant of god...who hopes for the mercy of God and His protection."

Look at the **iron helmet in case 46**.

Note down as much information about it as you can (use sketches if you wish).

Try and find out

- When it was made?
- Where it came from?
- What is it made of?
- How is it decorated?

Why do you think the helmet has a distinctive shape?

How do you think weapons and armour could have helped Muslim rulers?



*Example of
an iron helmet*

Crucial Information

In the early Islamic period the empire was ruled by a caliph who was believed to be God's representative on earth. The earliest caliphs ruled from Arabia and appointed other Arabs to help govern the growing area under Muslim control. Able people from all the different Muslim lands were employed as advisers, administrators, generals and judges. Each adviser had many officials to help them in their duties, like collecting tax and giving punishments.

Scribes, people who could write well, were very important to rulers. Effective government relied on writing orders and reports and keeping accurate records. Thousands of soldiers were used by Muslim rulers to keep control over the empire. Early on, soldiers were often Arabs committed to spreading Islam. Later, mercenaries from Central Asia, Turks or slaves from Europe were used, both to conquer and maintain power. These soldiers had many advantages. They were well-equipped with light body-armour, helmets and shields. They fought with spears, swords and bows, which they could use to great effect. Forts were built to protect important parts of the empire. These also served as barracks for soldiers and acted as a reminder to the population of who was in power.

Your task: Changing Rooms! On your return to class you will design a room in an Islamic style.

Use ideas from the gallery. You can use different techniques and materials and a variety of colours, but you need to follow those you have seen in the Islamic Gallery or read about in texts.

Remember to produce evidence for your choice of design: the following tasks will help you gather evidence.

Look at the tiles from **Damascus and Jerusalem in case 30.**

Note down as much information about them as you can (use sketches if you wish.)

Try and find out

- Where they came from?
- When they were made?
- What they are made of?
- How they are decorated?



Why do you think tiles were used to decorate so many buildings in the Islamic world?

There are tiles in the gallery from many parts of the Islamic world.

How do you think the interest in tiles was spread?

Written Source

Visitors describing the court of the Great Mosque at Damascus, 10th century:

'The court is paved with marble. The walls of the mosque are faced with multi-coloured marble and above this are mosaics of gold and other colours showing figures of trees and towns and beautiful inscriptions. Every well-known tree and town can be found on these walls. The capitals of the columns are covered with gold, and the vaulting above is decorated with mosaic in arabesque designs.'

Look at the **carved stucco in case 3.**

Note down as much information about it as you can (use sketches if you wish).

Try and find out

- Where it was made?
- When it was made?
- What it is made of?
- How it is decorated?



What type of building do you think the stucco came from?

Why do you think the person who carved it chose floral patterns?

Crucial Information

As the Muslims expanded their empire they took on ideas about building from other peoples. They adopted the domes and pillars of the Greek and Romans. They took on the pointed arch from the Persians. However, they also developed their own building styles and features. Minarets, for example, were developed by the Muslims themselves. Their main efforts went into religious buildings, like mosques and tombs, though they also designed and constructed schools, caravanserais (hostels) and fortresses (castles). Non-Muslim architects in Medieval Europe were so impressed that they copied their methods when building castles and cathedrals. Buildings were often highly decorated. As with the design of buildings, the Muslims were influenced by the styles of the areas they conquered, although in time an Islamic style of decoration appeared. The walls of a building could be richly decorated with wall paintings, carved plaster, tiles or mosaics. A range of patterns was used, including the arrangement of tiles to form Arabic inscriptions.

Your task: on your return to class you will write an imaginative account of what courtly life was like in Medieval Islamic lands. In your description you could mention scenes you can see on the Blacas Ewer in the gallery: hunting, music, drinking, receiving visitors, sword fighting, archery, riding.

There may be other objects from 13th century Iraq in the gallery that may help you. Remember to produce evidence for your work: the following tasks will help you gather evidence.

Look at the **gold wine bowl in case 18**.

Note down as much information about it as you can (use sketches if you wish).

Think about

- When it was made?
- Where it came from?
- What it is made of?
- How it is decorated?



What does the bowl tell us about the person who used it?

What about the things found with it-what else do they tell us about that person?

Written Source

Verses (around gold bowl) ascribed to Ibn al-Tammar 10th century poet

From Wasit, Iran:

Wine is a sun in a garment of silk

It flows: its source is the flask

Drink then, in the pleasure of time, since our day

Is a day of delight which has brought dew

Look at the **Blacas ewer (large brass jug)** in case 12.

Note down as much information about it as you can (use sketches if you wish).

Try and find out

- When it was made?
- Where it came from?
- What it is made of?
- How is the ewer decorated?



Crucial Information

The day to day life of a Muslim ruler was based around the court. Rulers spent much of their time receiving visitors and listening to their requests. Important meetings were held with those officials and generals who helped run the government. Guests were often entertained with music. Leisure time might also be spent listening to poets and story-tellers reciting their work. Lavish banquets and drinking games gave rulers and courtiers an important opportunity to relax from the pressures of life. Sometimes the court would leave the capital city and the ruler would visit his lands. This provided an opportunity to make a show of power. Noblemen would also take the members of the court out hunting, particularly at times when they were not involved in warfare. Hunters rode horses, and used spears or bows to attack a range of animals including deer and lions. Trained animals or birds, like dogs and falcons, were also used in the hunt. Courtiers might also be expected to play active games with their ruler, like polo.

Your task is to find out how people in the Islamic world benefited from the Muslim interest in science.

You should provide several examples. Use this worksheet, the gallery and your school textbooks to help you with this.

Look at the **jar-stand to the left of the stairs as you come down them.**

Note down as much information about it as you can (use sketches if you wish).

Try and find out

- When it was made?
- Where it came from?
- What it is made of?
- How is it decorated?

Why was it necessary to filter the water in medieval Egypt? (Use the source to help you.)

Why was water so important to people in the Islamic Empire? How would they have used it?



Written Source

Ibn Ridwan, court physician in Egypt, early 11th century:

"If the water appears contaminated by some noxious substance, have it boiled and let it cool in the open air' in the cool of the night. Then purify it with the ingredients we have already mentioned (bitter almonds, apricot pips, alum etc.) The best thing to do is not to use this water until it has been purified several times...the purified part is placed in a jar; only what seeps through...the jar will be used. In the summer; the jar which is to contain the water will be of clay or of terracotta".

Look at the **astrolabe** signed by its maker **Abd al-Karim** in case 45.

Note down as much information about it as you can (use sketches if you wish).

Try and find out

- When it was made?
- Where it came from?
- What is it made of?
- How is it decorated?



Why do you think Muslim scientists were so interested in the position of stars and planets?
Can you think of any problems when using this instrument in travel?

Crucial Information

The Arabs were extremely interested in the world that God had made. From this came their serious attitude to science. For example, the study of the stars, or astronomy, was particularly important to the Arabs. In the desert, travellers needed to know the position of the stars to help them travel during the night. Muslims also needed to know the time and the direction of Makkah for their daily prayers. To increase their knowledge the Arabs translated the ideas of the Greek geographer Ptolemy into Arabic and built an observatory in Baghdad. Muslims also improved the Greek instrument called the astrolabe. This could be used to measure the height and position of the stars to tell the time.

Your task: back in the classroom you are going to write a description of life as a trader.

You will need to use the information you collect in the gallery about travel and trade. Think about where you are going, what you are trading, how you are travelling. The tasks below will help you focus on key objects, but there are lots of objects in the gallery on which you could also make notes.

Look at the 'charger' (decorated with a boat) in case 47.

Note down as much information about it as you can (use sketches if you wish).

Think about:

- When it was made?
- Where it came from?
- What is it made of?
- How is it decorated?



If a charger is a large, flat dish, what do you think it was used for? (The source may provide some ideas.)

What evidence is there on the charger about transport in the Islamic world? Use your own knowledge and the charger to describe this type of transport.

Written Source

A guide to goods brought to Baghdad in the 9th century AD.

From India: tigers, elephants, precious stones and sandalwood

From China: spices, silk porcelain, paper, ink, horses and saddles

From Byzantium: silver and gold cups, coins, medicine and slaves

From Arabia: horses, camels and ostriches

From North Africa: leopards and falcons

From Yemen: cloaks, giraffes, breastplates and indigo

From Egypt: donkeys and cloth

From Central Asia: armour, helmets, grapes and sugarcane

From Persia: plums, woollen coats, honey, salt and glass

Look at the jug (in underglaze blue with dragon) in case 26.

Note down as much information about it as you can (use sketches if you wish).

Try and find out

- When it was made?
- Where it came from?
- What it is made of?
- How is it decorated?



Why do you think the potters from Iran designed it in this way?

According to the written source from Baghdad, what other goods were imported from the same country in the 9th century?

How do we know they were valuable?

Crucial information

Muslims were great travellers. They wanted to spread the word of God but also to understand the world He had created. Ibn Battuta, for example, made an epic journey around the Muslim world in the 14th century. Travel encouraged trade and vice versa. A network of trade routes grew up across the Islamic world. Settlements on these routes greatly benefited. As you can see from the source, Baghdad received goods from many different areas. Goods could be exchanged or bought and sold easily from many different areas using gold and silver currency. The goods were transported in a variety of ways. Some traders went by land. They used camels to carry heavy loads over long distances and difficult terrain. For shorter and easier trips a horse and cart was taken. Other people traded by sea or river using the dhow, a boat that was fast and easy to manoeuvre. Both travel and trade led to key consequences in the Islamic world. As merchants travelled, they took their religion with them and helped to spread it. As Muslims came into contact with other cultures, they borrowed ideas and styles. The trade in goods also helped Muslim towns to grow and people to prosper, particularly the rulers.