



Leighton House Museum

Leighton and the Middle East website: Teachers' Notes

Key Stage 3 History: classroom activities

Unit 06: What were the achievements of the Islamic state 600-1600?

Section 5 – What can we learn from the architecture of Islamic civilizations?

Many people today think that Muslim culture is uniform and intimately bound up with religion. This is not the case. The reality is that much of Muslim art, architecture and design is secular based and serves non-religious purposes. Architecture is an excellent example to illustrate this point.

Aim:

To get pupils to understand that the architecture of the Muslim world was and is diverse and has multiple uses.

Method:

Contrasting a mosque interior with the non-religious Arab Hall at Leighton House Museum.

Resources:

Virtual tour of Arab Hall, information contained within 'Leighton and collecting' on our website, photographs of mosque interiors

Activities:

- 1) Familiarise yourself with the debate on visual representation in Islam by looking at the essay *What is Islamic Art?* in our 'Leighton and Collecting' section on our website.
- 2) In order to explore the non-religious nature of Leighton's Arab Hall it is first useful for your pupils to understand the religious nature of the mosque. Use photographs of mosque interiors to explain to pupils the following:
 - why there is no figurative images within the mosque?
 - why calligraphy dominates the interior decoration of mosques?
 - why coloured and stained glass (non-representational) is used?
 - Why are the following words important in religious architecture - mihrab, minbar, quibla (see our Glossary for explanation).
- 3) Now access the virtual tour of the Arab Hall to explore a non-religious interior with your pupils. Leighton's Arab Hall is a re-imagining of many of the spectacular interiors he saw on his journeys in the Middle East. Leighton did not intend it to be a direct imitation of one place in particular but rather a room that had many influences.
- 4) Navigate through the numbered 'hotspots' to see how both figurative and non-figurative elements were used in Muslim buildings throughout the centuries.
- 5) Use 'hotspots' 1, 2 & 6 with your pupils to discuss how people within religions and cultures can have contrasting opinions on the use of images. This point could be tied in with Citizenship Unit 13; How do we deal with conflict?