



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

## Center for Middle Eastern Studies

**Title:** Interior Design of an Ottoman Mosque

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to expose students to the main interior architectural and decorative features of a typical Ottoman mosque, as well as to explore how the main beliefs and practices of Islam are reflected in mosque decoration and architecture.

**Overview of Main Ideas:** Ottoman mosques share certain key architectural and decorative features that reflect the main beliefs and practices of Islam during that time period. The key architectural features emphasized in this lesson are the kibla wall, mihrab, minbar, main prayer hall and women's gallery. The main decorative features emphasized in the lesson are geometric design and calligraphy in stained glass and tile work. Each of these architectural and decorative features reflects main beliefs and practices of Islam.

**Connection to the Curriculum:** My 6<sup>th</sup> grade social studies curriculum is a year-long study of world religions. The ultimate goal of the curriculum is to expose students to religious diversity, preparing them to interact in a multicultural world with tolerance, understanding and respect. Through understanding architectural and decorative elements of a mosque, students gain an appreciation and respect for the form and function of a mosque. In addition, students review the main beliefs and practices of Islam, thus cultivating greater understanding and respect for the religion of Islam.

**Grade Level and Subject:** 6<sup>th</sup> grade social studies

**Time:** 10 class periods (7.5 hours)

**Materials:**

- 3-part corrugated display board (for mihrab)
- Overhead transparencies (for stained glass windows)
- Painter's tape of various colors (for quibla and carpet design)
- Compass
- Sturdy small table that can bear weight (for minbar)
- Bulletin board paper

- Markers
- Scissors

**Objectives:** Students will identify interior architectural and decorative features of an Ottoman mosque and relate their form and function to major beliefs and practices of Islam.

### **Suggested Procedures:**

#### Background for the lesson:

1. Students already have a general background in major beliefs of Islam. Review the 5 Pillars of Islam, paying special attention to shahadah, salat and hajj (with emphasis on the importance of Mecca).
2. Students also have a general background on the spread of early Islam and the rise of the Ottoman Empire.

#### Opening the lesson/Setting the stage

1. Tell the students, “You are no longer in the classroom. You’ve been transported back in time to the Ottoman period. It’s the mid-1500’s and you are in Istanbul. I am the great architect, Sinan Pasha...” If you can, dress up as Sinan. Students love to see their teacher dressed up! Tell them, “I need your help because I have been commissioned by Sultan Suleyman II to build another mosque. My workers have already finished the outside of the mosque, but they all came down with a terrible disease before they completed the inside of the mosque. Please help me! I don’t want to disappoint the great, Suleyman. You all came highly recommended as artisans and craftsmen and I need your help! Because you’re all so skilled, I know I will need to convince you that I am worthy of your work. I believe once you have seen my previous work, you will be convinced that your efforts will not go to waste on a mosque designed by me.”
2. Show the artisans/craftsmen images of the interiors of the Shehzade, the mosques of Sokullu Mehmed Pasha, Rustem Pasha and Princess Mirimah and the Suleymaniye mosque.

Ask students,

- “What do the interiors of these mosques have in common?”

Lead the discussion to enable students to recognize the mihrab, minbar, main prayer hall and women’s gallery. Discuss the function of each of these features.

- “What beliefs of Islam do these features support? Based on what you know about Islam, what direction do you think the mihrab faces?”

Lead the discussion emphasizing why Muslims pray 5 times per day facing Mecca, why men and women are separated during prayer and the role of the imam.

- “What do you notice is *not* in any of these mosque interiors?”

Lead a discussion emphasizing the lack of ordered seats and lack of images of animals and people in mosque decoration, as well as the reasoning behind these omissions.

- “What are the decorations inside the mosque?”

Lead a discussion emphasizing geometrical design and calligraphy of verses from the Qur’an. Encourage students to think about why these decorations are used and what major beliefs of Islam are reflected in those choices (ie. monotheism, the Qur’an).

### Developing the lesson:

1. As a class, use the compass to find the direction of Mecca. Mark off with tape on the floor, the direction of Mecca (the qibla), the places for the mihrab, minbar, main prayer hall and the women’s section.
2. Divide students into 3 groups.
  - Group 1: mihrab, women’s section and main prayer hall
  - Group 2: the minbar
  - Group 3: the stained-glass windows
3. Each group will decorate its part of the mosque with geometric designs and calligraphy.

#### Group 1: mihrab and main prayer hall

- Students will look through images of mihrabs, women’s sections and main prayer halls from Sinan’s previous mosques.
- Students will use painter’s tape (various colors) to make a rug pattern of geometrical design that will help people line up for prayers in the main prayer hall.
- Students will use markers to decorate to the mihrab.
- Students will mark off the women’s area and make a sign indicating, “Women only in this section.”

#### Group 2: the minbar

- Students will choose several key verses from a list of famous verses from the Qur’an provided by teacher.
- Teacher will project images of “Allah” and “Mohammad” in Arabic calligraphy on the classroom wall. Students will trace the images onto bulletin board paper.
- Students will fill in the calligraphy with the chosen verses from the Qur’an.
- Students will wrap the paper around the table to decorate the minbar.

#### Group 3: the stained glass windows

- Students will study images of Iznik tiles provided by the teacher.
- Students will use permanent markers to decorate the overhead transparencies with geometric designs copied from the Iznik tiles.

- Students will tape their decorated overhead transparencies to the classroom windows to create the effect of stained-glass windows.

Concluding the lesson:

Each group will label its architectural and design features of the mosque with brief descriptions.

Assessing student learning:

- Bring in Suleyman! Invite another teacher (the head master/principal is ideal!) to come in and pretend to be Suleyman. Students will give a tour of the mosque and explain its features to Suleyman.
- Students will write up a self-led tour of the mosque and its features.

Extending the lesson:

Take a fieldtrip to a local mosque.