INDIA TEACHERS’ RESOURCE

Explore art and design from the Indian subcontinent at the home of creativity.

Key Stages 1 & 2: Art & Design, Literacy and RE

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Introduction

The V&A holds the largest collection of South Asian art and artefacts outside the Indian subcontinent.

In an atmospheric architectural setting, the South Asia gallery (Room 41) displays jewellery, fashion, textiles, metalwork and paintings. The central section of the gallery, ‘The Treasury’, contains precious objects from the Mughal Empire (1526–1857). They demonstrate incredible techniques and craftsmanship. Highlights include a beautiful jade wine cup owned by the emperor Shah Jahan and jewelled turban ornaments.

The objects in the gallery form a picture of life in the Mughal court from the 16th to the 19th century. They also reveal the powerful regional courts that emerged in the 18th century and show the cultural interactions with the Europeans who came to South Asia in this period.

Room 47b, adjacent to Room 41, displays Hindu, Jain and Buddhist sculpture and devotional objects. The two galleries provide a fantastic resource for exploring the culture, religion and style of the Indian subcontinent.

Pre-visit activities

• Develop a handling collection of objects from and about India. It could include images or statuettes of different Hindu gods, or objects associated with gods, such as a conch shell (Vishnu) or a small double-sided drum (Shiva). Other objects might be a flower garland, incense, fabric samples, a sari or a turban.
• Read stories linked to Hindu gods Shiva, Vishnu and Durga.
• Listen to traditional Indian music with your class.

The Museum visit

Download the accompanying activities which can be led by a teacher or an adult helper. We recommend splitting your class into smaller groups to rotate around the activities.

Bring pencils, colouring pencils and paper.

Hindu Gods and Goddesses

Many religions are practised in India today. The predominant faith is Hinduism. Sculptures of some of the more well-known Hindu gods are on display in Room 47b, including Shiva, Vishnu and Durga.

Shiva is often depicted as lord of the dance within a circle of flames. He represents the never-ending cycle of time. There is also a statue of the bull-calf Nandi. In Sanskrit Nandi means ‘joyfulness’ or ‘blissfulness’ and refers to the emotions experienced by a devotee in the presence of Lord Shiva.

Vishnu is the preserver and protector of the universe. He is usually depicted holding a lotus flower, a discus, a mace and a conch. The goddess Durga, meaning ‘invincible’, is represented as an eight-armed slayer of the buffalo demon. She signifies the power behind creation, preservation and destruction.

Costume and Jewellery

India has a rich textiles heritage that has influenced fashion around the world. Some of the words we use in English originally come from India – shawl, chintz, jodhpurs and pyjamas. There are examples of traditional outfits worn by Indian men, women and children on display, as well as garments designed for British taste using Indian fabric and patterns. Unlike European men, wealthy men at the Mughal court wore long gowns, as well as decorated sashes, pearl necklaces and jewelled turban ornaments.

Animals and Nature

From miniature paintings showing hunting, falconry, processions and battles to textiles with floral patterns, there are many examples of animals and nature in Room 41. The paintings tell incredible stories about life during the Mughal Empire and at other courts. Tipu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore, was known as ‘The Tiger of Mysore’ because of the strength and ferocity he showed against the enemy. Artefacts made for him were decorated with tiger motifs and stripes.

Pattern

The Mughal rulers were Muslim. Art and architecture produced during this period included intricate geometric and floral designs. ‘The Treasury’ in the centre of the gallery is surrounded by beautiful screens, known as jalis, carved with geometric patterns. These screens functioned as windows, room dividers and decorative features. From early morning to sunset, the shadow patterns they cast continuously moved, adding richness to the room.

Follow-up activities/find out more

• Visit: vam.ac.uk/page/s/south-asia
• Search the collections online: collections.vam.ac.uk
• Share the stories from the Six Degrees activity.
**HINDU GODS AND GODDESSES**

**At the Museum**

- Explore Room 47b to find the statues of Shiva, Durga and Vishnu.
  
  Use your face, hands and legs to re-create their different expressions and poses.

- Can you guess what each gesture means? Strength, power, peace, balance?

- Now use the area in Room 41, near the colonnade, to re-tell one of the stories about Shiva, Durga or Vishnu that you have read in class story time.

  Role-play or mime some of the scenes from the stories using the architectural setting as a stage.

**Back at School**

- Hindu gods and goddesses are often shown triumphing over evil. The festival of Diwali represents lightness overcoming darkness. During the festival colourful symbols called rangoli are created on the floors of homes to welcome the Hindu deities and are thought to bring good luck.

  Many different examples of designs can be found online. Use white chalk to draw three or four different designs in the playground for the class to colour in with bright chalks.
COSTUME AND JEWELLERY

At the Museum

- Find the display case that shows outfits for a woman, a man and a boy. How are they similar or different to the clothes you wear? What do you think it would feel like to wear one of the outfits?

- Explore the rest of the gallery to see if you can find pictures of people wearing outfits like these. What types of jewellery are they wearing? What can you tell about the person wearing the outfit?

- Look at some of the different patterns used to decorate the clothes. Now choose an object from the rest of the gallery that is not a textile or garment to inspire the shapes for your own pattern. For example, you could choose a turban jewel, a ceremonial sword or a drinking vessel. Draw the outline of the object. Now try repeating or rotating the shape to build up a pattern.

Back at School

- Use a simple printing technique to turn the sketches from the Museum into a pattern for a textile. Styrofoam makes a good printing block.

Place the sketch onto a Styrofoam tile and trace over it with a blunt pencil or the end of a paintbrush to leave an indentation. Cover the tile evenly with paint or water-based printing ink. Place the inky side down onto a large piece of cloth (test this process out on paper first, until students have got the hang of it). Apply pressure on the back of the tile with the back of a spoon or roller. Lift the tile and move it to another place on the material, repeating the pattern to replicate an Indian textile.
ANIMALS AND NATURE

At the Museum

– Look around Room 41 to spot as many different animals as you can. They might be hiding in the design of a wall hanging, in a miniature painting or even carved onto a piece of furniture. What kinds of animals can you find? You might find tigers, elephants, parrots, cows, deer, horses and birds of prey. Can you make the sounds of each animal?

– Miniature paintings tell stories of fantastical adventure through colourful images. Use the Six Degrees activity sheet to invent your own story with the different animals, people and landscapes you can see. Starting with Tipu’s Tiger, your story will finish with an elephant! Decide what happens on the tiger’s adventure and how he or she ends up meeting the elephant.

Back at School

– Create a collage inspired by the Six Degrees story from the Museum. Look at the animals, people and landscape you have included in your story. Sketch the different characters and settings onto large pieces of paper. Cut out the drawings. Overlap and layer the drawings to create a colourful narrative scene, similar to a miniature painting.
six degrees of separation is the theory that everyone and everything is six or fewer steps away

Tell a story about a tiger and an elephant using four other objects to connect them

Who will they meet?

Describe where they are

How do they feel?

What happens next?

Where will they go?
At the Museum

Find the jali screens in the centre of Room 41, near ‘the Treasury’. They are special windows carved from sandstone, marble or wood. See how many different shapes you can spot. Are there any lines of symmetry? What other types of pattern can you find?

Draw some of the shapes you find. Can you make a symmetrical pattern from the shapes? Try reflecting, rotating and tessellating them.

Back at School

Use air-drying clay to create a jali screen.

Plan out the designs using tracing paper or graph paper, which can then be used as a pattern to transfer onto the clay. Use the drawings from the Museum as inspiration.

Roll out square slabs of clay around 25 x 25 cm and 2 cm thick. Lay the patterns on top of the clay and using a pencil or clay tool, trace over the top of the pattern. Remove the paper and then cut out the shapes in the clay. Leave flat to dry. Once dry, find a sunny spot in the school to try out the screens.