

# PATTERNS IN ARCHITECTURE

Explore pattern in architecture at the home of creativity

*Key Stages 3-5 Art & Design and Design & Technology*

# V&A

# Patterns in Architecture

## Teachers' Resource

### Key Stages 3-5 Art & Design and Design & Technology

---

#### Introduction

This resource provides an innovative approach to teaching pattern and design. Explore the outstanding V&A and RIBA architecture collections and the decorative V&A building to discover how patterns are used in architecture and interior design. Investigate how pattern motifs can reflect different cultural values and identity. Give students an exciting design brief to create their own pattern designs, inspired by their research at the Museum.

*This resource was created as part of the V&A+RIBA Architecture Partnership education programme.*

---

#### Pre-visit activities

Discuss what makes a pattern. Look for pattern in your environment; at school, home or in your local area and record your findings using sketches or photographs. Discuss how patterns can reflect the identity of a city or place - such as the Sherlock Holmes tiles which create a pattern on the walls of Baker Street Station, or ceramic tiles used in the Islamic Middle East, which reflect Islamic design traditions. Give your students a design brief to work from and explain that they will be visiting the Museum to learn more about pattern design and to find inspiration for their own work. Here are some suggested briefs:

- Design a repeat pattern for a textile, wallpaper or ceramic tile inspired by pattern at the V&A.
- Design a repeat pattern that reflects the identity of your school, or the identity of your local area (e.g. it could include buildings, colours, shapes or materials that you see around you).
- Design a pattern to decorate and transform the exterior of a local building such as a school, library, town hall, swimming pool or leisure centre. Your pattern could reflect the purpose, location or users of the building. Take a photograph of the building and use Photoshop to add your pattern to it.

---

#### The Museum visit

Book a visit to the Prints & Drawings Study Room, and request the 'Designing Pattern' resource box, which contains drawings from the RIBA's Architecture collections ranging in date from the 1830s to the 1940s. Find out more about how to book by visiting the V&A's website: [vam.ac.uk](http://vam.ac.uk)

#### Pattern in architecture

Architects have been using patterns in building since the 4th century BC. Patterns are visible in the design of almost every building. They can be found on the exterior walls, entrances or chimneys as well as in the interior design of

ceilings, wallpaper or flooring. They can be created by the materials used in a building, e.g. terracotta brickwork, a steel frame facade, slate roof tiles or glass panes. Pattern designs can reflect the purpose or type of building, or communicate cultural identities and narratives.

#### Who designs patterns in a building?

Architects design patterns as surface decoration or as part of the structure of a building. They may work with artists and craftspeople to make them. At the V&A you can see pattern designs by many different artists, designers and architects including Owen Jones. He was one of the most influential designers of the 19th Century and after visiting The Alhambra in Spain he became interested in mosaics and tessellated pavements. His tile designs led to him becoming involved in the Great Exhibition of 1851, and he later designed a series of galleries at the V&A.

The 'Designing Pattern' resource box in the Prints & Drawings Study Room contains pattern designs made by Owen Jones for his publication *The Grammar of Ornament* (1856). Jones sourced these patterns from diverse non-western and western cultures during a period of travel in the 1850s.

#### Where to find pattern in the museum

The Museum was established in 1852, following the enormous success of the Great Exhibition the previous year. Its founding principle was to make works of art available to all, to educate working people and to inspire British designers and manufacturers. The architecture of the building includes a wide variety of styles, influences, materials and decoration, including many patterns, to reflect these ideals. You will find many examples of structural and decorative patterns around the museum, on ceilings, floors, windows, walls, seats, doorways, lighting, signage and columns or arches.

---

#### Follow-up activities/find out more

- Visit Search the Collections: [collections.vam.ac.uk](http://collections.vam.ac.uk) the V&A's online database, to discover a range of patterns in buildings from different areas of the world. Look for examples of different types of patterns: rotating, reflecting or tessellating.
- Make pattern sketchbooks or travel journals. Ask students to map their journey to and around school or the V&A, recording all the different patterns they see and describing where they have seen them.