

Mystic Lands: Taj Mahal: Heaven on Earth:

Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9-12

Curriculum Focus: World History

Lesson Duration: Two to three class periods

Program Description

Located in Agra, India, the Taj Mahal is a complex of gardens, mosques, and minarets constructed as a tribute to Shah Jehan's wife, Mumtaz Mahal, after her death. In his grief, Jehan vowed to build the most beautiful tomb ever. Explore the spiritual motivations that shaped the Taj Mahal and the city of Fatehpur Sikr.

Discussion Questions

Before watching the video

- What is the Taj Mahal?
- Where is it located?
- How can architecture reflect the beliefs of its builder?

After watching the video

- What is the Taj Mahal, who built it, and why? (Located in Agra, India, it is the tomb of Mumtaz Mahal and her husband Shah Jehan. It was built by Shah Jehan as an architectural expression of the love they shared.)
- Are there any other theories about why the Taj Mahal was constructed? (In addition to the love of his wife, many suggest that the Taj Mahal was also meant to reflect Akbar's profound belief in Islam and the love for his god, Allah.)
- Who were the Mughals, and when did they rule? (The Mughal Empire began in 1526 with the ruler Babur and ended in 1858, after years of decline when the British colonized India.)
- Why did the Mughal ruler Akbar seek religious tolerance? (Believing his empire would fail if it remained divided by religion, Akbar began a campaign for religious tolerance. He eliminated taxes that discriminated against Hindus, banned the enslavement of captives taken in war, and married into royal Hindu families.)
- What construction logistics were involved in building the Taj Mahal? (More than 20,000 workers were involved in the construction. This labor force included stonecutters, gardeners, calligraphers, and masons. Precious stones, sapphires, diamonds, emeralds, and rubies were brought from all over the world to be inlaid in its marble.)
- What symbolic elements are in the Taj Mahal's design? (The gardens surrounding it represent the Islamic garden of paradise. The number four and its multiples are holy numbers in Islam.)

The gardens each have four lawns, and each lawn has 16 flowerbeds; this symmetry is considered the symbol of perfection and completion. The canals that divide the gardens into quadrants are seen as the rivers of paradise. The white marble symbolizes the purity of faith—it recalls a white pearl, and Islamic tradition suggests that the world was made from pearls. The dome symbolizes the vault of heaven. Some even believe the Taj Mahal represents the heavenly throne where Allah will sit on the Day of Judgment.)

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Become familiar with the Mughals and the Taj Mahal.
- Recognize the Taj Mahal as an expression of India's diverse spirituality.
- Create a travel brochure about the Taj Mahal that covers key concepts of architecture, history, and art.

Materials

- Computer with Internet access
- Library materials and other print resources
- Printer for finished brochures

Procedures

1. A great way to get students to focus on the Taj Mahal's significance is by having them research and create a travel brochure for the famous tomb. You can have students devise individual brochures or work together in small groups. The brochures should be concise but informational, and they should include graphics to illustrate the concepts they cover. Each brochure should address these topics:
 - The location of the Taj Mahal and a bit about Agra, the Indian city where it is located
 - The structure's history, purpose, and builder
 - Examples of religious symbols of different faiths and why they were incorporated into the Taj Mahal and its gardens
 - Artistic methods and designs found in the structure
 - Architectural advances the Taj Mahal displays
 - Trivia, such as how many pounds of precious stones decorate the structure or how many artisans it took to build it



2. The following Web sites will be helpful to students as they conduct their research:
- **Nationmaster.com's** encyclopedia page (<http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia/Taj-Mahal>) has a good introduction to the Taj Mahal and its history.
 - **Taj Mahal: A World Heritage Site** (<http://www.taj-mahal-india-travel.com/taj-mahal-tours-agra-india.html>) is an online travel brochure that contains useful information and can serve as an example for students.
 - **The Majestic Taj Mahal** (<http://rubens.anu.edu.au/student.projects/tajmahal/home.html>) has lots of good information, graphics, and trivia.
 - **Taj Mahal: Memorial to Love** (http://www.pbs.org/treasuresoftheworld/a_nav/taj_nav/main_tajfrm.html) features lots of information, trivia, and audio clips.
 - **Cities/Buildings Image Database** (<http://www.washington.edu/ark2/>) contains detailed photos with descriptions of the Taj Mahal. Once at the site, click "Enter the Database"; enter the search term "Taj Mahal" to get to the images.
 - **Explore the Taj Mahal** (http://www.taj-mahal.net/augEng/pano_pages.htm) offers a virtual tour of the building, its gardens, and other structures on its grounds. There are video clips to watch, panoramic views, and articles and graphics that students can download. There is a \$3.50 fee to view most of the material on the site, but it is well worth it.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students conducted thorough research; developed a creative and informative brochure.
- **2 points:** Students conducted adequate research; developed a good brochure.
- **1 point:** Students conducted minimal research; created a poorly developed brochure.

Vocabulary

Agra

Definition: City situated on the banks of the Yamuna River in north-central India; capital of India during the 16th and 17th centuries

Context: Agra is where the Taj Mahal is located.

Akbar

Definition: Third of the Mughal rulers; first Mughal ruler born on Indian soil, and grandfather of Shah Jehan

Context: Akbar was known for his attempts to increase religious tolerance in his empire and for his construction of the utopian city Fatehpur Sikri.



Mughals

Definition: Muslim rulers of India from 1526 to 1858

Context: Under Mughal rulers, architecture and religious tolerance flourished, especially during the rule of Akbar.

Mumtaz Mahal

Definition: The beloved wife of Shah Jehan who died during the birth of their 14th child

Context: After Mumtaz Mahal's death, Shah Jehan created the Taj Mahal as her tomb and as a beautiful architectural expression of the love they had shared.

Shah Jehan

Definition: Fifth emperor of India from the Mughal dynasty; builder of the Taj Mahal

Context: Shah Jehan was deposed by his son Aurangzeb and spent the last eight years of his life gazing at the Taj Mahal from his room in Agra's Red Fort.

Taj Mahal

Definition: A tomb built in memory of Mumtaz Mahal by her husband Shah Jehan; considered the most beautiful building in the world, or a "heaven on Earth," by many

Context: Located in Agra, India, the Taj Mahal has come to symbolize the nation of India.

Academic Standards**Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)**

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit <http://www.mcrel.org/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Geography – Human Systems: Understands the nature and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics,
- Language Arts – Reading: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Culture
- Time, Continuity, and Change
- People, Places, and Environments



- Power, Authority, and Governance
 - Global Connections
-

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
-

DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How To Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index – Here the video is divided into six parts (see below), indicated by video thumbnail icons. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. Brief descriptions and total running times are noted for each part. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units – These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link – Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.

Teacher Resources – This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.



Video Index

I. Welcome to the Taj Mahal (1 min.)

One of the most beautiful buildings in the world is a symbol of love and Islam—and of India itself.

II. Symbol of Indian Spirituality (2 min.)

India is a land of many faiths and many peoples, but they come together at the Taj Mahal, a tomb built for a queen that now symbolizes a nation.

III. The Story of Emperor Akbar (9 min.)

The Mughal ruler Akbar fostered religious tolerance, built a new capital at Fatehpur Sikri, and formed his own religion. Art and architecture flourished during his reign.

IV. Shah Jehan Builds the Taj Mahal (5 min.)

Grief stricken after losing his wife in childbirth, Shah Jehan built a tomb to honor her. Requiring the labor of 20,000 workers and jewels from around the world, the Taj Mahal is unparalleled in design and artistry.

V. Monument to Love and Islam (4 min.)

A monument to love, the Taj Mahal may also be a shrine to Allah. In nearly every detail is spiritual meaning, from the inlaid flowers to the gardens, canals, and even the white marble.

VI. Spiritual Tolerance (2 min.)

After his son overthrew him, Shah Jehan spent his last years in Agra Fort, gazing at the Taj Mahal. Although his reign did not last, the spirit of religious tolerance and the Taj Mahal live on.

Curriculum Units

1. A Mughal Monument

Pre-viewing question

Q: Who were the Mughals?

A: Muslim rulers of India from 1526 to 1858

Post-viewing question

Q: What Mughal architectural elements are featured in the Taj Mahal design?

A: Sculpted columns, minarets, arches, and round domes on square bases

2. Akbar and Religious Tolerance

Pre-viewing question

Q: What religions are represented in India?

A: Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and Buddhism, among others



Post-viewing question

Q: How did Akbar encourage religious tolerance?

A: Akbar eliminated taxes that discriminated against Hindus; banned the enslaving of captives taken in war; and married into royal Hindu families. The architecture of his city Fatehpur Sikri blends elements of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

3. A Monument to Love

Pre-viewing question

Q: Why was the Taj Mahal built?

A: It is a tomb to honor Mumtaz Mahal, Shah Jehan's wife who died in childbirth.

Post-viewing question

Q: What does "Taj Mahal" mean, and why is this name appropriate?

A: Taj Mahal means "crown of the region," and it is much like a jeweled crown because precious stones are inlaid in its white marble.

4. Islamic Symbolism

Pre-viewing question

Q: What was Shah Jehan's faith?

A: Like the other Mughal rulers, he was a Muslim who worshipped Allah.

Post-viewing question

Q: What spiritual symbols are found in the Taj Mahal?

A: Its gardens represent the Islamic garden of paradise. Each garden has four lawns and each lawn 16 flowerbeds; the number 4 and its multiples are Islamic holy numbers. Canals dividing the gardens into quadrants symbolize the rivers of paradise. The white marble, representing the purity of faith, recalls a white pearl. Islamic tradition suggests that the world was made from pearls. The dome symbolizes the vault of heaven. Quotations from the Qur'an adorn the walls. Also visible are elements of other faiths: a Hindu creation symbol of lotus blossoms on the walls and the Christian art from Italy of precious stones inlaid in marble.