

World Religions in Greater Indianapolis Teaching Module

Teacher Name: Joshua M. Phillippe

Humanities Discipline: Art History

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World Religion: Islam

Teaching Module Title: The Atmosphere of Paradise

Teaching Module Goals:

1. Discuss the foundation, growth, belief, and religious divisions within Islam.
2. Familiarize students with the rich art and architecture from the Muslim world.
3. Recognize the contributions of Muslim scholars to science, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, and geography.
4. Reflection and class discussions focusing on Sultan Mohammed's *Mi'raj or Muhammed's Ascent* and some contemporary artists working in this tradition.

Assigned Reading and Videos:

John Bowker, *World Religions*, "Islam", pages 176-177, 180-183, and 192-195.

Maliha Noorani, demonstration on Persian miniature painting (6 minutes): <https://vimeo.com/35276945>

Shahzia Sikander, Indian and Persian miniature painting: <http://www.pbs.org/art21/artists/shahzia-sikander>

Study Questions and/or Discussions Prompts for Students:

1. What is the literal meaning of the word Islam?
2. Who were Musa and Isa and how are they revered by almost two billion Muslims?
3. When and why did the first religious division within Islam occur? Describe this divide.
4. In the 16th century Sulṭan Muhammed was one of the leading artistic figures in the Persian world. The style of painting this court painter became known for is marked by dynamic compositions, illogical perspectives, concealed grotesques, saturated color, and a strong tendency to see excess as a source of virtue. Reflect on pages 180-181 in the text giving close examination to Sultan Mohammed's illustration. Who are some of the important figures in this painting? Further describe some of the symbols and atmosphere of the painting. How do all of these individual components contribute to the whole of the work? Be prepared to discuss further in class.
5. Contemporary artist Shahzia Sikander specializes in Indian and Persian miniature painting, a traditional style that is both highly stylized and disciplined. While becoming an expert in this technique-driven, often impersonal art form, she imbued it with a personal context and history, blending an Asian focus on precision and methodology with a Western emphasis on creative, subjective expression. After screening the two videos on Persian miniature painting linked above how has your impression of Islamic art changed? What are some of the highlights of these two videos for you?



Mohammed's Ascent to Heaven (1543), Sultan Mohammed, watercolor and ink on paper, 11.3 × 7.3 inch, British Library