

# MoNA

Museum of Northwest Art

## Islamic Architectural Sculptures Inspired by Sheikh Idriss Mosque

A HANDS-ON ART ACTIVITY  
DESIGNED BY MONA EDUCATORS

Age: High School

Lesson Duration: 1 hour

Subject: Architecture



Student Sample,  
Image credit: MoNA Education

### Description

Students will learn about Adnan Idriss and the creation of the Sheikh Idriss Mosque and create a sculpture based on traditional Islamic architecture. In preparation, they will learn about the four key architectural features of a mosque and use this knowledge to create a miniature wood and clay version.

### Relevant Vocabulary

- Sahn (Courtyard)
- Mihrab (Niche)
- Minaret (Tower)
- Qubba (Dome)

### Materials

- Glue
- Pre-cut wood pieces
- Cardboard for bases
- Air-dry clay
- Common Features of a Mosque (see appendix)
- Paint and brushes (optional)
- Islamic Art & Architecture video (start at 5:56-- stop at 11:03)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5OkqI\\_uTbA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5OkqI_uTbA)

## Integration Topics

- Architecture
- Religion
- Islam

## Instructions

- 1)** Students will watch the "Islamic Art & Architecture" video and discuss what they notice about common features of a mosque. Then you can show images of the Sheikh Idriss Mosque (included at the end of this lesson) and ask students to point out what features they recognize.
  - 2)** In small groups, students will work together to read the common features of a mosque hand-out.
  - 3)** Using the pre-cut wood pieces and air-dry clay, students will work to create an example of Islamic architecture that includes at least two of the four common features of a mosque.
  - 4)** Students will discuss their creations with each other, using the appropriate vocabulary.
- \*\*\*Optional:** Students can paint their sculptures at a later date.\*\*\*

## Learning and State Standards

Fulfills **Washington State Arts Learning Standards:**

- **VA:Cr3.1.I** (Apply relevant criteria from traditional and contemporary cultural contexts to examine, reflect on, and plan revisions for works of art and design in progress)

## Appendix: Common Features of a Mosque



**Left:** Sahn (Courtyard)

**Image Source:**  
ResearchGate

The most fundamental necessity of congregational mosque architecture is that it be able to hold the entire male population of a city or town (women are welcome to attend Friday prayers, but not required to do so). To that end, congregational mosques must have a large prayer hall. In many mosques this is adjoined to an open courtyard, called a sahn. Within the courtyard one often finds a fountain, its waters both a welcome respite in hot lands, and important for the ablution (ritual cleansing) done before prayer.

**Right:** Minaret (Tower)

**Image Source:**  
Wikimedia Commons

One of the most visible aspects of mosque architecture is the minaret, a tower adjacent or attached to a mosque, from which the call to prayer is announced. Not solely functional in nature, the minaret serves as a powerful visual reminder of the presence of Islam.







**Right:** Qubba (Dome)

**Image Source:**

Archnet

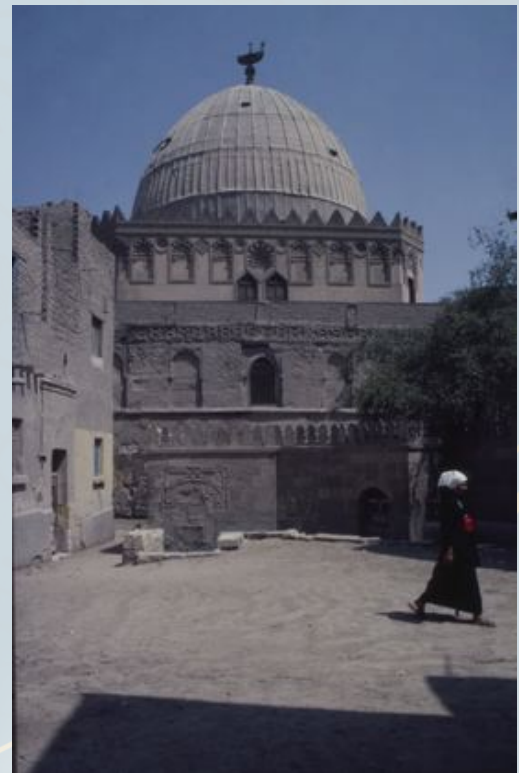
Most mosques also feature one or more domes, called qubba in Arabic. While not a ritual requirement like the mihrab, a dome does possess significance within the mosque—as a symbolic representation of the vault of heaven. The interior decoration of a dome often emphasizes this symbolism, using intricate geometric, stellate, or vegetal motifs to create breathtaking patterns meant to awe and inspire. Some mosque types incorporate multiple domes into their architecture, while others only feature one. In mosques with only a single dome, it is invariably found surmounting the qibla wall, the holiest section of the mosque.

**Left:** Mihrab (Niche)

**Image Source:**

Met Museum

Another essential element of a mosque's architecture is a mihrab—a niche in the wall that indicates the direction of Mecca, towards which all Muslims pray. Mecca is the city in which the Prophet Muhammad was born, and the home of the most important Islamic site, the Kaaba. The direction of Mecca is called the qibla, and so the wall in which the mihrab is set is called the qibla wall. No matter where a mosque is, its mihrab indicates the direction of Mecca (or as near that direction as science and geography were able to place it). Therefore, a mihrab in India will be to the west, while one in Egypt will be to the east.





Sheikh Idriss Mosque  
Designed by Adnan Idriss



**Idriss Mosque Mission:**

"The Islamic Center of Washington in collaboration with Sheikh Idriss Mosque resolves to ensure opportunities provided both Muslims and non-Muslims, for gaining knowledge and understanding, in the religion of Islam. We are resolved to develop, create and empower [upright] competent ambassadors to represent Islam to the public and all Muslim communities. We will work to establish positive relationships in America with our diverse Islamic families, partners, and communities through extending friendships, for strengthening relationships, bonds and building a solid foundation, for the future of Islam."

**Image Source:** [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Idriss\\_Mosque](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Idriss_Mosque)





The Idriss Mosque was the first mosque in Seattle, established in 1981. The mosque was financed by Sheikh Abdul Kadir Idriss, who wanted to bring this gift from Allah to the United States. His son-in-law, Adnan Idriss, developed the design and managed the construction.

This mosque has greatly benefitted the community, as it offers a location to provide financial assistance, education, marriage and burial services, and counselling.

Image Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Idriss\\_Mosque](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Idriss_Mosque)