

THE FABRIC OF INDIA TEACHERS' RESOURCE

*Learn more about the exhibition
at the home of creativity
3 October 2015 – 10 January 2016*

Key Stages 4–5: Art & Design, Design & Technology



The Fabric of India

Exhibition supported by Good Earth India
With thanks to Experion and NIRAV MODI.

Teachers' Resource

Key Stages 4–5: Art & Design, Design & Technology

Introduction

The *Fabric of India* exhibition provides an in-depth insight into the rich diversity of handmade Indian textiles. Spanning the 3rd century to the present day, the exhibition features a huge range of textiles, from embroidered jackets, wall-hangings and wedding ensembles to bold sari designs. It explores raw materials through to making processes and cutting-edge design.

Students will learn about: fabric, colour, embellishment techniques, identity, symbols, meaning, pattern, style, handcrafted luxury and contemporary textile designs.

The exhibition also explores the social and cultural dimensions of textile production. It opens up key discussion points around the manufacturing industry and global trade. This resource allows students to make links between historical and contemporary textiles through materials, techniques and design.

Pre-visit activities

- Put together a collection of fabric samples and swatches. Include examples that allow students to explore and examine a range of different textiles (natural and synthetic) and techniques. Techniques could include weaving, embroidery, appliqué, batik, tie-dye and block-printing. If possible, add equipment used for creating textiles, e.g. woodblocks or a small hand loom.
- Visit the exhibition web page to introduce students to objects they will see: vam.ac.uk/content/exhibitions/the-fabric-of-india/about-the-exhibition/

The Museum visit

Download the student activities to support your visit. You will need paper or sketchbooks, tracing paper, pencils and colouring pencils. Groups may be asked to stop sketching if the exhibition becomes very busy.

The exhibition is divided into six sections. For the purposes of this resource, we have combined the Sacred and Splendid sections.

The exhibition opens with a striking juxtaposition of two contemporary designs against the backdrop of a 17th-century floor-spread. This establishes the narrative carried through the exhibition of India's great textiles heritage. Use this display to set a research brief for your students:

Collect ideas from historical and contemporary Indian design to inspire a textiles project.

Nature and Making

This section is divided into themes: Dye, Raw, Print, Weave and Stitch. Use them as starting points to research natural materials and to introduce key techniques such as embroidery and block-printing for students to identify in the exhibition.

Sacred and Splendid

As well as being beautiful, textiles can embody meaning and narrative through their design. Use these sections to explore symbolism, motifs and patterns, as well as the lavish materials and intricate techniques used in religious and royal contexts.

A Global Trade

Examples of Indian textiles dating back many centuries have been found around the world, showing their economic importance as a trading commodity. Explore how trade influenced the style and design of textiles as makers tried to appeal to different markets and tastes.

Textiles in a Changing World

This section looks at the role of Indian textiles in the modern world. It starts with industrialisation and its political consequences in India, through to the place of traditional techniques in Indian textile making today. Explore the opulence of handcrafted fashion for high-end labels and Bollywood costumes that grew out of this.

At the Cutting-Edge

The final section brings the exhibition up to date with the latest developments in Indian textiles and fashion. Themes include contemporary textile art, fashion design and the striking new looks of the iconic sari. Make links between traditional techniques and cutting-edge fashion design.

Follow-up activities/find out more

- Visit: vam.ac.uk/content/exhibitions/the-fabric-of-india
- Research a contemporary Indian fashion designer from the exhibition, such as Manish Arora, Rahul Mishra or Kallol Datta.
- Research fair-trade initiatives in the textiles industry: sewalucknow.org and peopletree.co.uk/about
- Unite the ideas and sketches from the activities to create a mood board to inspire a textiles project.

NATURE AND MAKING

Materials, colour and embellishment

In the Exhibition

- Many of the clothes we wear today are made from synthetic (non-natural) fabrics and chemical dyes. Explore the different types of materials on display to make fabrics and colours. What kinds of things are they made from?
- Use colouring pencils to create a colour palette inspired by the fabrics and garments on display. How would you describe the colour palette? Is it warm, rich, cool, bright?
- Now look at the types of embellishment on display. Some of the patterns are made from unusual or expensive materials. What alternatives could you use to create similar effects? Take notes or sketch your ideas.

At the Museum

- Explore examples of block-printed textiles in the South Asia gallery (Room 41, Level 1). Now choose an object in the gallery that is not a textile or a garment to create a pattern for a block-print. For example, you could choose a turban jewel, a ceremonial sword or a drinking vessel. Draw the outline of the object in your sketchbook. Try rotating, tessellating and repeating the shape to build up the pattern.

Back at School

- Translate your design for a textile into a block for printing. Trace your design onto a piece of Styrofoam, cover with ink and print onto cotton – plain or patterned.
- Have a go at creating your own natural dyes. You could use fruit, vegetables, tea or henna. See if you can create four or more different shades with the same batch of dye. Try tying the fabric or dip-dyeing for different effects.
- Create your own handwoven swatches. Try weaving a mixture of regular threads with other materials such as thin copper wire (always wear safely goggles when working with wire). How does it affect the texture and structure of the fabric? Can you mould or shape it?

SACRED AND SPLENDID

Identity, symbols and meaning

In the Exhibition

- Some of the clothes and textiles in these sections include scenes from nature, courtly (royal) life, processions, mythical battles and religious stories. What do the symbols or motifs tell you about the people who may have owned the objects? Sketch or note down what you see.
- Now look more closely at the clothing in these sections. What do you notice about the shape of the garment or the drape and layering of the fabric? Sketch the shape or outline.

At the Museum

- Look for:
 - The dragon robes in the China gallery (Room 44, Level 1)
 - The Christian robes in the Medieval & Renaissance galleries (Room 10, Level 0)
 - The Tudor and Elizabethan objects in the British galleries (Rooms 57 and 58, Level 2)
- Compare the garments worn by rulers and wealthy people from different cultures. Sketch the different styles, shapes, symbols and motifs you find.

Back at School

- Taking inspiration from some of the religious or royal clothing you saw at the Museum, try draping, pinning and layering lengths of fabric directly onto a mannequin to reflect different shapes and styles of outfit worn by rulers or royalty. Photograph what you create.

A GLOBAL TRADE

Pattern, style and taste

In the Exhibition

- This section looks at textiles that were made in India for different markets – including Britain, Indonesia, Thailand and West Africa. Choose one of the textiles designed for a different culture. Sketch the main pattern or motif used to decorate the textile.

At the Museum

- Visit the South-East Asia gallery (Room 47a, Level 1). Here you will see objects from Indonesia and Thailand. Explore the style of one of these cultures. Can you pick out any repeating patterns or symbols from the objects? Draw one of the patterns you find on to tracing paper. Now overlay your pattern onto one of the sketches you did in the exhibition to create a multi-layered and more complex pattern.
- Visit the Fashion gallery (Room 40, Level 1). Explore the 'Court and Country 1750–1800' case. Can you spot any influences from India? Are there any materials, styles or patterns inspired by Indian culture? Use tracing paper to draw the outline of an 18th-century day dress. Now overlay the tracing paper onto one of the patterns you have drawn in the exhibition to create a mix of styles for the design of the garment.

Back at School

- Have a go at customising a piece of traditional Indian fabric for a younger style. How could you adapt the pattern or design to make it appeal to a teenager? Could you add any embellishment detail to the fabric? Experiment with combining earthy colour tones with neons or pastels. Combine different styles of symbols and patterns.

TEXTILES IN A CHANGING WORLD

Luxury

In the Exhibition

- Look at the wedding outfits by Sabyasachi Mukherjee or the costume for actress Madhuri Dixit in *Devdas*, the most expensive Bollywood film made to date. These outfits take their inspiration from the opulence of the Maharajahs (Indian royalty) and are a celebration of the heritage of Indian textiles. They bring together multiple embellishment techniques and skilled craftsmanship. See how many different techniques you can identify.

At the Museum

- Visit the Fashion gallery (Room 40, Level 1). Find the case 'Radical Fashion' and explore the different types of textile embellishment on display. Are there any you can link back to the techniques you saw in the exhibition?
- Find the outfit designed by Christopher Kane for Topshop. How has the designer incorporated traditional Indian techniques into his design?

Back at School

- Research images online from the film *Devdas*. Look at some of the other lavish costumes worn by the characters.
- Try creating some swatches of hand-stitched sequins or bead work.

AT THE CUTTING-EDGE

Contemporary designers

In the Exhibition

- Think about the historic pieces you have already seen. How have the contemporary designers in this section used some of the traditional techniques in their designs? Sketch what you find.

At the Museum

- Use the 'Six Degrees' activity to make connections between historical and contemporary design.

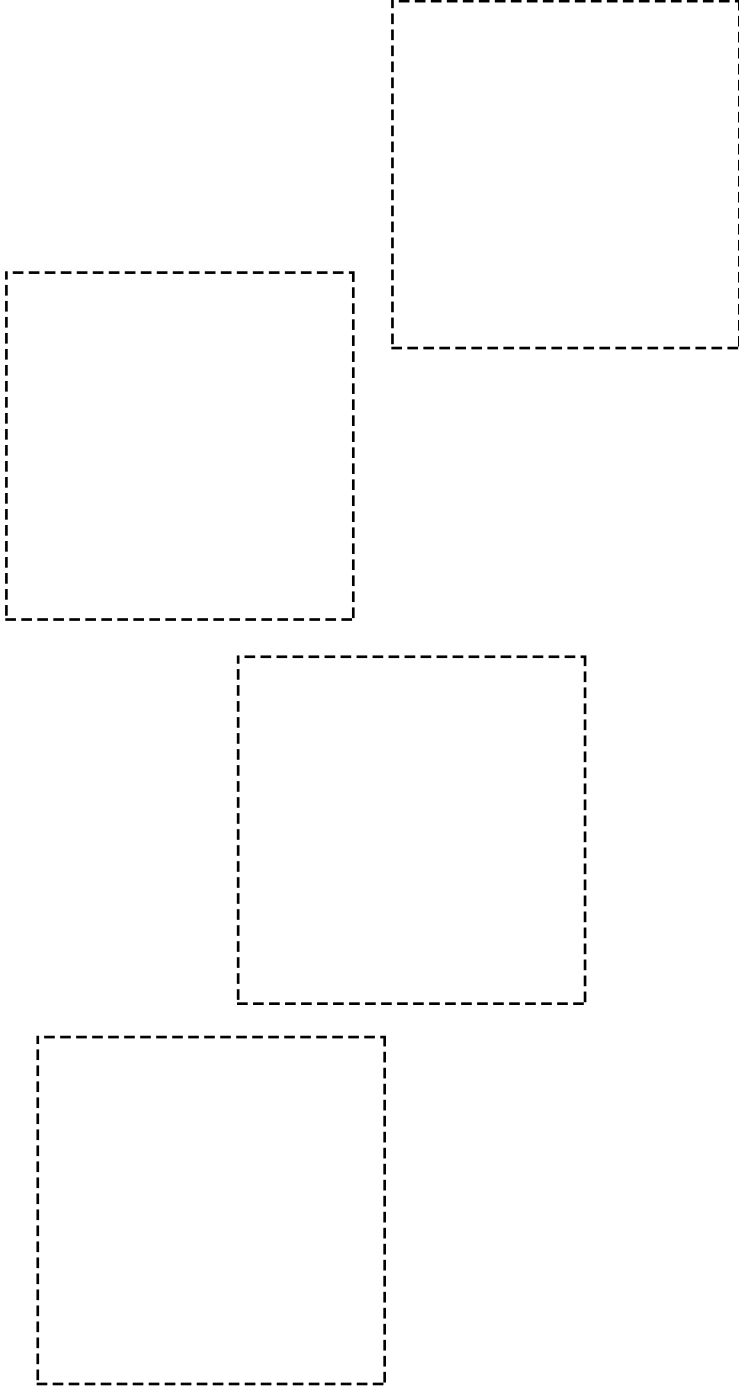
Back at School

- Take one of the sketches, woven swatches, block prints or sequin samples you made in the previous activities. Photograph it and upload the image to a digital programme such as Photoshop or Repper Pro. Use the programme to manipulate the colour and tone, replicate the pattern, tessellate and rotate. Print your new digital design onto paper or printable fabric. You could also try projecting the digital image onto a piece of white fabric or garment to create a different effect.

six degrees of separation is the theory that everyone and everything is six or fewer steps away



Dress, nylon and elastane
Designed by Christopher Kane for Topshop, 2009
Place of origin: India



Create links between objects and write how they are connected

- Pattern
- Print
- Embroidery
- Weave
- Colour
- Stitch
- Embellishment
- Fabric



Gown, block-printed cotton
Artist/maker unknown, about 1810
Place of origin: England