



An introduction to Christian art – teachers' notes

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As we continue to grow our free catalogue of teaching resources, we'd really appreciate a few minutes of your time to let us know what you liked and what could be improved. Please complete this [five-question survey](#).

All Bible references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

SLIDE 3: What is Christian art?

Christian art is sacred art; imagery which uses religious inspiration and themes to uplift the mind to the spiritual. It may be used by Christians as part of their worship of God, both in the past and present. Common subjects found in Christian artwork include people from Christianity (and in particular Jesus Christ), stories from the Bible, as well as depicting shapes, symbols and colours which have special religious meaning. Art is important in Christianity; in some other religions (such as Islam and Judaism) figurative representations are forbidden, so Christians make a much wider use of artwork than these religions.

SLIDE 4: Why is Christian art created?

Churches are often richly decorated with images illustrating Bible stories and passages. There is no direct prohibition on depicting God, Jesus or the saints. Many Christians have personal Bibles which are decorated. The pictures themselves are not considered holy.

Some of the most famous works of art in the world are inspired by Bible stories and characters.

SLIDE 5: The history of Christian art

Jesus and his first followers were Jewish and may well have held the idea that making images of God was breaking the second of the Ten Commandments. However, very quickly, many people from Greek and Roman backgrounds joined the faith bringing their traditional art, depicting gods and goddesses, myths and legends and these were quickly adopted and adapted.

You may want to talk to your pupils about the Second Commandment in relation to the history of Christian art:

'You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation[b] of those who love me and keep my commandments.' (Exodus 20: 4-6).

Westminster Abbey

Learning



Religious art is permitted, and promoted, because of Jesus being the image of God.

SLIDE 6: Who makes it?

Talk about the different images and the skills that would have been required to make them. A religious building, like Westminster Abbey, is, in itself, a work of religious devotion. St Edward the Confessor's Abbey took about 20 years to build, truly an act of devotion.

SLIDE 7: Who benefits from it?

Remind pupils about the different reasons Christian art is created, as outlined in Slide 4. Over time, some of the more practical reasons for creating Christian art may have become less important, but one thing that has never changed is that Christian art is created to glorify God.

This explanation focuses on how Christians benefit from Christian art, but you may also choose to discuss how people of other faiths or no faith also benefit in other ways when they view art within Christian churches. For visitors of churches, like Westminster Abbey, Christian art is an important tool for education and inspiration.

SLIDE 8: Find out more ...

This lesson acts as an introduction to the topic of Christian art. Continue the learning with our other resources:

- [The Bible in Christian art](#)
- [People in Christian art](#)
- [Light and colour in Christian art](#)
- [Shapes and symbols in Christian art](#)