



Art and Architecture trail – teachers’ notes

Thank you for downloading this resource. We hope that it will be a useful teaching tool during your visit to Westminster Abbey.

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](#).

1) The Pyx Chamber and the dark cloister

Look around you. Can you spot some of these Romanesque features? Tick off each one as you find it.



You might also like to explore the dark cloister, which is the passage next to the Pyx Chamber that looks a bit like a tunnel. The dark cloister also has round arches and small, narrow windows, some of which are stained-glass.

The first stone church on this site was built between 1040s and 1065 on the orders of King (and later Saint) Edward the Confessor. This area is all that survives from that original church. It was designed in the Romanesque (or Norman) architectural style. Edward was familiar with this style because he had spent time in Normandy, where it was popular. Features of Romanesque buildings include rounded or semi-circular arches, small dark windows and thick columns and walls. This design reflected that the church was like a fortress, standing against challenges it might face at the time, such as Viking invasion.

Enter the Abbey and walk to the Great West Door.

2) The nave

Look up and all around you. Discuss: What do you see? **Students might see and name a range of things including statues, flags, poppies, candles, gold, chandeliers. They might also mention architectural features such as tall ceilings, pointed arches, stained-glass windows and columns.**

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Can you make the same pointed arch shape with your arms? **Students could lift their arms up towards the ceiling, bringing their hands together to make a tall, pointed arch.**

Can you spot any small faces hidden up between the vaulting? **There are lots of small faces and figures of people, animals and imaginary beasts on the ceiling and high up on the columns around you. Invite students to see which ones they can find.**

From 1245 onwards, King Henry III had Edward the Confessor's church pulled down. It was rebuilt in honour of Edward, because he was a saint. The new Abbey was designed in the Gothic style, which was a style that followed Romanesque. Gothic buildings were designed to be tall and filled with natural light. This was achieved through architectural features such as pointed arches, ribbed vaulting and flying buttresses (which support the weight of taller buildings) and large windows (to bring in light and colour).

You might like to ask students to compare the two architectural styles from what they have seen. The below could be helpful to facilitate comparison:

Romanesque architecture

Rounded arches
Thick columns and walls
Small, narrow windows (dark)

Gothic architecture

Pointed arches
Tall, thin walls
Large windows (light)

Gothic churches were designed and built to glorify God. The pointed arches encouraged people to look upwards and think about Heaven. Bringing natural light into the building was important because, in Christianity, light represents the presence of God.

3) King Richard II portrait

How has the artist made Richard II look important? **He is wearing a crown and holding an orb (the round object) and sceptre (the gold staff). He is sitting on a chair that looks a bit like the Coronation Chair, which is next to the portrait. Students might see that he is wearing expensive looking clothes (a robe lined with fur). He is also wearing red (a royal colour) and is surrounded by gold.**

King Richard II was only ten years old when he was crowned. You may wish to point this out, particularly if your students are a similar age.

This is the earliest known portrait of an English monarch, dating from the 1390s. Portraits this old are very rare. If you look closely, you might spot that it's actually painted on six planks of wood.

4) Icons

Can you see how these colours have been used in the icon? **Jesus is wearing blue, and his halo (the circle around his head to show holiness) is also blue. As blue represents Heaven, this symbolises Jesus' divinity as the son of God. Gold represents God. The whole background of the icon has been gilded with gold leaf. You could ask students why they think this might be.**

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Think of something important to you. What colour would you use to represent it and why? **You could facilitate this by asking students what is important to them (family, friends, pets, special places, sentimental objects). The colour they chose to represent it might be symbolic (e.g. green for nature, pink for love) or might be the student's favourite colour or the colour of the object, for example.**

Students are welcome to light a candle with adult supervision (please remind them to be careful of sleeves and long hair) or you could light one candle as a group.

Christian art is sacred art which glorifies God. It might also be used as part of worship. Icons like these are written rather than painted and are made through a very specific process using traditional materials. They use colour and symbolism to express ideas about Christian faith. For example, anything written outside of the inner frame (such as Jesus' halo) refers to Heaven or the divine. The colour blue (also representing Heaven) is only used for important people in Christianity. One reason for this is because blue was made from grinding lapis lazuli, a semi-precious stone, which would have been very expensive.

Make your way towards the gold screen.

5) The quire screen

Look at the beautiful quire screen. Can you spot any repeating patterns? **There are lots of repeating patterns on and around the quire screen, including on the walls. You might like to ask students how many different ones they can see.**

Add your own special mark to one of the panels below. **Encourage students to draw or write their own individual mark on one of the panels on their trail. This could be something personal to them, like a favourite animal or symbol, or their name or initials.**

It took many different skills to build and decorate the Abbey you're in today, including the work of architects, painters, stonemasons, sculptors, iron workers and glaziers (those who work with glass), as well as hundreds of labourers. A religious building like Westminster Abbey is itself a work of religious devotion. Stonemasons would sometimes put their own unique mark on stones they had cut (called a mason's mark), or a small tweak in a repeating pattern, to show pride in their work.

As you walk through the golden quire screen, look up. In the past, all of the Abbey would have been covered in bright colours like this.

6) The quire

Can you match the shape to the meaning?

Circle – God is eternal and has no beginning and no end.

Trefoil – The Trinity: one God worshipped as three distinct persons (Father, Son and Holy Spirit).

Quatrefoil – The four Gospels - books in the Bible about the life of Jesus.

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Westminster Abbey is full of shapes with special meanings. As you move through the Abbey, encourage students to look all around them to spot examples of these and other interesting shapes. You may find them in the windows, walls, ceilings and amongst the monuments.

‘Sacred geometry’ is the term used for giving sacred or special meaning to geometric shapes used in the design and building of holy places. These shapes reflect the perfection of God.

7) The High Altar

Walk to the High Altar.

Look carefully at all the different shapes and how they fit together. Write down or draw some of the shapes you can see. **Students might see circles, triangles, squares, rectangles, hexagons, stars, crosses and diamonds.**

You are standing in the centre of the Abbey. What shape was it built in? Discuss: Why do you think this was? **Encourage students to look up to understand that they are standing in the centre of a cross-shaped church. The cross is the key symbol of Christianity, as the belief is that Jesus died on the cross.**

The Cosmati Pavement is a type of stone decoration known as Cosmati work. It was made over 750 years ago by Italian workmen and British stone carvers, using techniques and designs from Italy, and stones from England and Rome. As a pavement, it is unique in Britain. Your students might like to compare it to the tiled floor in the chapter house, which is a traditionally made English medieval floor.

This is the place where coronations take place. The Coronation Chair, on which the monarch is crowned, is placed in the centre of the Cosmati Pavement.

8) Rose windows

Can you think of any other reasons why coloured glass may have been used?

- **To create a special atmosphere – you might see the effect of sunlight shining through coloured glass. To Christians, this reflects the magnificence of God.**
- **The use of different colours also communicates ideas and meanings to people. For example, blue can represent Heaven and green can represent growth and rebirth.**

Design your own rose window. **Encourage students to think about some of their favourite shapes, patterns or stories, either in general or perhaps those they have seen or heard about during their visit.**

This activity could also be done back at school. You might like to talk about the symbolism of shapes and colours as the students design their own window, or discuss which stories, ideas or people they might choose to represent. Our [Christian art](#) resources could be useful for this. Large rose windows are characteristic of Gothic architecture – they are designed to let in lots of natural light. You could ask your students to compare them to the small, narrow Romanesque windows they saw in the cloisters.

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Rose windows are divided into segments which make them look similar to the petals of a rose. Often the tracery (the stone work which holds the windows) is highly decorative. Rose windows are also very symbolic. They have many lines of symmetry (as well as rotational symmetry) to show that God is perfect.

9) The Lady Chapel

How is this space different to the rest of the Abbey? Write down two or three words. **Students might say it is lighter or brighter, more decorative or detailed, or more colourful. They might also mention that it has a different smell.**

This feature is sometimes called ‘dissolving walls’. Discuss: Why do you think it has this name? **In the Lady Chapel, the wall space between the windows is very narrow compared to the rest of the Abbey. The large windows and thin structural stone give the impression that the walls are ‘dissolving’ into the windows. This allows light to enter the Abbey in a way that creates beautiful effects.**

The best place to see the dissolving walls is by heading to the back of the Lady Chapel, behind the tomb of King Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, to the RAF Chapel. However, please be aware that this a narrow walkway for visitors and can become very busy. Please walk around the tomb in a clockwise direction.

The Lady Chapel was built by King Henry VII between 1503 and 1519 in the Late (or Perpendicular) Gothic style, which is different to the rest of the Abbey. One of the characteristics of this style is fan vaulting, where the ribs on the ceiling are curved to resemble a fan, creating elaborate patterns. The ceiling of the Lady Chapel, carved by stonemasons, is a fan vaulted roof. It also features hanging pendants, which are sculpted ornaments suspended from the ceiling. You might like to ask your students whether they can spot them. It’s believed that the design of the whole chapel, including the ceiling but also the carvings of angels and saints on the walls around you, is meant to represent Heaven.



10) Poets’ Corner

Imagine you have a statue at the Abbey. How would you want it to look? Create a pose to show your classmates! **Encourage students to think about how they would stand and what facial expressions they would make. They might like to look around at nearby examples for inspiration.**

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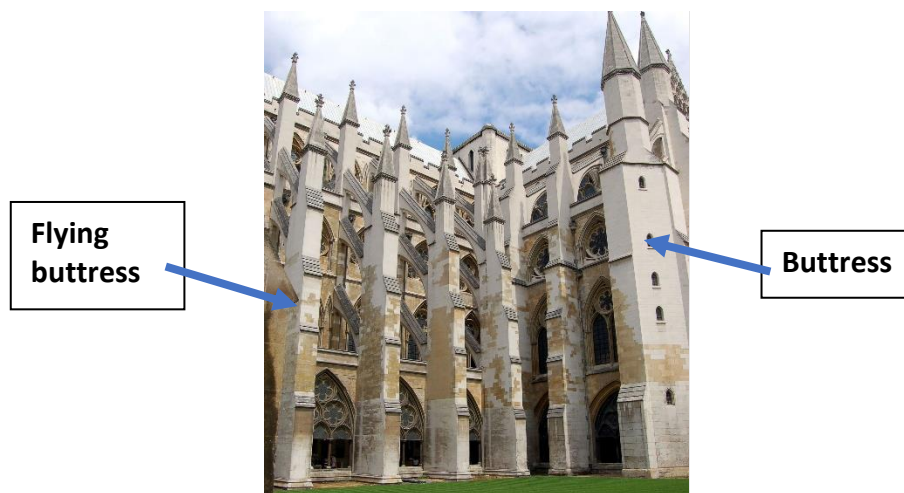
Originally the Abbey would have been covered in medieval wall paintings like the ones in Poets' Corner. As with stained-glass windows, wall paintings would have reminded Christians about stories and people important to their faith. However, within churches these were often painted over or destroyed. These paintings have survived because for hundreds of years they were hidden behind statues - they were only discovered during cleaning in 1934. The left painting depicts Jesus with St Thomas (also known as Doubting Thomas) and on the right is St Christopher carrying the Christ Child.

11) The cloisters

Return to the cloisters.

You might like to visit the chapter house at the end of your visit to consolidate your learning. In the chapter house there are examples of art and architectural features explored in this trail including a tiled pavement, a vaulted ceiling, stained-glass windows, statues, shapes and wall paintings.

If you have time at the end of your visit, you could sit in the cloisters sketching and reflecting. Encourage students to look for interesting architectural features. You might spot buttresses and flying buttresses, which help support the weight of tall, Gothic buildings. A buttress is a stone structure built against a wall to strengthen it, and a flying buttress is a stone structure with an arch that extends to the top of a wall.



Students can also write down their favourite thing about their visit, something that surprised them or that they want to find out more about.