

North African Illuminated Manuscripts

Children's Art Activity

The religion of Islam entered Egypt shortly after its inception and quickly spread west. Today Islam, as it has been for centuries is the dominant religion in Northern Africa. Islamic culture places a strong emphasis on literacy and writing in general and specifically of the Koran, its holy book. Artists spend years learning the art of beautiful handwriting called *calligraphy*, and book decoration called *illumination*. With few exceptions Islamic art is restricted to the use of abstract and geometric patterns. Beautiful patterns and circular designs predominate. Elaborate designs are found on the pages of handwritten scripture called manuscripts. Before the invention of the printing press these manuscripts were patiently written on vellum or parchment—stretched and dried animal skin. The designs reveal an interest in geometry, mathematics and precision as well as beauty.

Materials

parchment paper
circle templates
black sharpie pens
water color markers
calligraphic stamps
stamp pads
laminated examples
step by step pattern sheets
pencils

Procedure:

Step 1. Show the children examples of N. African Illumination and point out that the art work is purely geometric. Discuss how the designs, because of Islamic proscriptions against representational imagery, do not represent people, animals or objects from real life but rather are images of beautiful patterns.

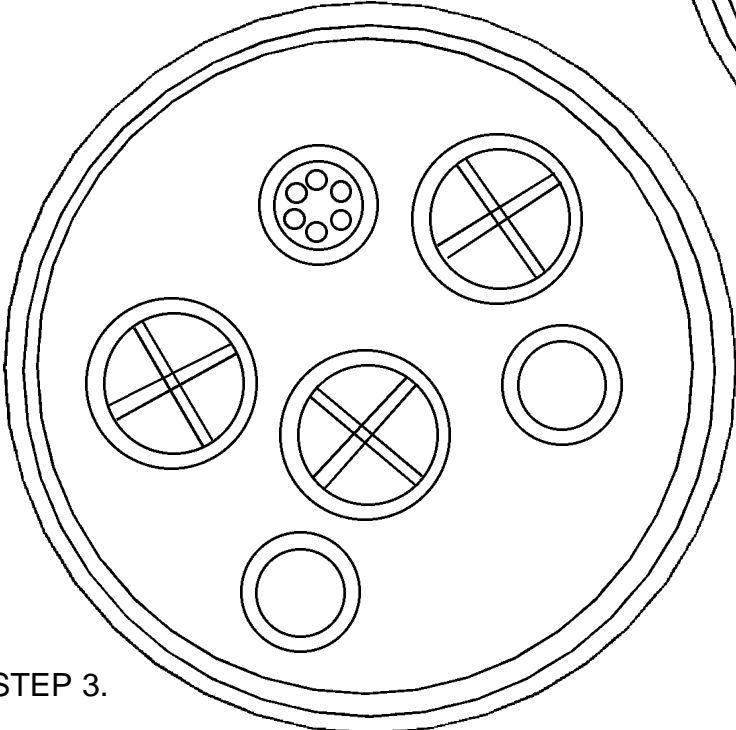
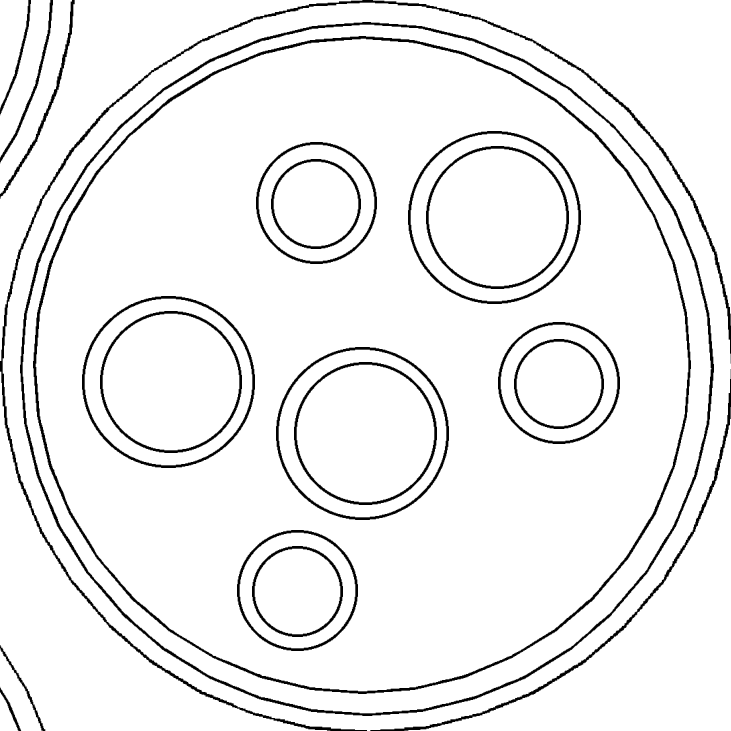
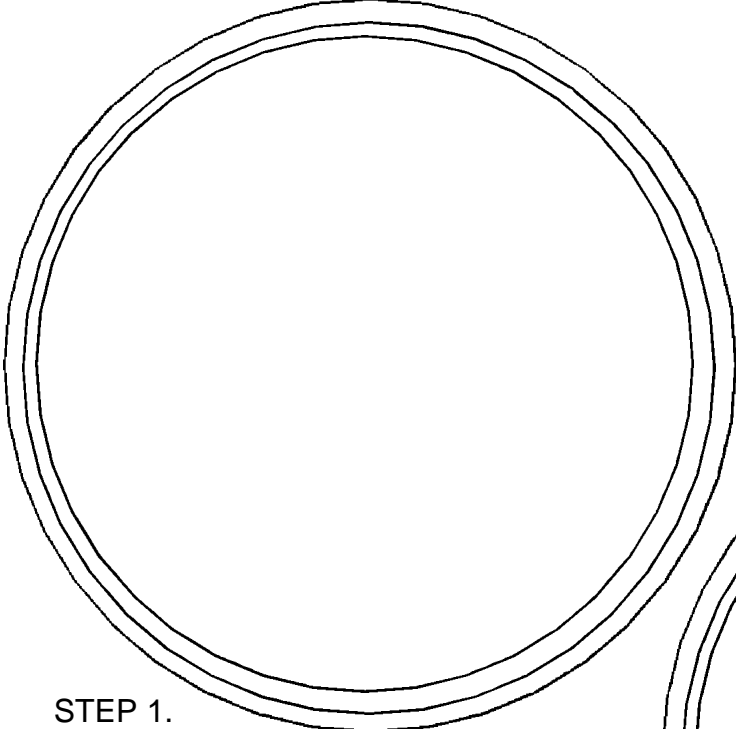
Step 2. Give each child a piece of parchment paper. Have the child select an arabic word and, using its corresponding stamp, stamp a word on the parchment paper. Ask the children to leave room on the page for a design.

Step 3. Starting with a circle template, have the children draw a large circle with a black permanent marker. Show them how to follow the steps on the pattern sheets provided. Or allow them to create their own patterns/designs. Designs are more interesting if the circle, other shapes and lines are repeated.

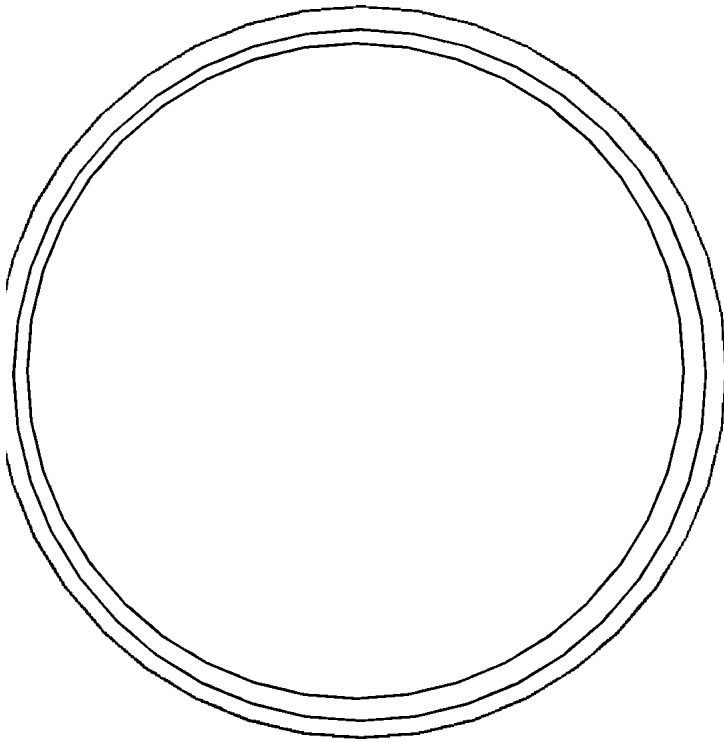
Step 4. Once all of their line work is finished have the children fill in their line work with watercolor marker. Ask the children to color solidly and neatly. Point out how the colors work best if repeated in a rhythmic way throughout the design.

Step 5. Write the translation of the child's chosen word on the back in pencil.

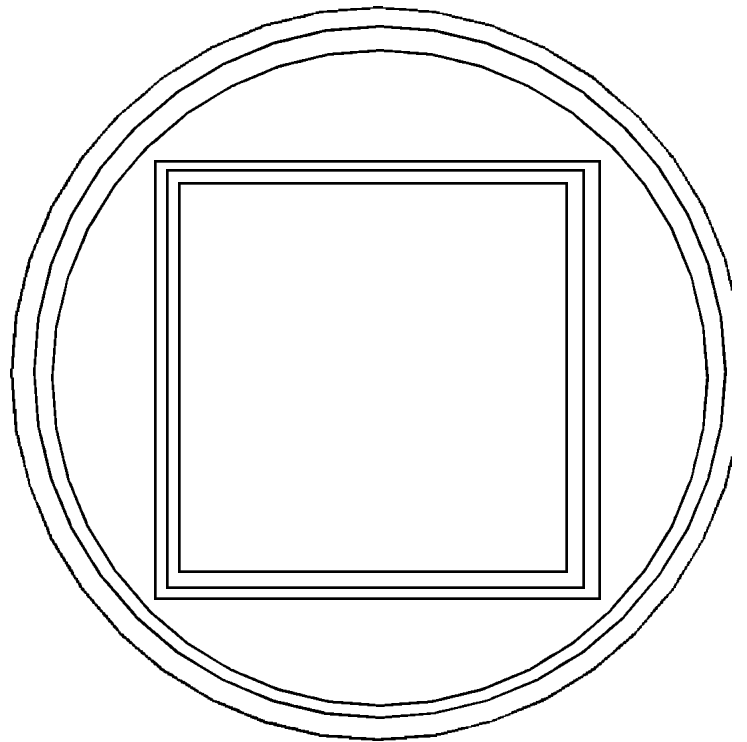
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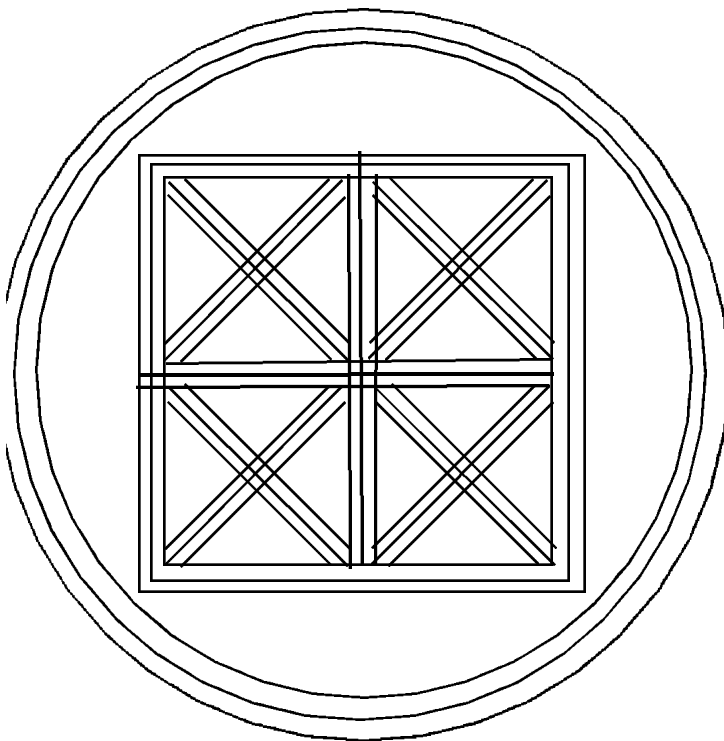
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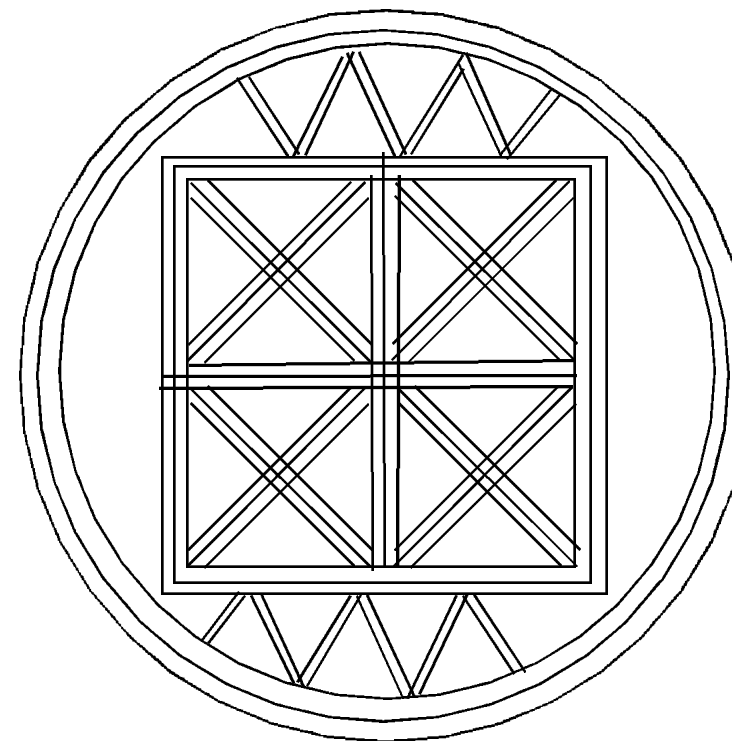
STEP 1.



STEP 2.



STEP 3.



STEP 4.