

An artwork for a religious building based on the four elements of creation



Time needed: 30-40 minutes

Suggested resources:

- paper
- paints, pens or coloured pencils
- paper or other materials for collage
- glue sticks

Idea:

While styles of worship and religious ideas can be quite different, core beliefs and symbolism is often shared by people of different faiths. The four elements of creation - earth, water, fire and air - and are often used in religions. Do some research to find how these elements are used and what symbols might be used to represent them.

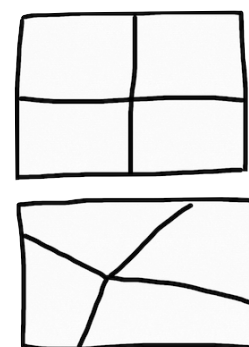
Imagine you have been asked to create an artwork for a church or another religious building that celebrates the four elements of creation.

Think about how your image might be divided between the four elements. Can you think of symbols that represent earth, water, fire and air and work these into your design? It might be a particular sign that has shared meaning, like the dove. Think about the colours you would use and the techniques needed to make the artwork.

Plan and create your artwork

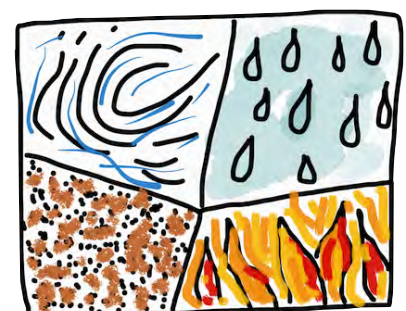
Step 1

Take your piece of paper or card. Decide how you are going to divide up the paper into the four parts. Decide how you might incorporate some symbols such as flames, an anchor, a bird or an olive branch.



Step 2

In each of the four parts use different marks, colours, thickness of paint or collaged materials to give an impression of the four elements.



Step 3

Decide if you want the parts to be divided up or whether they could merge into each other.

Further reading and things to think about

Symbols are shapes or signs that represent something else. Light is a symbol for God, divinity, and goodness in many religions. Water represents purity and a washing away of sin. Fire is often used to represent the Holy Spirit or the presence of God. The earth is often praised as life-giving or, by contrast, as a place of drought and fear.

Many religions share symbolism, for example rainbows, angels, light and water have similar meanings. People create artwork to inspire worship and praise God. These can be statues, paintings, mosaics like at St Paul's or stained glass windows, where symbols are worked into the design. In Islam, script, writing from their holy texts, is turned into art.

The first St Paul's church at Bow Common was built in 1858, to a traditional design that dated back over 1,000 years. During World War II (1939-45), the church was destroyed by a bomb. Building a new church started in 1958. The new church was designed to reflect the ideas of the post-war world; it was a fresh start. But the church continues to use symbolism that would be recognisable to

Christians 1,000 years ago and to people of other faiths.

In the mosaics at St Paul's, there are depictions of the four elements of creation at each corner of the mosaic scheme. In between there are angels with raised arms, a prayer pose used in many religions. Actions as well as signs can be symbolic. For example, we find ritual washing or cleansing in Christian baptism, in the Jewish mikva bath, and in Islamic wudu, the washing before prayers.

On the priest's chair, you can find doves and branches of an olive tree, which represent peace. God sent a dove carrying an olive branch to Noah after the great flood. This Bible story (do you remember that Noah built an ark and rescued two of every living creature?) is another example of water and earth as important elements in the relationship between God and people.

On the small altar, there is an anchor (painted in red) to symbolise that God is a source of stability in stormy times.

Learning objectives

- Understand that religions use symbolism to express faith and worship.
- Understand that symbolism can be found in creation, an action or activity as well as drawn or written signs
- Understand that different religions share common symbolism.

Curriculum links

- Religion KS2 - Beliefs about worship, the meanings of symbols and actions used in worship; common symbolism in different religions.
- Art KS2 - Use sketch books to record their observations and review ideas; improve their mastery of art and design techniques.