

Architects of Faith: Exploring Sacred Spaces

Learning objective: To identify, compare, and analyse the physical features and symbolic significance of different places of worship within major world religions.

Max the monkey has been busy measuring the proportions of various sacred buildings! Below is a table featuring key architectural or symbolic elements found in different places of worship. Your task is to match each feature to the correct religion and then provide a deeper analysis of why these features are essential to the believers who use them.

Word bank: Minaret · Altar · Bimah · Mandir · Synagogue · Mosque · Church · Gurdwara · Nishan Sahib · Icons

1. Identify the place of worship that features a 'Bimah' (a raised platform for reading the Torah) and explain why this central positioning is significant for the congregation. (4 marks)

2. Compare and contrast the function of a 'Minaret' in a mosque with the function of a 'Nishan Sahib' (flagpole) outside a Gurdwara. How do they both serve the local community? (4 marks)

3. Justify why many places of worship include a specific area for silence or meditation. How does the physical design of the building support this purpose? (3 marks)

4. If a new place of worship were being built in your local town, what three essential features would you include to ensure it is both welcoming and sacred? Explain your reasoning. (4 marks)

5. Explain why light (such as stained glass, candles, or lamps) is often a consistent feature across many different world religions. What might the light represent symbolically? (3 marks)

6. What might happen if a place of worship had no symbolic features or religious objects at all? Discuss how this might change the experience of someone visiting to pray. (4 marks)

Draw: Draw a bird's-eye view floor plan of a multi-faith community centre. Include at least four distinct zones that could be used by different religious groups for reflection, and label the architectural features you have designed for each.



Extension challenge: Research the 'Golden Ratio' or specific geometric patterns used in religious architecture (such as Islamic tessellation or the symmetry found in cathedrals). Write a short paragraph explaining how mathematics is used to express beauty and order in these sacred spaces.