Dazzling Details

Zoom in for a close look at art from the **Islamic world**!

**HIDDEN FEATURES AND CREATURES ARE JUST AROUND THE CORNER!**
Details offer clues about art—what it means, how it was made or used, and even who owned it.

Use this map and the details on each card to find amazing artworks in the Galleries for the Art of the Arab Lands, Turkey, Iran, Central Asia, and Later South Asia. Look closely to learn about some of the many cultures that make up the Islamic world.

Tear off the cards along the dotted lines. Read the questions and then turn over to find out about the works of art and for fun activities!
Gallery 450

Look closely at this bowl—are you getting the message?

Bowl with Arabic inscription (detail), 10th century; Nishapur, Iran; earthenware slip; Rogers Fund, 1965 (65.106.2)

Gallery 453

What is this smiling lion hiding?

Incense burner of Amir Salıf Al-Din Muhammad Al-Mawardi (detail), dated 1181–82; Iran; bronze; Rogers Fund, 1951 (51.56)

Gallery 462

Eyes wide open! What creatures are lurking?

The Book of Kings (Shahnama) of Shah Tahmasp (detail), about 1530–35; Iran, opaque watercolor, ink, silver, and gold on paper; Gift of Arthur A. Houghton Jr., 1970 (1970.301.73)

Gallery 455

Can you show me the way to the holy city?

Mihrab (detail), 1354–55; Iran; stonepaste, polychrome-glazed tiles, plaster; Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1939 (39.20)
This sculpture of a lion was made for a prince. It once held burning incense that could fill an entire room with scented smoke.

**Did you know?** The head of this lion is also a lid that you could lift to add more incense.

**Activity**

Look closely. At home, draw the places where the smoke might have escaped this smiling beast.

This bowl has a message written in beautiful handwriting called “calligraphy.” The message says, “Planning before work protects you from regret. Prosperity and peace.”

**Did you know?** Whenever you see Arabic letters on a work of art, it’s probably trying to send you a message. Look for other examples in the galleries.

**Activity**

At home, write your own message in a circle like the artist did on the bowl. *Plan ahead* to make sure it fits!

Muslims pray facing the holy city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. A decorated niche—or small curved space set into the wall—shows the direction of Mecca and is called a *mihrab* [mih-RAAB]. The combination of words from the holy books of Islam and beautiful patterns draws the worshiper’s attention.

**Did you know?** Craftsmen cut the tiles on site to make sure the shapes fit properly in the *mihrab*.

**Activity**

At home, complete the design by drawing your own pattern in the blank space.

Tiny details tell the story of *The Book of Kings (Shahnama)* [shah-nah-MEH]—a famous Iranian legend featuring battles between good and evil, heroic warriors, and mythical beasts. What is happening in the scene on this page?

**Did you know?** Some of the details in a painting like this were so small the artist used a brush with only a few hairs from a squirrel’s tail to create them.

**Activity**

In the galleries, pick a detail from a scene in *The Book of Kings*—the smaller the better! Without telling your family or friends which one you chose, describe its color, shape, and location to help them find it. Switch roles.
Did you see that flicker? It came from over here!

Lamp for the mausoleum of Amir Aydakin Al-‘Ala’i Al-Bunduqdar (detail), about 1285, Egypt; glass, enamel, and gilding; Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.985)

Can a signature be a work of art?

Tughra of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (detail), about 1555, Turkey; ink, opaque watercolor, and gold on paper; Rogers Fund, 1938 (38.149.1)

Whoa! Are we seeing double?

We change the carpets in this gallery every few years to protect them.

Carpet with palm trees, ibexes, and birds (detail), late 16th–early 17th century, present-day Pakistan; cotton, wool; Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.858)

Beware! Are you friend or foe?

Dagger with zoomorphic hilt (detail), 2nd half of the 16th century, India; hilt: gilt copper, ruby; blade: steel, gilt, copper; Purchase, Lila Acheson Wallace Gift, 2011 (2011.236)
Investigate the handle of this impressive royal dagger made over 400 years ago. Images of animals in combat represented a ruler’s power and military might. What creatures do you see fighting here? Who do you think will win?

Did you know? A ruby-studded dagger like this one was probably used for ceremonies and not in battle.

Activity

At home, write your initials above in fancy letters fit for a king. Fill the open spaces of the letters with designs.

Activity

The writing on this lamp tells us it once lit the tomb of a court official who lived in Egypt over 700 years ago. He was the Keeper of the sultan’s bow. Where do you see pairs of bows on this lamp?

Did you know? The stone pellets shot from bows like the ones on this lamp were called bunduq [BUHN-duk]. The word means both “hazelnut” and “bullet” in Arabic.

Look closely at the other lamps in this gallery. Choose a symbol and draw it here when you get home. What does it tell you?

Activity

Look at a carpet from a distance and notice the repeated colors and shapes. Get closer and look for individual details. Which details do you find most interesting?

Did you know? If you looked at any of these carpets under a microscope, you would find row upon row of tiny knots.

Activity

Imagine you are a reporter. At home, write a headline above for a news report about what may have caused this fierce fight.

Activity

Pick a carpet and choose one detail that repeats to form a pattern. At home, draw the detail you chose.

This is the official emblem, or tughra [TUHG-rah], of a powerful Turkish ruler known as Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent. It is like a signature that includes his title, name, and the name of his father.

Did you know? To help prevent fakes or forgeries, tughras deliberately included elaborate, swirling letters that were hard to copy.

The word means both “hazelnut” and “bullet” in Arabic.