Beliefs Made Visible

WHY SCRIPT MATTERS

With simple beginnings in the pre-Islamic period, Arabic script developed rapidly after the rise of Islam into not only a writing system but also an art form. Because the revelations of God to Muhammad were in Arabic, it became the language of Islam and the reading and writing of Arabic play a central role in the religion. In the first chapter of the Qur'an, God is described as "most generous, teaching by the pen" (96/3-4), and God is often described in Islamic poetry as the eternal calligrapher.

In this activity, you will think about the visual impact of various scripts. How does the appearance of a message affect its reception?

Garden of Happiness," an Ottoman Turkish poem, 2004, by Mohamed Sakariya (American, born 1942). Ink and colors on paper. *Asian Art Museum, Gift of Anne Breckenridge Dorsey and Carolyn J. Young*, F2005.73. Photograph © Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.

DURATION

10–15 minutes

MATERIALS

Writing utensils (color markers, pencils, etc.)
Paper

1. Look at the different versions of "The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog" below. Each sentence is made up of the same words but written in a different script or font. Take a look at each sentence and share with your partners the feeling or impression each font creates. What words might you use to describe each font?

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPS OVER THE LAZY DOG.

The quick brown fox jumps over the lazy dog.

2. Which font would you use for a diploma? For a party invitation? For a video game ad? Why?

3. Given what you have learned about fonts, what impact do you think the script of the Qur'an is supposed to have on the reader?

4. Now it's your turn! **Create a kit'alar**, a calligraphic work written on a rectangular piece of paper pasted onto a cardboard backing, or a series of *kit'alar*, called *murrakkalar*.

   To learn more about Arabic script, visit these resources:

   History of Islamic calligraphy

   Create a personal murakkaalar

Asian Art Museum