

The Taj Mahal

Pre-Reading

A. Warm-Up Questions

1. Look at the picture of the Taj Mahal. Describe the structure. What do you think of it?
2. Do you know where the Taj Mahal is located?
3. When do you think it was built?
4. Why do you think it was built?
5. What building materials do you think were used in the construction of the Taj Mahal?



B. Vocabulary Preview

Match up as many words and meanings as you can. Check this exercise again after you see them in context in the reading on page 2.

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|--------------------|--|
| ___ 1. monument | a) a skilled worker who makes things with his or her hands |
| ___ 2. emperor | b) a rounded roof with a circular base |
| ___ 3. mausoleum | c) very special, excellent |
| ___ 4. mosque | d) a ruler, a leader |
| ___ 5. elaborate | e) very valuable |
| ___ 6. reflect | f) a building in which Muslims pray |
| ___ 7. outstanding | g) to throw back light or an image |
| ___ 8. craftsman | h) a building or statue in memory of someone or something |
| ___ 9. precious | i) a large place to keep the body after a person dies |
| ___ 10. dome | j) having great detail, very carefully planned |

Reading

1. The Taj Mahal is a beautiful **monument** that is found in Agra, India.
2. Agra was the home of the Mughal emperors until 1637. Shah Jahan, the fifth Mughal **emperor**, had the Taj Mahal built as a **mausoleum** for his beloved second wife, Arjumand Banu. She died in 1630 after giving birth to their fourteenth child. When her remains were moved to the Taj Mahal, she became known as Mumtaz Mahal.
3. The Taj is part of a large complex that also includes a gateway, a garden, a **mosque**, and a guesthouse. The Persian-style garden is large and **elaborate**, with long pools of water that **reflect** the Taj. The central **dome** of the Taj is 58 feet (about 18 meters) wide and 213 feet (about 67 meters) high. Mumtaz Mahal is entombed in a lower chamber. After the Shah's death, his body was placed next to hers.
4. Shah Jahan employed Ustad Ahmad, the most famous Persian architect of the day, to design the complex. Twenty thousand workers and master **craftsmen** from all over India and Asia were brought to Agra to carry out his design. Over 1,000 elephants transported the finest building materials found in India.
5. The mausoleum is made entirely of white marble, inlaid with **precious** and semi-precious gems. Light from the sun reflects off the marble during the day and moonlight reflects off it at night, which adds to its beauty. The mosque and the guesthouse on either side of it were built from red sandstone. It took 22 years to complete the project.
6. The Taj Mahal is an **outstanding** example of Islamic art and architecture. Some people think it is the most beautiful building on earth. In 1983, the United Nations declared it a World Heritage Site. Over the years, millions of tourists have visited it.

*“Did you ever build
a castle in the air?
Here is one, brought
down to earth, and
fixed for the wonder
of the ages.”*

—Bayard Taylor, American novelist

Comprehension

A. True or False?

Read the statements below.

If the statement is true, write T beside the sentence.

If it is false, write F and correct the information.

- _____ 1. The Taj Mahal was built in the 17th century.
- _____ 2. Emperor Shah Jahan is buried in the Taj Mahal.
- _____ 3. All the people who worked on the Taj Mahal were from the local area.
- _____ 4. All the building materials for the Taj Mahal were found in Agra.
- _____ 5. The entire complex is made of white marble.

B. Ask & Answer

Practice asking and answering the following questions with your partner. Then write your answers in complete sentences in your notebook.

- Where is the Taj Mahal located?
- Why did Emperor Shah Jahan have the Taj Mahal built?
- Briefly describe the Taj Mahal.
- Who designed the Taj Mahal and who built it?
- How were the building materials transported to Agra?
- How does the white marble add to the beauty of the mausoleum?
- Why did the United Nations declare the Taj Mahal a World Heritage Site?

Vocabulary Review

A. Complete the Sentences

Complete the sentences using vocabulary from page 1.

You may need to change the word forms.

- Women have to cover their heads when they go into a _____ to pray.
- There is a big _____ in front of the government building. It was built in memory of all the soldiers who lost their lives in the wars.
- He makes very beautiful furniture. He is a very talented _____.
- They made very _____ plans for the wedding reception.
- He is an _____ high school student. He will do very well in university.

Vocabulary Review cont.

B. Choose the Correct Word

Choose the word or phrase with the closest meaning to the underlined word or phrase in the following sentences.

1. When Arjumand Banu died, her remains were moved to the Taj Mahal.
 - a) money
 - b) jewels
 - c) dead body
2. The Taj is part of a large complex.
 - a) complicated design
 - b) structure made up of several parts
 - c) country
3. Twenty thousand workers were brought in to carry out his design.
 - a) complete
 - b) lift up
 - c) draw
4. The mausoleum is made of white marble, inlaid with precious gems.
 - a) wood
 - b) famous pictures
 - c) valuable stones
5. The United Nations declared it a World Heritage Site in 1983.
 - a) first opened
 - b) formally announced
 - c) often visited

Discussion

1. A mosque is a place of worship for people of the Muslim faith. What do we call places of worship in other religions? Have you ever been to any other than your own?
2. Do people today place as much importance on burial spots as they did in the past?
3. What styles of architecture do you like or dislike? Do you prefer old or modern?
4. Name some other World Heritage Sites. Have you ever been to one? If so, describe it.