

If you only have 30 minutes ...

How can a single architectural structure push its way through cultural stereotypes by means of artistic representation and change a flawed worldview? The Taj Mahal has done just that, as well as in its depiction in drawings and paintings. Use information from the article to answer the short answer questions regarding Western Europe's perception of India prior to and following the building of the Taj Mahal.

In what ways has the cultural and historical significance of the Taj Mahal influenced Western European perception of India? Consider that countless people of multiple walks of life have been profoundly influenced and moved by the beauty of the Taj Mahal. Provide evidence to support your answer.¹

How did the artwork of professional British landscape painters Thomas and William Daniell alter the Western European perception of India?²

Considering the cultural significance of the Taj Mahal and its influence on the artistic world, discuss the different answers provided to the short answer questions above with those around you. Further discuss if the Taj Mahal has brought about any emotions in the class. Does the Taj Mahal captivate and fascinate the members of your class as it has explorers, merchants, painters and architects over the centuries? Describe how and in what ways?

Common Core Standard(s) Met:

CCRA.R.2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCRA.R.9 Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

1 Possible answers might include:

Emperor Shah Jahan envisioned the Taj Mahal as his magnum opus. Francois Bernier, personal physician on the Hindustani Court, deemed that the Taj Mahal “deserved to be listed among the wonders of the world.”

The “Taj Mahal by Moonlight” was a watercolor painted by Bengali artist Sita Ram in 1815. It sold for 10 times its original value at auction in 2023. This proves that the power of the Taj Mahal to add value to India continues to “transcend time.”

The Taj Mahal was praised by Jean-Baptiste Tavernier, a French merchant of gemstones and silk, in his travelog, *The Six Voyages of Jean-Baptiste Tavernier*. This travelog was published after his sixth trip to India in 1668. It was translated into English, German, Italian and Dutch. With the advertisement of the wonder to the Taj Mahal to such a wide language base, it drove a newfound Western interest in the East.

2 The popularity and recreation of their artwork positioned the Taj Mahal as a catalyst for a new perception of a sophisticated India. Prior to and during the beginning of the 17th Century there was a negative perception of India in the Western world as a “lesser civilization” and “a land of magic, mystery, and a strange religion.”