

INFORMATIONAL READING COMPREHENSION

Read the passage. Then answer the questions on the following page.

AZULEJOS: A TRADITION OF PORTUGAL

1 Wander through the streets of Lisbon, Portugal, and you'll see buildings covered in painted ceramic tiles, or *azulejos*. The tiles add beauty and character to the city's structures. But they have also played an important role in the history of Portugal's arts and commerce. Today, the **ubiquitous** Portuguese *azulejos* can be found in historical and modern buildings alike. The tiles are a characteristic feature of Portugal's urban landscapes.

2 The art of ceramic tile is not original to Portugal. Glazed tiles can be traced back to ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. The art form was first introduced to the Iberian Peninsula—where Portugal is located—by the Arabs who ruled the land there for centuries. In fact, the word “azulejo” comes from an Arabic word meaning “polished stone.” The Arab tradition of ceramic tiles favored geometric shapes, often set into mosaics that covered entire walls. This tradition is still evident in Portugal today. But the unique combination of influences from cultures throughout the world has given Portuguese *azulejos* their own special flair.

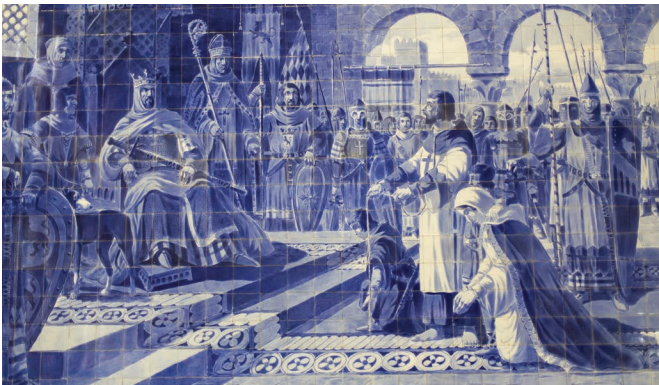


Image 1 An elaborate blue-and-white mural showing a scene from Portuguese folklore.

3 During the 1500s, artistic influences of the Italian Renaissance were incorporated into *azulejos*. The repetitive geometric patterns of the Arab tradition were replaced by individually painted tiles. Together, these tiles formed large murals portraying scenes from mythology, the Bible, and folklore. Some were made to look like wall tapestries, inspired by carpets imported from the East. In the late 1600s, the Dutch began producing blue-and-white tiles in the style of Chinese porcelain. The Portuguese adopted this style as well and began producing the tiles themselves. This style is the most dominant one still visible throughout Portugal's cities today.

4 The period from the late 1600s through the early 1700s is known as the *Ciclo dos Mestros*, or “Cycle of Masters,” for *azulejos* in Portugal. The Portuguese produced great quantities of *azulejos* in many different styles and artistic traditions. Then, in 1755, Portugal's capital, Lisbon, was unexpectedly destroyed. A great earthquake, followed by a tsunami and fires, devastated the city. The disaster set off yet another shift in the art of *azulejos*. The city needed to be entirely rebuilt. At the time, tiles were more affordable than stone for covering the facades of buildings. They were also relatively easy to maintain and resistant to the elements. Accordingly, *azulejos* took on a more **utilitarian** purpose. Simpler styles and patterns were once again favored as a way to support the rebuilding efforts.



Image 2 Many buildings in Portugal are covered in *azulejos* with a simple, repeating geometric design.

5 *Azulejos* continued to evolve throughout the 1800s and 1900s, incorporating influences from new artistic movements. In fact, during the 1970s and 1980s, *azulejo* murals were put in Lisbon's underground subway stations. These murals were designed by contemporary artists. Some of these modern *azulejo* murals feature a pop-art, comic-book style; others use lines and color to create more abstract images; and still others play on some of the traditional artistic styles of *azulejos*, but with a modern twist.

6 Despite the modern take on *azulejos*, many artisans in Lisbon still produce *azulejos* in the traditional ways. First, clay is hand-pounded into tile molds. The soft tiles are dried for one to two months. Then they're baked for eighteen hours at temperatures of over 2,000 degrees Fahrenheit. After that, the tiles are hand-painted and finally fired in a kiln, where their colors come to life. Artisans sell their hand-crafted tiles at home and throughout the world. This centuries-old tradition is still alive and thriving in modern Portugal.

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AZULEJOS: A TRADITION OF PORTUGAL

Answer the following questions about "Azulejos: A Tradition of Portugal."

1. What are azulejos?

2. What does the word **ubiquitous** mean as it is used in the first paragraph?

- A. old or vintage
- B. vibrant or loud
- C. found all throughout a place
- D. unique

3. Which group of people introduced tile-making to what is now known as Portugal?

- A. Dutch traders from the north
- B. Arabs who ruled the Iberian Peninsula
- C. Italian artists during the Renaissance
- D. ancient Egyptian travelers

4. What makes azulejos uniquely Portuguese? How are they different from tile-making traditions in other parts of the world?

5a. What central idea is conveyed in paragraph 3?

5b. How does Image 1 support the central idea of paragraph 3?

6. Which of the following is the best synonym for **utilitarian** as it is used in paragraph 4?

- A. boring
- B. somber
- C. decorative
- D. functional

7. Describe the effect of the great earthquake of 1755 on the Portuguese azulejo tradition. Cite specific evidence from the text to support your response.

8. List two ways that azulejos are still relevant in modern Portugal.

- 1. _____

- 2. _____

9. The steps in the traditional process for making azulejos are mixed up. Number from 1 to 5 to put them in the correct order.

- _____ Tiles are dried for 1-2 months.
- _____ Tiles are baked at 2,000°F for 18 hours.
- _____ Clay is pounded into tile molds.
- _____ Tiles are fired in a kiln.
- _____ Tiles are hand-painted.

10. In your own words, state the central idea of the passage as a whole.

