

CHRISTMAS AND DIVALI: What can we learn from the celebrations?

AT1:

Pupils will:

- *Acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of Christianity and the other principal religions represented in Great Britain and their associated beliefs, experiences and practices.*
- *Acquire and develop knowledge and understanding of some of the influences of life experiences, beliefs, values and faith traditions upon individuals, communities, societies and cultures.*

AT2:

Pupils will:

- *Respond to core questions with reference to the teachings and practices of religions, and to their own understanding and experience.*
- *Reflect on their own beliefs, values, perceptions and experiences in the light of their study of religion.*
- *Develop positive attitudes of respect towards other people who hold views and beliefs that are different from their own.*

Pupils will be enabled to:

- *Explain the stories behind the Hindu celebration of Divali and the Christian celebration of Christmas, and the significance and meaning of some of the events in the stories.*
- *Know and understand the significance of these two festivals for believers, what the beliefs are behind the stories and the customs of celebration.*
- *Consider what they have learnt for themselves from the Hindu and Christian stories, reflecting on themes such as good and evil, light and darkness.*
- *Consider what the most important events are in their own lives, and what they mean to pupils themselves.*

SESSION 1: Introduction – Special events

- 1. Discuss their own experiences of special times, occasions, ceremonies and important events.**
 - *Discuss what makes these special times stand out.*
 - *Explore what pupils believe about these occasions and what makes them special.*
 - *What has been a special time in your life and why?*
- 2. Write and draw pictures about a special occasion and what it meant to them.**

SESSION 2: The story of Rama and Sita

- 1. Listen to the story of Rama and Sita.**
 - *The emphasis is on the triumph of good over evil.*
 - *Discuss how the festival of Divali celebrates the triumph of good over evil.*
 - *Discuss the activities that are carried out during Divali.*
 - *Where would you find the story of Rama and Sita?*
 - *How did the story of Rama and Sita end? Was it a good or bad ending?*
 - *Why do Hindu's light diva lamps at Divali time?*
 - *How do you think a Hindu child feels at Divali time?*
- 2. Rewrite the story of Divali in cartoon strip form.**
 - *Include some writing and pictures about the Festival of Divali.*
- 3. Make Rangoli patterns.**
 - *Use chalk on the playground and/or crayons on paper.*

SESSION 3: The story of Lakshmi and the Washerwoman.

- 1. Discuss the story of Lakshmi and the poor washerwoman and the string of pearls and making fresh starts at the beginning of the year.**
 - *Discuss the feelings associated with losing and being lost, finding and being found.*
 - *Have you ever lost anything precious, if so how did this make you feel?*
 - *Can you think of any other stories you have heard in which good triumphs over evil? Make a long class list.*
- 2. Rewrite the story of Lakshmi and the washerwoman, in cartoon strip form.**

SESSION 4: Good versus evil.

- 1. Discuss the belief that good triumphs over evil.**
 - *List and discuss 'goodies and baddies' in children's film and story.*
 - *Talk about pupils' own experiences and knowledge of national and international news items about good versus evil.*
 - *Is our opinion on who / what is 'good' and who / what is 'evil' different to other people's opinions? Who is right?*
 - *Does 'good' always triumph over 'evil'?*
- 2. Make diva lamps and Divali cards (consider appropriate messages to put inside Divali cards)**

SESSION 5: Christmas

1. Discuss the Christmas Story

- *Eg; the visit of Gabriel to Mary, the trip to Bethlehem, the birth and the visits by shepherds and magi.*
- *Explore who Christians believe Jesus is, the significance of his birth on earth, the meaning of the gifts given by the magi.*
- *Explore the experience in the Christmas story of supernatural happenings such as the involvement of angels and the appearance of lights – visits to Mary, Joseph, Elizabeth and the shepherds and the star of Bethlehem.*
- *Discuss light as a symbol for Jesus and the use and significance of candles in Christian celebrations of Christmas.*
- *Remind pupils that they learned about the significance of light at Divali for Hindus.*
- *Discuss pupils thoughts on the angels, and what they think Christians believe about the significance of light and the role of angels as messengers.*
- *List all the ways in which Christians celebrate Christmas. Discuss which activities are distinctively Christian celebration (eg. making nativity cribs), and which are from celebration which has no particular religious place (eg. Christmas food/parties).*
- *Are some 'traditional' cards harder to categorise?*
- *Consider the question: Is Christmas for everyone, or just for the Christians?*
- *Where would you find the stories of the birth of Jesus?*
- *How does light play an important part in the story of the Nativity?*
- *At Christmas which celebrations are directly related to the Nativity story?*
- *What does the word celebration mean?*

2. Produce a poster or collage, and writing, to illustrate light as symbol for Jesus and how light features in at Christmas. (eg; angels, star, candles etc)

SESSION 6: What have we learnt?

1. Recap work covered in this unit of work.

- *What can we learn from the two festivals we have studied for ourselves?*
- *What are the most important events in the year for pupils? Why? How are they celebrated?*

2. Ask all pupils to choose a special time and/or place from what they have learnt about during this unit of work on 'Celebration'. Write about and illustrate the time and/or place explaining what makes it stand out, and what its special significance is for the believer, outlining what beliefs, experiences, feelings and emotions are associated with the celebration.

The Story of Diwali

Once upon a time there was a great warrior, Prince Rama, who had a beautiful wife named Sita.

There was also a terrible demon king, Ravana. He had twenty arms and ten heads, and was feared throughout the land. He wanted to make Sita his wife, and one day he kidnapped her and took her away in his chariot. Clever Sita left a trail of her jewellery for Rama to follow.

Rama followed the trail of glittering jewellery until he met the monkey king, Hanuman, who became his friend and agreed to help find Sita. Messages were sent to all the monkeys in the world, and through them to all the bears, who set out to find Sita.

After a very long search, Hanuman found Sita imprisoned on an island. Rama's army of monkeys and bears couldn't reach the island, so they began to build a bridge. Soon all the animals of the world, large and small, came to help. When the bridge was built, they rushed across it and fought a mighty battle.

When Rama killed the evil Ravana with a magic arrow, the whole world rejoiced. Rama and Sita began their long journey back to their land, and everybody lit oil lamps to guide them on their way and welcome them back.

Ever since, people light lamps at Diwali to remember that light triumphs over dark and good triumphs over evil.



Lakshmi and the Clever Washerwoman

Once upon a time, a king and queen lived in a beautiful palace. The Queen was rather spoiled and vain. Every Divali, she would ask her husband for the most expensive presents. Each year, the King gave her whatever she asked for, however difficult it was for him to get it. One particular year, the Queen had asked for a seven-string necklace of large pearls. The King sent a thousand divers to the far corners of the earth searching for those pearls. Just before Divali, the divers returned. They had, at great peril to their own lives, found just the right oysters and, from them, pulled out only those rare pearls that were large and perfect. The grateful King thanked the divers profusely and gave them large sums of money for their labours. He sent the pearls to the royal jeweller to be strung and on Divali morning he was able to present his wife with the gift she desired. The Queen was jubilant. She put on the necklace and immediately ran to the mirror to admire herself. She turned her head this way and that, convinced that she was, indeed, the most beautiful creature in the whole world.

It was the Queen's custom to go to the river every morning to bathe, accompanied by a bevy of handmaidens. On this particular morning when she got to the river bank, she undressed and, just as she was poised to dive into the water, she remembered that she was still wearing her seven-string necklace of pearls. So she stopped and took it off, laying it on top of her clothes. 'Watch my necklace,' she called, as she dived off a rock. The handmaidens watched the necklace carefully, but something happened which even they were unprepared for. A crow flew down from a nearby tree, picked up the necklace and flew away with it. The handmaidens screamed and shouted but it was no use. The crow had flown out of their sight.

When the Queen found out what had happened she cried with frustration and anger. She went back to the palace and, still sobbing, told the King of her misadventure. The King tried to console her, saying that he would get her a prettier necklace but the Queen pouted and said that she would not be happy until her seven-string necklace was found.

So the King summoned his drummers and heralds. He ordered them to go to every town and village in the kingdom, telling the people that a reward would be offered to anyone who found the Queen's necklace. Meanwhile, the crow had flown from the manicured palace grounds to one of the lowliest slum areas. Here he dropped the necklace on the doorstep of a poor washerwoman's hut. The washerwoman did not live alone. She shared the hut with her constant companion, an old, toothless crone, called Poverty. The two were not particularly fond of each other but they had been together ever since the washerwoman could remember and had become quite used to each other's ways. As it happened, the two occupants of the hut were away when the crow flew by. The washerwoman was collecting dirty laundry and Poverty, as usual, was accompanying her. On their way home, they passed the village market where they stopped to hear the King's drummers and the proclamation about the Queen's necklace. Poverty began to cackle, 'Oh the ways of royalty! What will they lose next? Why do they bother us common people with their antics!' But the washerwoman was thinking other thoughts. She had never owned any jewellery and wondered how she would look in a seven-string necklace.

When they got home and the washerwoman put her bundles down, the first thing she noticed was the pearl necklace lying on her doorstep. She picked it up and was about to put it on when a thought occurred to her. 'I have an errand to run,' she told Poverty, 'I will be back in a minute.' So saying, she rushed off with the necklace and headed straight for the King's palace. The guards tried to stop her but when she told them what she was carrying, they escorted her directly to the King. The King was very happy to get his wife's necklace back. He praised the washerwoman for her honesty and then, picking up a large purse containing the reward money, he said, 'Here, take this for your pains. It should keep you well fed and well clothed for the rest of your days.' To his surprise, the King found himself being refused. The washerwoman seemed to have something else in mind. She said, 'I am a poor, humble washerwoman, Your Majesty. I do

not want the money which you are so kindly offering me. There is one favour, however, that I hope you will grant me. Today is Divali. I want you to decree that no one, not even you, will light any oil lamps in his home. Today I want all houses to be dark. All except mine. I want mine to be the only lighted house in the entire kingdom.' The King, grateful that he had got off so lightly, agreed. He sent out his drummers and heralds with the decree as he had promised. He ordered his palace servants to take down all the oil lamps and to put them into storage for the following year. The washerwoman rushed home, buying as many oil lamps along the way as she could afford. She arranged these carefully outside her hut and waited. Night fell. The washerwoman lit all her lamps and looked around. The rest of the kingdom to the north, south, east and west, lay in total darkness.

Lakshmi had, of course, left the heavens and was ready to perform her yearly duty of going from house to house, blessing with prosperity all those that were well lit. This year, something was wrong. There were no lights to be seen anywhere. Poor Lakshmi stumbled along in the darkness, from one house to another, but nowhere could she see the slightest trace of a welcoming glimmer. Suddenly she spotted a glow of bright lights far away in the distance. She began running towards it. It was the middle of the night when a very exhausted Lakshmi got to the washerwoman's hut. She began pounding on the door, crying, 'Let me in, let me in!' This was the moment that the washerwoman had been waiting for. She called out to Lakshmi, saying, 'I will let you in only on the condition that you stay with me for seven generations.' Just then, the washerwoman looked behind her and saw Poverty trying to creep out through the back door. She rushed to the door and locked it. Poverty began to shout, 'Let me out, let me out!' You know there isn't room in this hut for both Lakshmi and me.' So the washerwoman said, 'All right, I will let you go but only on the condition that you do not return for seven generations.' Poverty said, 'Yes, yes, I will do as you ask. Just let me out of this place. I cannot stand the sight of Lakshmi.' At that the washerwoman opened the back door and Poverty rushed out. Then she hurried to the front door where Lakshmi was pounding desperately and crying, 'Let me in, let me in.' 'Only on the condition that you stay with me for seven generations,' the washerwoman repeated. 'Yes, yes,' said Lakshmi, 'I will do anything you ask, only let me in.' And so the poor washerwoman let Lakshmi into her home and it was blessed with wealth and prosperity for seven generations.

Diwali Festival In India

"Diwali", the festival of lights, illuminates the darkness of the New Year's moon, and strengthens our close friendships and knowledge, with a self-realization!

Diwali is celebrated on a nation-wide scale on Amavasya - the 15th day of the dark fortnight of the Hindu month of Ashwin, (October/November) every year. It symbolizes that age-old culture of India which teaches to vanquish ignorance that subdues humanity and to drive away darkness that engulfs the light of knowledge. Diwali, the festival of lights even to-day in this modern world projects the rich and glorious past of India.

Every year on the dark nights of Diwali the sound of firecrackers announces the celebration of the **favourite festival of Indians**. Homes are decorated, sweets are distributed by everyone and thousands of lamps are lit to create a world of fantasy. Of all the festivals celebrated in India, Diwali is by far the most glamorous and important. Enthusiastically enjoyed by people of every religion, its magical and radiant touch creates an atmosphere of joy and festivity.

The ancient story of how Diwali evolved into such a widely celebrated festival is different in various regions and states of India. In the north, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Bihar and the surrounding areas, Diwali is the day when **King Rama's** coronation was celebrated in Ayodhya after his epic war with Ravana, the demon king of Lanka. By order of the royal families of **Ayodhya** and **Mithila**, the kingdom of which Sita was princess, the cities and far-flung boundaries of these kingdoms were lit up with rows of lamps, glittering on dark nights to welcome home the divine king Rama and his queen Sita after 14 years of exile, ending with an across-the-seas war in which the whole of the kingdom of **Lanka** was destroyed.

On the day of Diwali festival, doorways are hung with torans of mango leaves and marigolds. **Rangolis** are drawn with different coloured powders to welcome guests. The traditional motifs are often linked with auspicious symbols of good luck. Oil diyas are arranged in and around the house. Because of these flickering lamps, the festival has acquired its name : Dipawali or Diwali meaning '**a rows of lamps**'. On this day, people buy something for the house or some jewellery for the women of the house. It is auspicious to be buy something metallic, such as silver.

Whatever may be the fables and legends behind the celebrations of Diwali, all people exchange sweets, wear new clothes and buy jewellery at this festive time. Card parties are held in many homes. Diwali has become commercialized as the biggest annual consumer spree because every family shops for sweets, gifts and fireworks. However, in all this frenzy of shopping and eating, the steady, burning lamp is a constant symbol of an illuminated mind.

