

# Deepavali (Diwali)—The Festival of Lights

## Hinduism

Hinduism is one of the world's major religions and holds the distinction of being the most ancient. It is sometimes referred to as *Sanatan Dharma* (Eternal Religion). It is not a single religion with one founder, single teacher or prophets.

Hinduism is based on respect and considered the most tolerant and peace-loving religion. Sacred texts written in Sanskrit, known as the Vedas, guide Hindus in their daily lives. The Vedas are the law, and most beliefs, concepts and ceremonies are based on information contained within the Vedas.

Hindus believe in a universal soul or god called Brahman who takes on many forms that some Hindus worship as gods or goddesses in their own rights. The three most important Hindu gods (which are forms of Brahman) are:

- **Brahma, the Creator:** Lord Brahma symbolises the Supreme Reality who brings forth creation. His divine consort is Saraswati, the Goddess of learning and knowledge, and she provides Lord Brahma with knowledge necessary for the process of creation.
- **Vishnu, the Preserver:** Known as the preserver of the universe, Lord Vishnu is the master of the past, present and future, supporting and sustaining the Universe and everything within. His divine consort is Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth and prosperity, both material and spiritual. She is especially worshipped during the festival of Deepavali.
- **Shiva, the Destroyer:** the Lord of mercy and compassion, Lord Shiva is responsible for change, both in the form of death and destruction as well as spiritually (such as shedding old habits). His divine consort is Shakti, Goddess of household and motherhood.

## Ten Incarnations of Lord Vishnu

The worship of Lord Vishnu is very popular among Hindus. It is believed he has ten incarnations which relate to human evolution from aquatic life to human life, consistent with Darwin's theory of evolution.

Hindus believe in *samsara* (reincarnation) where the soul is eternal and lives many lifetimes in one body after another, animal or human. They believe all forms of life contain a soul and all souls have the chance to experience life in different forms. This cycle is governed by karma—how acts you commit in life determine the fate in lives that follow. Hindus aim to live a life that will cause their next life to be better.

### ACTIVITY

Download the *Ten Incarnations of Lord Vishnu* blackline master from the Teacher Toolkit and have students illustrate each of Vishnu's incarnations.

## The story of Rama and Sita

The festival of Deepavali stems from a story about Rama and Sita, an ancient Sanskrit tale from the Ramayana written between 500 and 100 BCE. Rama is one of Vishnu's incarnations and Sita is an incarnation of his divine consort Lakshmi.

The great warrior, Prince Rama, lived in Ayodhya and was married to the beautiful Sita. The prince was meant to take over his father King Dasaratha's throne. But his wicked stepmother, Queen Kaikeyi, tricked the king into banishing his son into the forest. Sita refused to stay in the safety of the palace and went with her husband into the forest.

They lived a simple, peaceful and happy life, until one day Sita was spotted by the demon king Ravana who decided to kidnap her, taking her to the island of Lanka and making her his wife. Little did Ravana know that Sita had scattered her jewellery piece by piece to make a trail for Rama to follow. With the help of a monkey warrior named Hanuman and other animals from the woods, Rama fought the evil demons that were keeping his wife prisoner. He eventually defeated Ravana in battle and rescued Sita.

After the death of the evil demon king, the world rejoiced and Rama and Sita returned to Ayodhya. The people lined the streets with flags and flower garlands, and in every home an oil lamp was put in the window to help guide Rama and Sita and their great army back home.

## Rama and Sita Shadow Puppets

### ACTIVITY

As a class, perform a shadow puppet show based on the story of Rama and Sita. Divide the class into small groups and allocate a section of the story to each group. Download the *Rama and Sita Shadow Puppets* blackline master from the Teacher Toolkit and have students write the dialogue and create puppets for their scenes. Allocate time in the afternoon for a special performance of the puppet show.

## Celebration

Deepavali (more commonly known by its contraction, Diwali) literally means 'a row of lamps' in Sanskrit, and is the most important of the Hindu festivals. It is a five-day celebration which occurs on the 15th day of the Hindu month of Kartika. This is around October/November on the Gregorian calendar.

### The festival consists of:

**Day 1: Dhanteras.** This day marks the beginning of the Deepavali celebrations. Many Hindus consider it favourable to buy gold or silver articles as it is believed that some form of precious metal is a sign of good luck. People decorate the outside of their homes with Rangoli patterns and hang a banner across the top of their front doors as a sign of welcome. Rangoli patterns can be geometric or sometimes take the form of a fruit, tree, flower or religious Hindu figure. They are created from a

mixture of rice flour and water, although sometimes coloured sand is used. It is believed that if the Rangoli patterns and the banner are particularly beautiful, the goddess Lakshmi will pay them a visit. Diyas (oil lamps) are lit to banish evil spirits and to tempt Lakshmi to their homes.

## Rangoli Patterns

### ACTIVITY

Download the five *Rangoli Patterns* blackline masters and have students create their own colourful patterns, using glitter to make them stand out. Hang the finished examples around the classroom to entice Lakshmi to visit.

**Day 2: Choti Diwali.** The second day of the festival is the celebration of Lord Krishna's victory over the demon, King Narakasura. Again people light their homes with diyas and set off firecrackers. *Choti* means 'small', implying that celebrations on this day are on a smaller scale than the main Deepavali celebrations.

**Day 3: Lakshmi Puja.** On the third day of celebration, Hindus cleanse themselves and join with their families and *Pandit* (priests) to worship Lakshmi to bring them good luck and prosperity in the coming year. They also celebrate that good has triumphed over evil by lighting hundreds of diyas which they place around their home, in gardens and on rooftops and outer walls. This commemorates the oil lamps that were lit during Rama and Sita's homecoming to Ayodhya.

## Letters to Lakshmi

### ACTIVITY

Challenge students to write letters to Lakshmi inviting her to visit.

**Day 4: Govardhan Puja.** The fourth day of the festival is Hindu New Year. On this day, Gudi Padwa is celebrated. It is symbolic of love and devotion between husband and wife. People invite their newly married daughters, along with their husbands, to have special meals and give them gifts.

**Day 5: Bhai Dooj.** The last day of the Deepavali festival marks the special relationship between brothers and sisters; without it the festival is incomplete. Siblings share a meal and exchange gifts, signifying the duty of a brother to protect his sister as well as the sister's blessings for her brother. This is symbolised by the tilak (vermilion mark) that the sister applies on the forehead of her brother. Women who don't have brothers worship the moon deity, Chandra.

## Traditional Food and Dress

Deepavali is a time to spend with family and friends. Greeting cards are sent out, inviting friends and relations to visit and share gifts—often in the form of candles and sweets.

Sweets are the most commonly eaten food during Deepavali—and plenty of them! Indian sweetmeats called *mithai* are a cross between snack, dessert and confectionary, and are nibbled on during the day on their own or as a part of a meal alongside savoury items. Cooking sweets for Deepavali usually starts a month before the festival and is a social affair, with women gathering in each other's kitchens to make snacks.

New clothes are very important during the festival of Deepavali. Children wear clothing based on those of the gods and goddesses—colourful robes and dresses. Women include plenty of bright costume jewellery and decorate their hands with Mehndi designs.

For more information on how Deepavali is celebrated in Australia, visit the Hindu Council of Australia at [www.hindu council.com.au](http://www.hindu council.com.au)

## Resources available in the 2012 School Essentials catalogue

- *Reader's Theatre: Multicultural Stories* (p 10 and p 237)
- *Illustrated Stories from Around the World* (p 206)
- *Global Village Craft Paper* (p 206)
- *Design a Postcard* (p 216)
- *Traditional Kids Card Kit* (p 217)
- *Gaudi Mosaics* (p 223)
- *Double Colour Mosaic Squares* (p 224)
- *Around the World Paper Collection* (p 227)
- *Scratch Art Paper* (p 227)
- *Kids Songs from Around the World* (p 238)
- *Around the World Kids* (p 398)
- *Kingfisher Knowledge: Wonders of the World* (p 205)
- *Travel Through Time Complete Collection* (p 207)

## FREE Teacher Toolkit resources available at [www.scholastic.co.nz/schools/bookclub](http://www.scholastic.co.nz/schools/bookclub)

- *Ten Incarnations of Lord Vishnu* blackline master
- *Rama and Sita Shadow Puppets* blackline master
- *Rangoli Design Circle Pattern* blackline master
- *Rangoli Design Flower Pattern* blackline master
- *Rangoli Design Mirror Pattern* blackline master
- *Rangoli Design Square Pattern* blackline master
- *Rangoli Design Swirl Pattern* blackline master