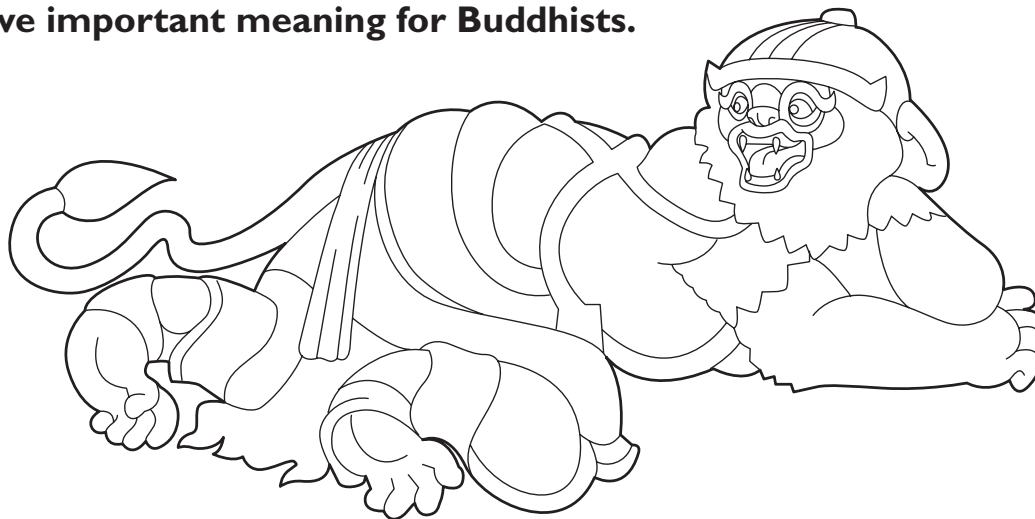


Art and symbols in the temple

Buddhist temples are filled with art and symbols that have important meaning for Buddhists.



Q1. What can lions stand for when they are on Buddhist paintings?



Q2. What are the names of two types of painting that you might see in the temple?

Q3. What can the following colours stand for in Buddhist art?

(i) Red 

(ii) Blue

(iii) White 

Q4. Some paintings in Buddhist temples show a wheel with eight spokes. What do the spokes stand for?



Q5. Some paintings in Buddhist temples show a lotus flower. What are two things that the lotus flower reminds Buddhists of?



Answers

1. Power, strength and royalty.
2. Thangkas and mandalas.
3. (i) Compassion. (ii) Truth. (iii) Purity.
4. The Eightfold Path.
5. Purity, a person's ability to rise out of bad situations and be good, that anyone can become enlightened.

Lesson objectives

- ▶ To introduce different kinds of Buddhist art and symbols.
- ▶ To show that Buddhist art forms have special meanings.
- ▶ To introduce the purpose for thangkas and mandalas.

Lesson outcomes

- ▶ The children know that all Buddhist art has special meanings.
- ▶ The children know that thangkas and mandalas can be used in worship.
- ▶ The children know the meaning of some common Buddhist symbols.

Teaching notes

Thangkas and mandalas

These are two styles of painting that are common in Buddhism, especially in Tibetan Buddhism. The word thangka means 'something that can be rolled up' and a thangka was traditionally painted on a canvas so that it could be easily transported and used for teaching. Thangkas usually have pictures of the Buddha or other enlightened Buddhists or Buddhist teachers, or scenes from the Buddha's life. Thangkas are often painted in very bright colours, with red, blue, white and green being the most popular.

The word mandala means circle, sphere or container and mandalas are paintings in the shape of a circle that are used for meditation.

Mandalas are usually painted with an object or figure in the centre of the circle and other symbols and designs in a symmetrical pattern around the centre image. While thangkas often depict a particular person or event, mandalas are more symbolic, they represent the world or the universe in Buddhist terms and are often meant to invoke a particular force (such as healing, peace or love).

The Wheel of Law and the Wheel of Life

There are two types of illustrations of a wheel that can be found in Buddhism. One is a simple 'wagon' wheel shape with eight spokes. This is called the Wheel of Law and each spoke of the wheel stands for one part of the Eightfold Path. The wheel shape symbolises the way that life is constantly turning and continuing.

The Wheel of Life is a type of mandala that illustrates the Buddhist belief that when a person dies, their consciousness leaves their body and enters one of six paths of rebirth: enlightened beings; people who are on the path to enlightenment and are basically happy and do good things; beings who have many good things in life but still like to fight and do other things that are bad (they can be either human or animal); hungry 'ghosts', beings who suffer from constant hunger (they can be either human or animal, when they are human the hunger refers to an insatiable hunger for accumulating possessions); 'hell-beings' are people or animals who suffer from constant unhappiness and misery. The paintings usually illustrate each of these six levels in a graphic and fantastic way, with demons and Buddhas.

Complementary work

The children could investigate the designs of different thangkas and mandalas.

Resources

Secondary sources on thangkas and mandalas. See the book, *Tibetan Thangka Painting* by David Jackson, and the *Tibetan Art Colouring Book*.