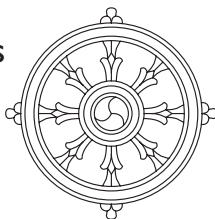


The meaning of Buddhist symbols

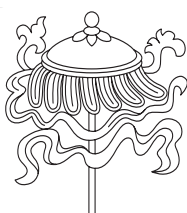
A. The Wheel of Law stands for the Eightfold Path.



Is there a drawing or painting of the Wheel of Law in the temple? If so, draw it here. Make sure you use the correct colours.

A

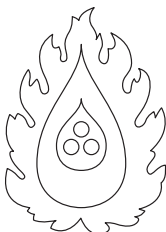
B. A parasol (sun umbrella) stands for protection against evil, and for royalty.



Is there a drawing, painting, sculpture of a real parasol in the temple? If so, draw it here. Make sure you also use the correct colours.

B

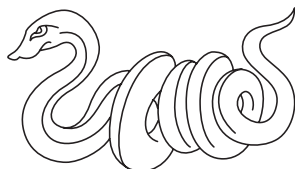
C. The triratana stands for the three jewels of Buddhism.



Is there a triratana in the temple? If so, draw it here. Make sure you also use the correct colours.

C

D. A snake or naga stands for protection.



Is there a drawing, painting or sculpture of a snake at the temple? If so, draw it here. Make sure you also use the correct colours.

D

Activity objectives

- ▶ To investigate different symbols found in the temple.
- ▶ To learn the meaning of some of the symbols found in the temple.

Preparation and resources

Paper, coloured pens or pencils, a flat surface, such as a clipboard, to draw on while at the temple.

Introducing the activity

You can use this activity alone, or with activities from units 2, 4, 8 and 9. You can also use it without visiting a temple, by showing the children photographs or printouts from the inside of different temples. Before starting, you may want to review some of the symbols commonly found in temples, and remind the children that even the colours of the symbols have meaning.

Teaching notes

Buddhism uses a great many symbols as teaching aids. The symbols can have different meanings, depending on what country a person is from, but here we have given general meanings. The use of symbols in Buddhism dates back to the very beginning of the religion. Many of the symbols stand for spirits and deities that people worshipped before Buddhism. For example, the snake, or naga, was a pre-Buddhist fertility symbol, and Tara was a pre-Buddhist goddess. These symbols were incorporated into Buddhism in order to make it easier for people to adapt to their new beliefs. The symbols were also important teaching aids at a time when few people could read or write.

Many of the symbols associated with the Buddha have to do with royalty, because the Buddha was born as a prince. Other symbols refer to specific events in the Buddha's life, and still others are purely symbolic.

Students should be encouraged to notice that many of the symbols come from South East Asia at the time Buddhism began (such as the parasol, which was carried by the servants of wealthy and important people to keep the heat off their masters).

Concluding the activity

The children should ask the person showing them around to describe the meanings of any symbols they see. They can then compare and discuss the meanings of the symbols they have drawn. They could also prepare a poster display of Buddhist symbols, featuring what they have learned and the drawings they have made.

Activity outcomes

- ▶ The children can draw a few Buddhist symbols.
- ▶ The children can understand the meanings behind some Buddhist symbols.
- ▶ The children can recognise a few basic Buddhist symbols.

Complementary work

The children can research other Buddhist symbols and their meanings.

Resources

Secondary sources on Buddhist symbols. See *A Handbook of Tibetan Buddhist Symbols* by Robert Beer, or www.atschool.co.uk.