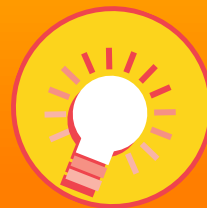


Comprehension Workbook 5

Kumbh Mela



Find out about the meaning of stories and articles

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Hindu faith

Matches the requirements of the Literacy Strategy and designed to integrate with the study of world religions. (This material is independent of any specific text book and can be used alongside any publisher's books including our Hindu Faith, Mandir, Hindu art and writing and Hindu holy days books.)

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Kumbh Mela

The Kumbh Mela is the world's largest religious festival. The festival takes place every 12 years in Northern India. During the Kumbh Mela, worshippers bathe in the Ganges river to clean away their sins. The Kumbh Mela is held every 12 years in one of four different places. After 12 Kumbh Melas, every 144 years, a grand Kumbh Mela is held in Allahabad. A Great Kumbh Mela was last held in 2007, and 70 million people took part over 45 days.

Hindu scriptures say the four places where the Kumbh Mela is held are places where the gods once spilled drops of a potion of immortality. This is the story of how the drops were spilled.

Long ago, the gods were under a curse which made them weak and fearful. In order to free themselves of the curse, the god Brahma said they must churn the Ocean of Milk to create the potion of immortality.

The gods asked the demons for help with their task. The gods offered to share the immortality potion with the demons in exchange for their help with churning the Ocean of Milk. The demons agreed. First, the gods and demons pulled up Mount Madura to use as a churning stick. Then they brought Vasuki, the King of the Serpents, out of his underwater home to act as a rope for churning. Vishnu tricked the demons into the dangerous job of holding Vasuki's head during the churning, while the gods held his tail. During the churning, Vasuki's breath grew very hot and the demons almost suffocated. For 1,000 years, the gods and demons worked together to churn the Ocean of Milk.

As the gods and demons churned, different treasures came up out of the Ocean of Milk. First came the goddess Lakshmi; then Sura, the goddess of wine; Chandra, the moon; a white horse named Uchchaisravas; a jewel called Kaustubha; a wishing tree; Surabhi, the cow of plenty; Airavata, a white elephant; a conch shell; a mighty bow. Finally, the jar containing the potion of immortality, called the Kumbh Amrit, came out of the ocean.

Both the gods and the demons tried to grab the potion. The gods knew that if the demons drank the potion they would become stronger than the gods. The gods and demons fought for 12 days and 12 nights. This is the same as 12 years for humans. As they fought over the jar, some drops of potion spilled on the ground. These drops landed at four places: Allahabad, Haridwar, Ujjain and Nasik. Today, these are the places where the Kumbh Mela is held. Finally, the gods won and took the jar of potion for themselves.

The Kumbh Mela remembers this battle between gods and demons. Hindus believe that during the Kumbh Mela, the river turns into the potion of immortality. During the festival, millions of pilgrims bathe in the river in order to earn good luck, holiness and salvation.



Understanding words

Before we can understand a story we have to know what all of the words mean. Let's try one...

a Write a sentence in which you found the word 'immortality'.

b From that sentence, write what you think 'immortality' means.

c Write a new sentence using the word 'immortality'.

d Use a dictionary to find words with a similar meaning (synonyms) to 'immortality'.

e Can you think of someone in books or a movie who is 'immortal'.



Finding key words

Next, we need to find the key words that tell us what the story is about...

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list like the one below. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym). You don't have to use all the spaces, but you should not use more.

Key word	Synonym (similar word)
Example: grab	snatch

3

Summarising

(the gist of the story)

To summarise means to rewrite the story in a shorter version using as many of our key words from Task 2 as needed.

1 Write a heading for your summary.

2 Now write the main idea in one sentence.
e.g. "This story tells us..."

3 Now add some detail to the main idea by writing more sentences after it.

**Finally,
can you rewrite your
summary to make it better?**

1. Look out for errors such as using the same word too often – use alternatives.
2. Make sure you have summarised the author's purpose in your OWN words.
3. Make sure your summary is in a logical order.
4. Is your summary informative AND interesting to others?

There is nothing wrong with rewriting; even the best authors rewrite their work.

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Sequencing

Sequencing means getting the events in the right order. Write these sentences in the correct order, so they make sense.



The gods and demons fought for 12 days and 12 nights.

Both the gods and the demons tried to grab the potion.

Then they brought Vasuki, the King of the Serpents, out of his underwater home to act as a rope for churning.

The gods offered to share the immortality potion with the demons in exchange for their help with churning the Ocean of Milk.

First came the goddess Lakshmi...

For 1,000 years, the gods and demons worked together to churn the Ocean of Milk.



Get to the facts

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the facts of the story.



Write a sentence to answer each of these questions:

- (a) Where do worshippers bathe during the Kumbh Mela?
- (b) What did the gods and demons use as a churning stick?
- (c) What did the gods and demons use a rope for churning?
- (d) How long did the gods and demons fight for?



Whys and wherefores

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the meanings in the story and how it was written.

1 What did the gods offer the demons in exchange for their help in churning the Ocean of Milk?

2 What are the first three things that came out of the Ocean of Milk?

3 What would happen to the demons if they drank the potion of immortality?

4 The drops of potion fell on four places – what happens today at each of these places?



Opinions matter

Answer these questions to give your views and to develop the story.

1 Why was it dangerous to hold Vasuki's head?

2 Do you think the gods were right to trick the demons into holding Vasuki's head?

3 Do you think the gods ever wanted the demons to get the potion of immortality?

4 The drops of potion fell on four places – what do these places have to do with the Kumbh Mela?

5 What would have happened if the demons got the potion of immortality?



A holy man, a Sadhu, at the festival.



Talking it through

It often helps if a group of people get together and discuss a problem.



Discussion topic: Bathing in the Ganges

Discuss why you think the Kumbh Mela is so important to Hindus?
What do Hindus believe happens if they bathe in the river Ganges during the Kumbh Mela?



Make a story...

When you read a description it often gives you ideas about how the event might be described differently.



Festival

Imagine that you are attending the Kumbh Mela. As you arrive, the festival looks like a large city, with tents and streets and cafes. (Now write a story about what it might be like to attend a huge festival such as the Kumbh Mela – how would you find your way around, what would it be like to bathe in the river with tens of thousands of other people?)

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