

Comprehension Workbook 7

# Celebrating Diwali



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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# Diwali

Diwali is one of the biggest and most important holidays in the Hindu year. The word Diwali is a short version of Deepavali, which means "rows of lamps" and Diwali is also called the festival of Lights. During Diwali, clay lamps are lit to celebrate the victory of good over evil. The festival of Diwali lasts for five days, and each day has its own traditions of celebration. Here are some of the traditions for celebrating each of the five days of Diwali.

## Day 1

The first day of Diwali is called Dhanteras, which means wealth. One legend says that on this day, a young prince was doomed to die by snake bite. That night, the prince's wife lit hundreds of lamps and placed them at the entrance of her husband's bedroom. The wife spent the entire night singing songs and telling stories. When Yama, the god of Death arrived disguised as a snake, his eyes were blinded by the brilliant lights and he could not see the entrance to the prince's bedroom. So he sat in front of the bedroom door the whole night listening to the beautiful songs. In the morning he quietly went away. Thus the young wife saved her husband from the clutches of death.

On this day, houses and businesses are cleaned and decorated with designs called rangoli that welcome Lakshmi, the goddess of Wealth and Prosperity. Lamps are kept burning all through the night and families place gold or silver objects around the house as a sign of luck. Prayers, hymns and traditional sweets are offered to Lakshmi.



### Day 2

This day is called Choti Diwali, or "Small Diwali". One legend about this day is that it is the day the god Krishna freed 16,000 princesses that were being held captive by a demon king. After fighting the demon, Krishna took a well-deserved bath and one way of celebrating this day is to take a bath at sunrise. At night, lamps are again lit, and fireworks are set off. Traditional sweets, such as steamed vermicelli with milk and sugar, are eaten.

### Day 3

This is the main day of Diwali. This day is for the worship of the goddess Lakshmi. Special worship services are held in temples and oil lamps are lit and placed everywhere to light Lakshmi's way. It is believed that on this day Lakshmi walks through the green fields and city streets and showers her blessings on everyone.

The goddess Lakshmi likes cleanliness, and she will visit the cleanest house first. In some places, offerings of tumeric and vermillion are made to brooms on this day. Lamps are lit in the evening to welcome the goddess and to light up her path.

### Day 4

On this day, husbands and wives show their love for each other by giving each other special gifts and meals. This day also remembers a time when the god Krishna saved a village from monsoon floods by lifting up a mountain to use as a shelter. One tradition is to make a mountain out of different types of food. Prayers are then offered to Krishna before the food is shared.

### Day 5

This day is called Bhai Duj. This is a day when brothers and sisters honour each other. Sisters place a mark called a tilak on their brothers' forehead as a sign of protection. Brothers and sisters also exchange gifts and pray for each other's health and happiness.



# 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 '**tradition**'.

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

**c** Write a new sentence using the word '**tradition**'.

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

**e** Think of a holiday that you know. What is on '**tradition**' that is followed on that holiday.



# 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: exchange	swap

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.**

123  
4

# Sequencing

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



This day also remembers a time when the god Krishna saved a village from monsoon floods by lifting up a mountain to use as a shelter.

When Yama, the god of Death arrived disguised as a snake, his eyes were blinded by the brilliant lights and he could not see the entrance to the prince's bedroom.

This is a day when brothers and sisters honour each other.

It is believed that on this day Lakshmi walks through the green fields and city streets and showers her blessings on everyone.

After fighting the demon, Krishna took a well-deserved bath and one way of celebrating this day is to take a bath at sunrise.

One legend says that on this day, a young prince was doomed to die by snake bite.



# 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) What does Dhanteras mean?
- (b) What did the princess use to blind the snake?
- (c) How many princesses did Krishna set free?
- (d) How did Krishna save a village from flooding?
- (e) What do brothers and sisters exchange on the fifth day of Diwali?



# Whys and wherefores

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

1 Why are houses cleaned and decorated on the first day of Diwali?

2 Why do people take a bath on the second day of Diwali?

3 What are some reasons why lamps are lit during Diwali?

4 What are two ways family members show their love for each other during Diwali?



# Opinions matter

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

1 How is Lakshmi honoured during Diwali?

2 Why do you think Lakshmi is worshipped during Diwali?

3 Why do you think it is important for brothers and sisters to show their love for each other?

4 How did the princess trick death?

5 Can you think of a moral for the story of the princess and death?





# Talking it through

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

## Discussion topic: Diwali

Diwali is celebrated in many different ways. What are the advantages and disadvantages of spreading a festival over five days?



# Make a story...

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



## Diwali

Imagine that it is time for Diwali. Describe how you would celebrate Diwali on each of the five days. You can add some of your own traditions to the festival, but they should have something to do with the other traditions. For example, you might light a particular type of lamp, or share special sweets.

# Celebrating Diwali

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