

# Looking at murtis



◀ This is a picture of the god Ganesha, who is god of knowledge, and who destroys obstacles to success.

▶ This is a picture of the goddess Lakshmi, who is the goddess of wealth and prosperity.



▲ This is a picture of the god Shiva, who destroys things so that they can be remade better.

Use the drawings to answer the following questions. There may be more than one answer for each question.

Who carries a sweet to reward worshippers? .....

Who is drawn with a lotus flower, the symbol of truth? .....

Coins stand for wealth. Who has coins in their hand? .....

Who is pictured with a snake, which represents victory over evil? .....

Who has one leg on the ground and one leg in the air, to remind Hindus to balance spiritual life and everyday life? .....

Who has a pot belly to remind Hindus that it is important to take in whatever knowledge life brings you? .....

## Activity objectives

- ▶ To learn about some of the symbols associated with Hindu gods and goddesses.
- ▶ To recognise some of the meanings in the symbols used in Hindu worship.

## Preparation and resources

The children may need extra sheets of paper for answering the questions. Pictures of gods and goddesses.

## Introducing the activity

Before you start the activity you may like to show the children the picture of Ganesha on page 7 of the student book and ask them to describe all of the different things they see in the picture.

## Teaching notes

*The purpose of this activity is to give the children a chance to learn more about the symbolism of each murti. Each deity has many characteristics that are symbols of the deity's power. For example, Vishnu holds a conch shell which stands for the five elements and eternity; a discus, which is the symbol of the mind; a bow that symbolises power and a lotus which is a symbol of the cosmos. Each deity also has a vehicle on which he or she travels. These vehicles, which are animals or birds, represent the various forces that he or she controls.*

### Ganesha

*Ganesha is the son of the goddess Parvati and the god Shiva. Ganesha carries an axe to cut earthly attachments, a rope to carry the truth, his favourite sweet – a laddoo ball – to reward worshippers. His vehicle is a mouse, which represents timidity and nervousness that can overwhelm us at the start of a new venture – by worshipping Ganesha these feelings can be overcome.*

### Lakshmi

*The goddess Lakshmi sits on, and often holds, a lotus bud, which stands for beauty, purity and fertility. Her four hands represent four virtues: righteousness, desires, wealth and the liberation from rebirth. She always wears gold embroidered red clothes. The red stands for activity and the gold for prosperity. Her vehicle is an elephant spraying water, which stands for ceaseless effort.*

### Shiva

*Shiva is a god of destruction, but he destroys in order that new creation can occur, so he is a positive influence. He often appears in the form of a linga, a stone which stands for the universe. In human form, he is smeared with ashes, standing for destruction, and carries a trident and drum as symbols of power. His hair, which is piled on top of his head, has the river Ganges running through it. His vehicle is the bull, which stands for brute force and blind power, which Shiva can help to control.*

## Concluding the activity

The class could describe other symbols that they see in each picture and discuss what they may mean.

## Activity outcomes

- ▶ The children can associate symbols with meaning.
- ▶ The children can observe and recognise symbols in a picture.

## Complementary work

The children may like to look at pictures of other gods and goddesses and discuss the symbols they see, or use secondary sources to find the meaning of the attributes and vehicles of different gods and goddesses.

## Resources

Pictures of gods and goddesses. Secondary sources about the attributes and vehicles of gods and goddesses.