

Special days at the gurdwara

Some Sikh festivals are celebrated inside the gurdwara, and some are celebrated in the neighbourhood around the gurdwara.

Q1. What happens during an akhand path?

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Q2. What happens during a nagar kirtan?

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Q3. What are three things that might happen during a gurupurab?

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Q4. Look at the illustration on this page. In what ceremony might you see this person in the street?

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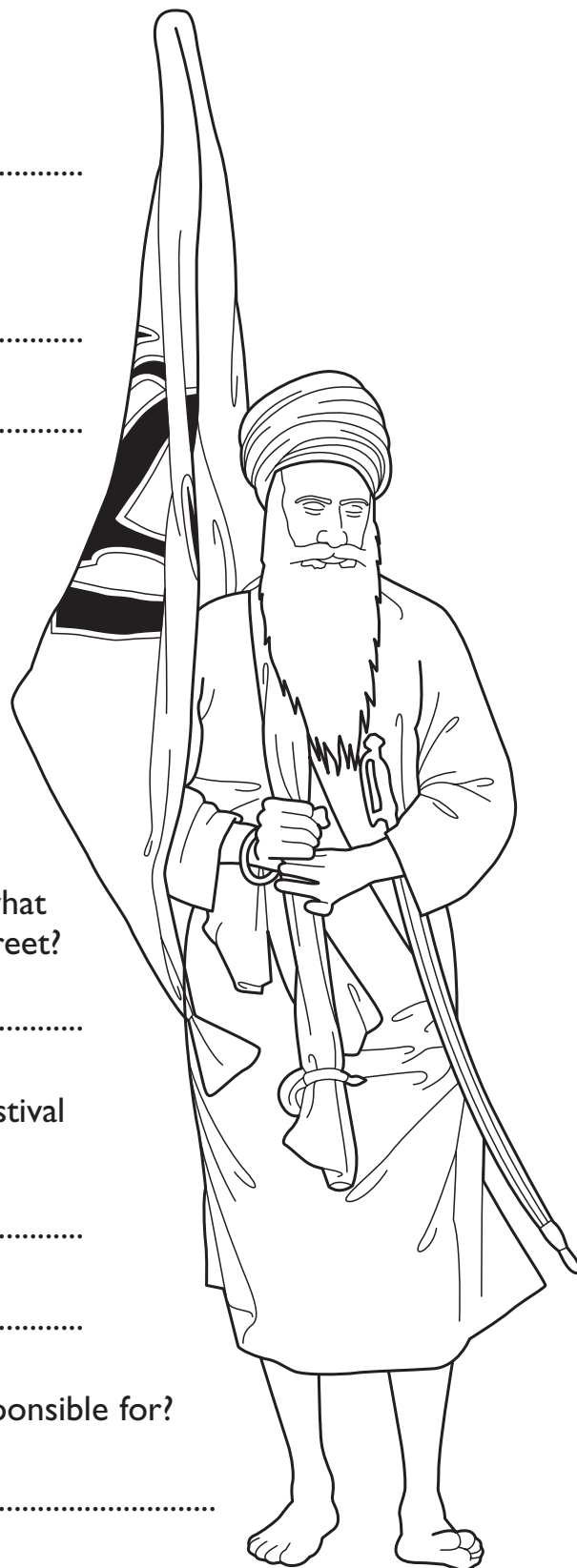
Q5. What two things are celebrated at the festival of Baisakh?

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Q6. What are the members of the khalsa responsible for?

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Answers

1. The entire Guru Granth Sahib is read non-stop.
2. The Guru Granth Sahib is paraded around the neighbourhood.
3. Akhand path; nagar kirtan; singing hymns; giving out food and drink.
4. During a nagar kirtan.
5. The Sikh New Year; the creation of the baptism ceremony.
6. Following the principles and traditions of Sikhism.

Lesson objectives

- To describe the nagar kirtan and akhand path and their role in Sikh festivals.
- To introduce the gurupurab festivals.
- To introduce the ceremony of Sikh baptism and its meaning.

Lesson outcomes

- The children can describe some of the things that occur during akhand path and nagar kirtan.
- The children know the meaning of the Sikh baptism.

Teaching notes

Fairs and festivals

There are a great many Sikh fairs and festivals. Some, such as Maghi and Muktsar are regional celebrations, which mark important local events, often the martyrdom of Sikhs at the hands of the Moghuls.

Many Sikh holidays coincide with Hindu holidays. Since most of the early Sikhs had been Hindus, the gurus sometimes chose Hindu holy days as Sikh holidays in order to make it easier for people to adopt the new faith. However, the

focus of the Sikh holidays is not on ritual or gods, but on Sikh beliefs or history.

Holla Mohalla is celebrated a day after the Hindu festival of Holi. This festival began as a gathering of Sikhs for military exercises and mock battles. At the time the festival began, the Sikhs were fighting the Moghul Empire. Today, the festival is still celebrated with mock battles using traditional weapons.

Sikhs celebrate Diwali, but for Sikhs the holiday has a different focus. The sixth guru, Guru Hargobind, and 52 rajahs were released from detention at Fort Gwalior (they had been held by the Moghul Emperor Jahanigir and the guru had agreed to his release only on the condition that the rajahs, who were not Sikhs, were also released) on Diwali, and the Sikh holiday is called Bandi Chhorh Divas, or “the day of release of the detainees”.

Nagar kirtan

The words nagar kirtan mean “town and songs of praise” and the parade is often a very elaborate and spirited event. In addition to crowds of people and floats containing the Guru Granth Sahib, there may also be drummers and other musicians, gatka performers (an ancient Sikh martial art) and floats representing schools or charitable institutions.

Complementary work

The children could investigate different Sikh festivals and how they are celebrated.

Resources

Pictures of a nagar kirtan in the UK at:
www.sikhkids.com/Nagarkirtan02album/;
www.bedfordgurdwara.org.uk/nagark0.htm. Sikh festival information at:
www.sikhs.org/fest.htm; www.sgpc.net/festivals/index.asp.