



India: Holi Festival and Painted Elephants

Pre-visit Activity: Background Reading

One of the world's oldest civilizations along the Indus River Valley became the country of India. Today India is the second largest country in the world. It is home to a wide variety of climates, landscapes and resources, but its rich cultural history is what makes India distinctive. Hinduism, one of the oldest religions in the world, began in India and has shaped much of the daily life of the people who live there.

The people of India's more than 400 states enjoy many celebrations through the year. Their most important celebration, Diwali, occurs during November, while Holi is a festival that marks the arrival of spring. The tradition most commonly associated with Holi is the throwing of colors and water amidst loud music and drums. The colors are symbolic of the bright colors of springtime, but Holi also signifies a victory of good over evil based on a Hindu legend. Though Holi originated in India as a religious festival, this "Festival of Colors" has been adopted in many places around the world.

The festival celebrations begin on the evening of the full moon that comes between the end of February and middle of March. On the first evening, known as "Holika Dahan", people gather around a bonfire to celebrate the victory of good over evil. Prayers and religious rituals are also included. The following day is called "Holi". This is when the famous colorful powders are thrown. Historically, the gulal (powder) was made of turmeric paste and flower extracts, but today synthetic versions are used.

The four main powder colors used have different meanings. Red reflects love, blue is the color of the god Krishna, yellow is the color of turmeric and green symbolizes spring and new beginnings.

One state in India is known for a unique Holi tradition: an elephant festival. The Jaipur Elephant Festival began as a way to honor elephants by decorating them and then allowing them to parade in front of adoring crowds. Elephants are honored because they have always been important in India. Not only did they work hard as beasts of burden, they were also allowed to carry kings. Ganesha, a Hindu god, is part elephant and known as the "remover of obstacles". The tradition of honoring elephants continues to be important in India through art and ecotourism.

Source: <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2013/08/painted-elephants/shear-text>



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Pre-visit Activity: Background Reading

Name: _____ Date: _____

Answer the questions based on the reading about India and Holi.

1. India is an important country historically, and today. Explain this statement by telling two facts about India.

2. Name the religion that originated in India. _____

3. When is Holi celebrated? _____

4. Holi is also known as _____

5. Why do you think it is called this? _____

6. Holi marks the arrival of spring, but it also signifies a victory of _____ over _____

7. Tell the meaning of each of the following Holi colors.

Red _____

Blue _____

Yellow _____

Green _____

8. Besides throwing colors, how does the state of Jaipur celebrate Holi?

9. Why do you think elephants are honored in India?

10. Ganesha is the name of one of the Hindu gods. What does he look like and why is he important? _____





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Pre-visit Activity: Background Reading **KEY**

Answer the questions based on the reading about India and Holi.

1. India is an important country historically, and today. Explain this statement by telling two facts about India. **one of oldest civilizations in the world; second largest country today; many climates, landscapes, and resources; home to oldest religion in world**
2. Name the religion that originated in India: **Hinduism**
3. When is Holi celebrated? **Begins on the full moon between end of February and middle of March**
4. Holi is also known as **the festival of colors**
5. Why do you think it is called this? **Springtime has many colors; they throw colored powder**
6. Holi marks the arrival of Spring, but it also signifies a victory of **good** over **evil**
7. Tell the meaning of each of the following Holi colors:
Red - **love**
Blue - **the color of the god Krishna**
Yellow - **the color of tumeric**
Green - **spring/new beginnings**
8. Besides throwing colors, how does the state of Jaipur celebrate Holi? **They have an elephant festival**
9. Why do you think elephants are honored in India? **Have always been an important animal in India because of the work they can do; symbolic of India**
10. Ganesha is the name of one of the Hindu gods. What does he look like and why is he important? **part elephant and part man; known as the remover of obstacles**