INDIA: DIWALI- THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS

In India, Diwali is regarded as one of the most important holidays of the year. It is as important to Hindus as Christmas is to Christians in America. Originally an agrarian economy, the holiday originated as a harvest festival with celebrations in October and November. Today, the festivities mark the beginning of the new business year.

Indians use the occasion to strengthen family and social relationships. They wear colorful new Saris, share sweets with their neighbors, gather for family meals and worship time at the temple, and decorate their homes with colorful welcome mats called Rangoli. These welcome mats are often created from color powder, rice, or flower petals and are used to welcome guests and good fortune into their homes.

Light is also a prominent feature in this celebration. Special clay lamps called diyas are used to symbolize the victory of good over evil and welcome the goddess Laksmi- which represents the final goal of life. She encourages Indians to reach for a better life by being faithful, virtuous, and selfless.
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1. Describe the difference between the original festival and how it is celebrated today:

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2. What does light represent in the festival?

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3. How are diyas used in the festival?

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4. What is the significance of the Rangoli during the festival?

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5. How do Indian’s typically celebrate Diwali?

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ACTIVITY KEY

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1. Describe the difference between the original festival and how it is celebrated today: It was traditionally celebrated at the end of the harvest season to give thanks for a bountiful harvest. India was traditionally an agriculturally based economy, but has become more industrialized in recent decades. Therefore, the festival has changed to celebrate the end of a business year and the coming of a new and prosperous business season. Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth and prosperity. During the celebration, lamps are used to welcome her into their home asking blessings for the coming year.

2. What does light represent in the festival? Light has many uses in the festival. It represents good winning over evil; a spiritual light of inner peace over coming darkness. It is also used to welcome the goddess Lakshmi into homes with the lighting of lamps.

3. How are diyas used in the festival? Diyas are small clay lamps that are used for decoration and light in the festival. People light the pathway to their homes–welcoming the goddess Lakshmi. They are also used to decorate the traditional Rangoli welcome mats as well.

4. What is the significance of the Rangoli during the festival? Rangoli is used as a colorful welcome mat during many festivals in India. It is made from colored sand, rice, or flower petals. It is used to welcome friends, family, gods, and goddesses into homes during celebrations.

5. How do Indians typically celebrate Diwali? Indians celebrate in the following ways: sharing sweets with friends and neighbors, family meals, buying new sari's, going to temple, decorating their homes with lights (diyas) and Rangoli, worshiping Lakshmi.