



India: Diwali

Pre-visit Activity: Background Reading

India is the location of one of the world's oldest civilizations that developed along the Indus River Valley. 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.

Diwali is regarded as one of the most important holidays of the year in India. It is as important to Hindus as Christmas is to Christians. Because India originally had an agrarian economy, the holiday began as a harvest festival with celebrations in October or November. Although still celebrated in October or November, the celebration now marks the beginning of the new business year, with the hope of having a prosperous year.

There are many activities associated with Diwali. It is a time to strengthen family and social relationships, gather for meals, share sweets with neighbors and decorate their homes with colorful welcome mats and candles. The welcome mats called rangoli are created from colored powder, rice, or flower petals as a way to welcome guests and good fortune into their homes. Diwali is also a time for people to dress up in colorful new clothing, such as a sari for women. Families also go to the temple to worship.

The use of light is the most important feature of Diwali. Special clay lamps called diyas are used as decoration to symbolize the victory of good over evil. People place the diyas on the rangoli to welcome the goddess Lakshmi into their homes. Lakshmi encourages Indians to reach for a better life by being faithful, virtuous, and selfless. Other forms of light are used throughout India during Diwali, including the use of fireworks at the end of the long day of celebration.

Source: <http://www.abcworldculture.com/#mode=country®ionId=66&uri=country-content&nid=20.38&key=facts-holidays>



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Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Explain the original reason Diwali was celebrated, then compare that with the reason it is celebrated today.

2. What does light represent during Diwali?

3. How are diyas used during Diwali?

4. What is a rangoli and how is it used?

5. List three activities that take place during Diwali.





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1. Explain the original reason Diwali was celebrated then compare that to the reason 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 during Diwali? 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 during Diwali? 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.
4. What is a rangoli and how is it used? 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. List three activities that take place during Diwali. Indians celebrate in the following ways: sharing sweets with friends and neighbors, family meals, buying new clothing, going to temple, decorating their homes with lights (diyas) and rangoli, worshipping Lakshmi.