

Celebrating... Diwali

What better way to brighten dark, winter days, says **Linda Mort**, than with an exploration of the Hindu festival of lights?

Commencing this year on November 13th, Diwali is celebrated as a five-day New Year festival; it symbolises the triumph of good over evil, light over darkness, and new beginnings. Houses are lit by Divas – small clay pots containing a little oil and a wick (a tea light can replace the oil) – and rangoli patterns are made outside front doors, together with footprints (see below) to welcome Lakshmi, the goddess of good fortune and wealth, into every home. Buildings and streets are decorated with lights, and there are firework displays. Homes are cleaned, new clothes worn, and cards and gifts, such as sweets (mithai) and dried fruit, are exchanged.

One of the most famous legends associated with Diwali tells the story of how Prince Rama returned from exile with his wife, Sita, to his kingdom, after overcoming the 10-headed demon Ravana with the help of Hanuman, the monkey god, and his army of monkeys. People were so delighted that they lit the couple's return with rows of lights.

Exploring the festival

Sharing celebrations

Just before the festival, children can talk about what they and their families plan to do in celebration, including any special roles the children may have, such as making rangoli patterns (see below) or helping to make coconut burfi sweets to offer to visitors and to give as gifts. Encourage the children listening to comment on how they and their families may celebrate festivals and special times, in similar ways. Talk together about how people who celebrate different festivals can do so in similar ways, to say 'thank you' to their god, to remind people how to be kind to one another, and to make other people and themselves happy. Ask the families of any children celebrating Diwali whether they can send in any photographs of their celebrations, so that the children can talk about how they 'got on' with their special roles and about their feelings during the festival.

Making tracks

Invite a parent to demonstrate making rangoli patterns and 'footprints' for the goddess Lakshmi. Children can make rangoli patterns by drawing repeating patterns in coloured chalk on sandpaper, or by drawing outline shapes in glue on card and sprinkling with lentils, petals, fruit seeds or dry sand, coloured with a little powder paint. They can make 'Lakshmi's footprints' by drawing round one another's feet, cutting out the shapes and decorating them with glitter and sequins, for display around the room.

Sweet treats

To make coconut burfi sweets, each child can mix one tablespoon of desiccated coconut

with one teaspoon of condensed milk. When everyone has taken their turn at mixing in a large bowl, add a few drops of food colouring (pink or green). Each child then fills an egg cup with the mixture and pats it down. Chill for 15 minutes then tip out each egg cup quickly onto a plastic plate.

Linda Mort is an early years specialist. Next issue, she will look at St Nicholas Day in Holland, Germany and the Czech Republic.

Story time

EXPLORE AND RE-ENACT THE TALE OF RAMA AND SITA...

Tell the story of Rama and Sita (see resources, below) and encourage children to create their own puppet show, perhaps using finger puppets with paper cylinders. Ravana the demon will need a child to use both hands with fingers outstretched! The children could also plan and create a Diwali story mat on the back of a length of wallpaper, talking beforehand about the main events, characters and locations, including the jungle forest, the sea and Ravana's garden on the island of Lanka. Small world figures can be adapted using paper, felt-tipped pens and sticky tape. As a last stage, children can use Talking Points – mini recorders (see resources) – to record a few words said by some of the characters, and these can be placed next to the small world figures. Children can also re-enact the story outside: "What can we use for a bridge of stones?"

Resources

- *The Diwali Small Book (Festival Stories)* by Anita Ganeri and Carole Gray (Evans Publishing group)
- Diwali Read-aloud Festival Story Poster (childseyemedia.com)
- Talking Points (tts-group.co.uk)

Talk together about how people who celebrate different **festivals** can do so in **similar** ways, to say 'thank you' to their god



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