

Diwali Lesson Plan

Grade Level: K-5

Overview: This lesson plan is intended to give students a basic understanding of the fall Hindu festival called Diwali {di-WAHL-ee}. Along the way, students will also gain insight into more general aspects of Indian culture and art.

Background Information: There are various tidbits you can offer, depending on grade level and what specific standards you are trying to meet. Here are a few ideas:

- Hinduism is the 3rd largest religion in the world and is widely considered to be the world's oldest continuously-practice religious tradition. The vast majority of Hindus (over 950 million people and about 80% of the population) live in India. Students should be able to locate India on a world map.
- Many Hindus practice their traditions at home using home altars. They also visit Hindu temples. Show a few images of home altars and/or Hindu temples. If you have a Hindu temple in your area, visit their website to download an image.
- Hinduism has many local and regional customs, which means there are lots of different ways to "be Hindu." Two of the most important holidays for nearly all Hindus are Holi, in the spring, and Diwali, in the fall. Diwali is also known as the Hindu Festival of Lights. This can be taken literally, since the days are getting shorter and lamps are a popular tradition. Or, it can be taken metaphorically, with a focus on "good overcoming evil" and "light overpowering darkness."

Diwali Story

One popular Diwali story centers on the Ramayana, the epic tale of Prince Rama and his beautiful wife, Sita. A short version is included in this packet.

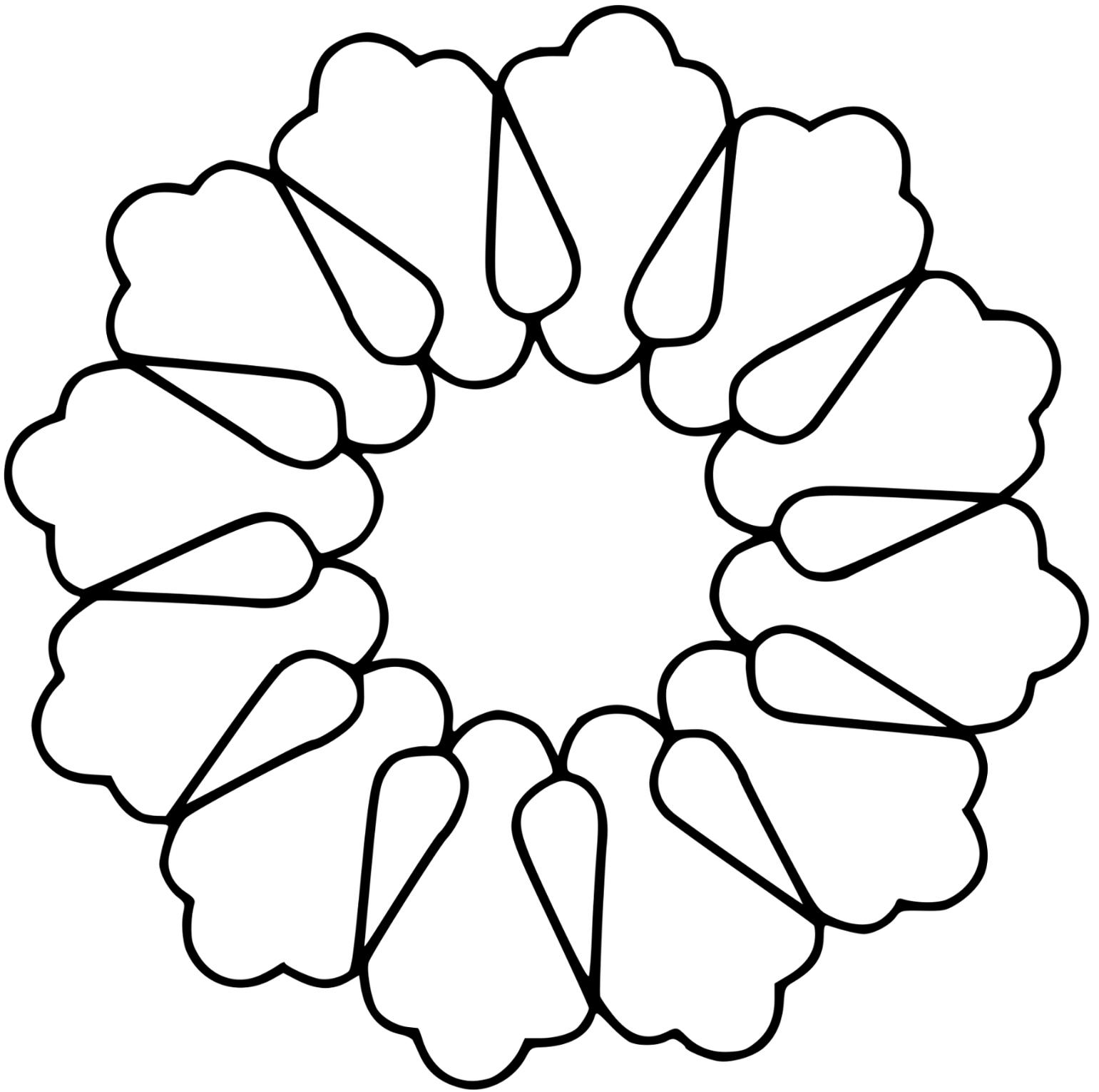
Craft #1: Rangoli

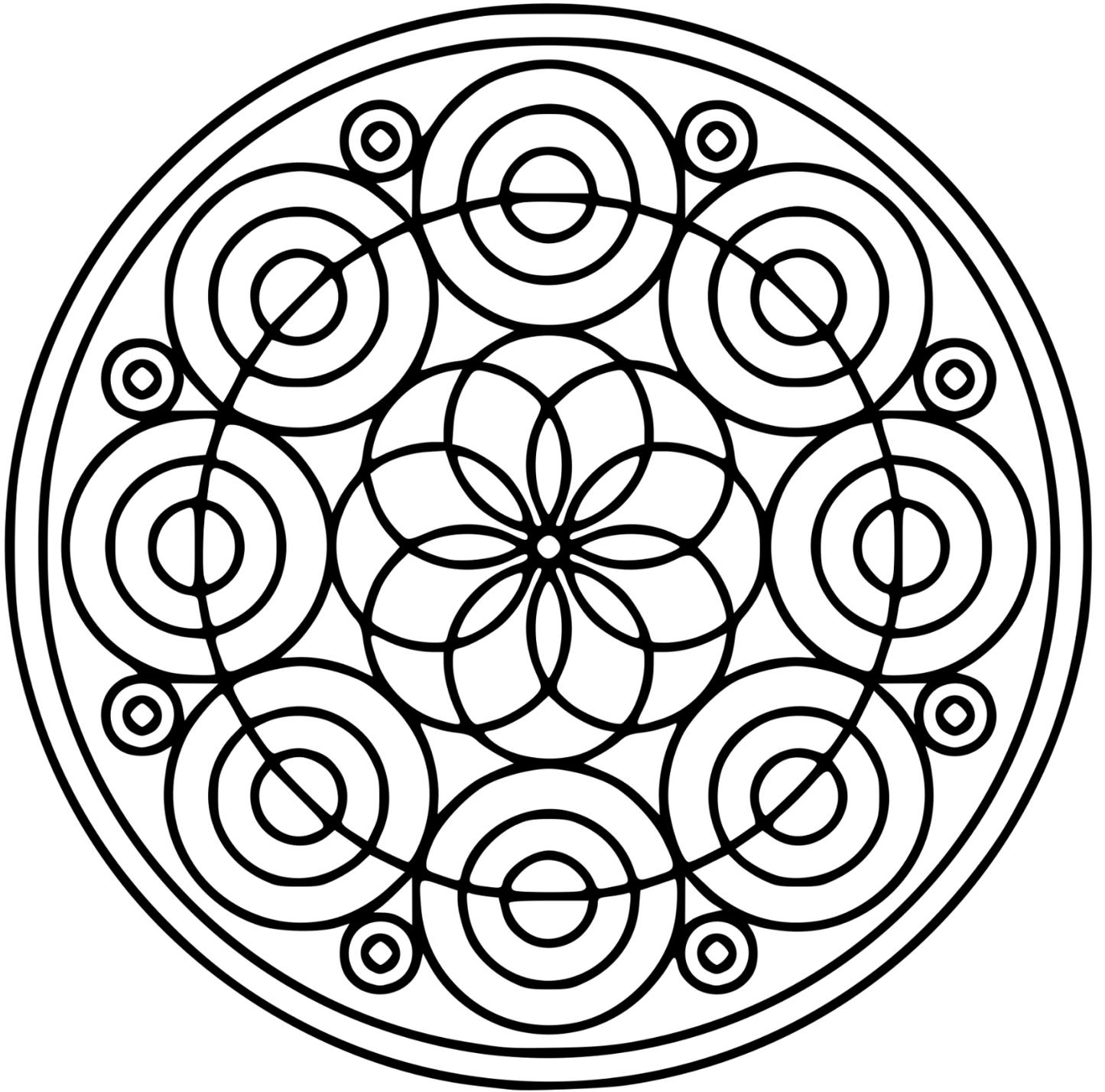
Rangolis {ran-GO-leez} are colorful decorations placed on the floor, often in courtyards and entryways. Made for various Hindu/Indian holidays, they are especially popular during Diwali. Traditionally, they were made with natural items, like flower petals or colored rice/flour. Some people say *rangolis* usher in wealth and good fortune by welcoming the goddess, Lakshmi.

Materials: One template per student, along with glue and colored sand/colored rice/flower petals to fill it in. Alternatively, kids can simply color their rangolis using crayons/markers/colored pencils.

Group Project: Enlarging a template or creating one on butcher block paper is an easy way to turn this into a class project that can be displayed at the school.







Craft #2: Diya

Diwali is all about light, which is why sparklers, firecrackers, lanterns, and colorful light strands are all popular at this time of the year. Oil lamps, called *diyas* {DEE-yuhs} are also quite common. They come in various shapes and sizes and were traditionally made from clay. They are also said to light the way for the goddess, Lakshmi, or for Prince Rama and his wife, Sita. The light symbolizes goodness, purity, and enlightenment.

Materials: Clay/DIY salt dough and decorating items (e.g., small buttons/beads, gem stickers, chopsticks). Tea lights are optional.

Instructions: Mold clay into desired shape. Younger kids can make a simple pinch pot. Slightly older kids might enjoy creating a teardrop shape. Before the clay dries, add buttons/beads/gem stickers or carve designs into the clay with a utensil. If desired, add a tea light.



Activity: Gutte

Gutte {geh-TAY} is a traditional Indian game played with 5 small stones. It closely resembles the American game of jacks, but numerous versions have been found throughout the world.

Materials Needed: Five small stones per group of players

Process: Many rule sets exist. You can watch *gutte* being played at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mwT5H7qV27U>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2kxRAZVoUU>

- 1) Throw all five stones in front of you. Choose one and pick it up. Now, toss that stone into the air, grab one stone from the ground, and then catch the tossed stone before it falls to the ground. Repeat until all four stones have been picked up.
- 2) Throw all five stones in front of you again. Choose one and pick it up. Now, toss that stone into the air, grab two stones from the ground, and then catch the tossed stone before it falls to the ground. Repeat with the remaining two stones on the ground.
- 3) Repeat but grab three stones from the ground and then the one stone that's left.
- 4) Repeat one more time but grab all four stones from the ground.
- 5) Hold all 5 stones in your face-up palm. Toss all 5 stones into the air, flip your palm over, and try to catch all the stones on the back of your palm.

Welcome Home Rama and Sita!

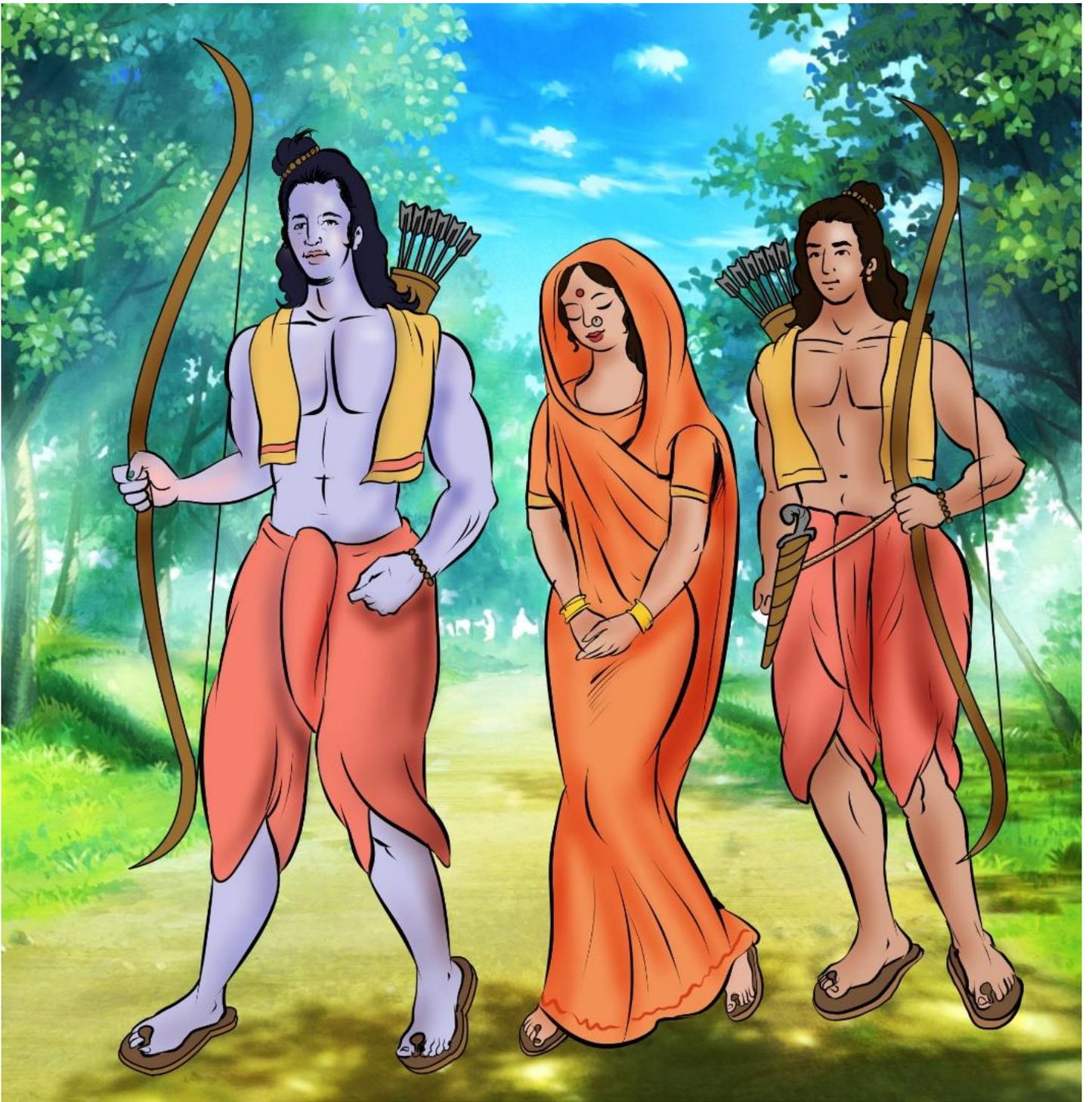
It was a long time to live in the forest instead of the palace, but Rama was prepared. Honestly, the whole thing was just a big family mess. The current king was getting old, and everyone expected Rama, his oldest son, to be named as his successor. Unfortunately, Rama's stepmom wanted her son, Bharata, to be the king instead. She also wanted Rama banished to the forest for 14 years.

Normally, the king would not have agreed to such ridiculous requests. But, he had given Bharata's mother two wishes many years ago, and she had saved them for this very moment. Lots of people were upset, including Bharata who had no interest in stealing the throne from his stepbrother. But there was nothing to be done. The decision had been made. Rama was one of the few members of the royal household to remain completely calm, accepting his fate with both grace and humility.

Have you ever been calm when everyone else was stressing out?

Do you know what it means to have grace and humility? What would the opposite of grace and humility be like?

Eventually, it was decided that Rama's wife, Sita, and Rama's other brother, Lakshmana, would join him in the forest for the 14-year exile. After some tearful hugs and long goodbyes, the three headed off. It was a dramatic change from palace life, but they soon settled into their new routine. The first 13 years passed without incident. The final year, however, was quite a different story.



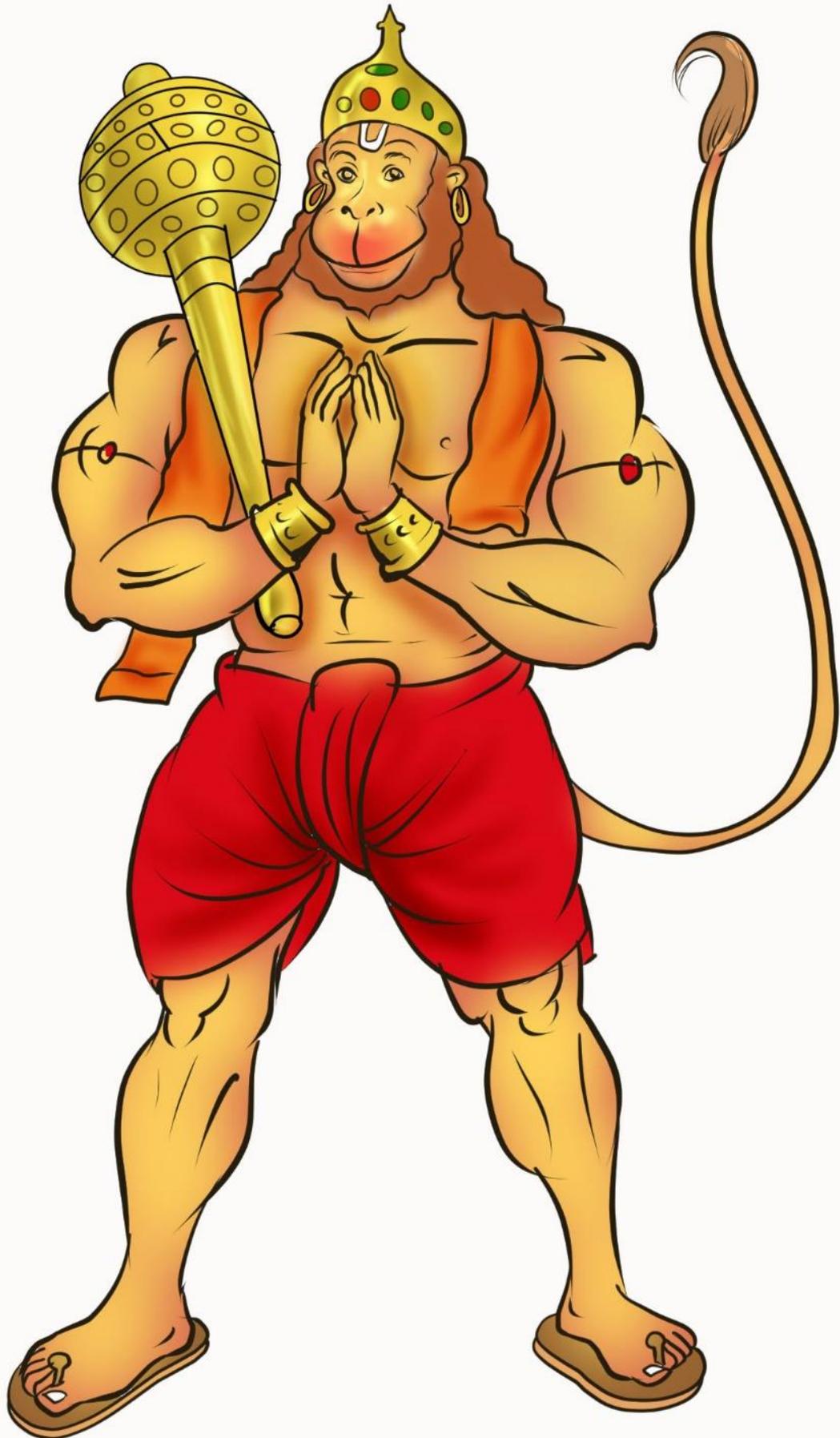
Rama had angered the evil King Ravana {rah-VAH-nuh} of Lanka {LAHN-kuh}, and the king wanted revenge. Through a series of tricks, King Ravana had managed to kidnap Sita while Rama and Lakshmana were away from their hut in the forest. By the time the brothers realized Sita was missing, she was long gone. Clearly, they needed to rescue her, but first they had to figure out where she was.

Rama turned to his friend, Sugriva {soo-GREE-vuh}, king of the *vanaras* {vah-NAH-ruhs}. These ape-man forest-dwellers, who could change size and shape, searched the land over for any sign of Sita. One group, led by a *vanara* named Hanuman {HAH-new-mahn}, heard a rumor that Sita was being held captive on King Ravana's home island of Lanka. To confirm that she was really there, Hanuman made use of his special shape-shifting skills. He gathered his courage, summoned all his supernatural strength, and grew himself into a towering giant. Then, he took a humongous leap of faith over the vast expanse of sea in the direction of Lanka. He had to outwit a couple of sea demons along the way, but he soon arrived on its sandy shores, ready to find Sita.

Since traveling around Lanka as a huge giant would be dangerously obvious, Hanuman turned himself into a tiny insect, so he could scour the island undetected. Hanuman eventually caught sight of Sita. She was being held prisoner in a garden surrounded by demon warriors.

Hanuman quickly returned to the coast, transformed himself once more into a giant, and jumped back over the sea to the mainland. When King Sugriva and Rama finally heard the wonderful news, they nearly burst with joy: Sita had been found!

Hanuman's special power was that he could change his shape and size. If you had a special power, what would it be?



Now, it was time to win Sita back. Rama, Lakshmana, and an army of *vanara* soldiers gathered all the supplies they would need for the upcoming epic battle. This time, when they reached the sea, they built a bridge and quickly crossed over to the island of Lanka. King Ravana and his army of giant demons were ready and waiting.

The war between the forces of good and evil raged for weeks. Both armies fought with all their might, refusing to retreat, but the situation soon took a horrible turn. King Ravana's son killed millions of *vanaras* in a single day and then used his powers to put both Rama and Lakshmana into a magical sleep called the serpent's noose. Everyone thought they were dead until an enormous eagle arrived to scare away the serpents and rouse the two men from their trance. The conflict resumed.

During another battle, King Ravana, himself, hurled his spear through the air and wounded Lakshmana. Once again, everyone was sure he would die until one of the monkey chiefs remembered the magic mountain herb. Hanuman rushed to retrieve it, but when he arrived on the mountaintop, he couldn't find it, so he picked up the entire mountain and brought it to the battlefield! The herb truly was magical, and Lakshmana was healed in no time, but there was no time to spare if they wanted to win this war.

Eventually, it all came down to a fight between the two leaders, King Ravana and Prince Rama. Each man rode his chariot into the fray, prepared to win or die. Arrows and spears hurtled across the skies. A couple of times, Rama's weapons hit the king right in his head. But, as soon as one head was destroyed, another one grew in its place! Rama began to feel like this war would last into eternity.

The war between Ravana and Rama happened thousands of years ago, but people still go to war. What could humans do to avoid fighting?



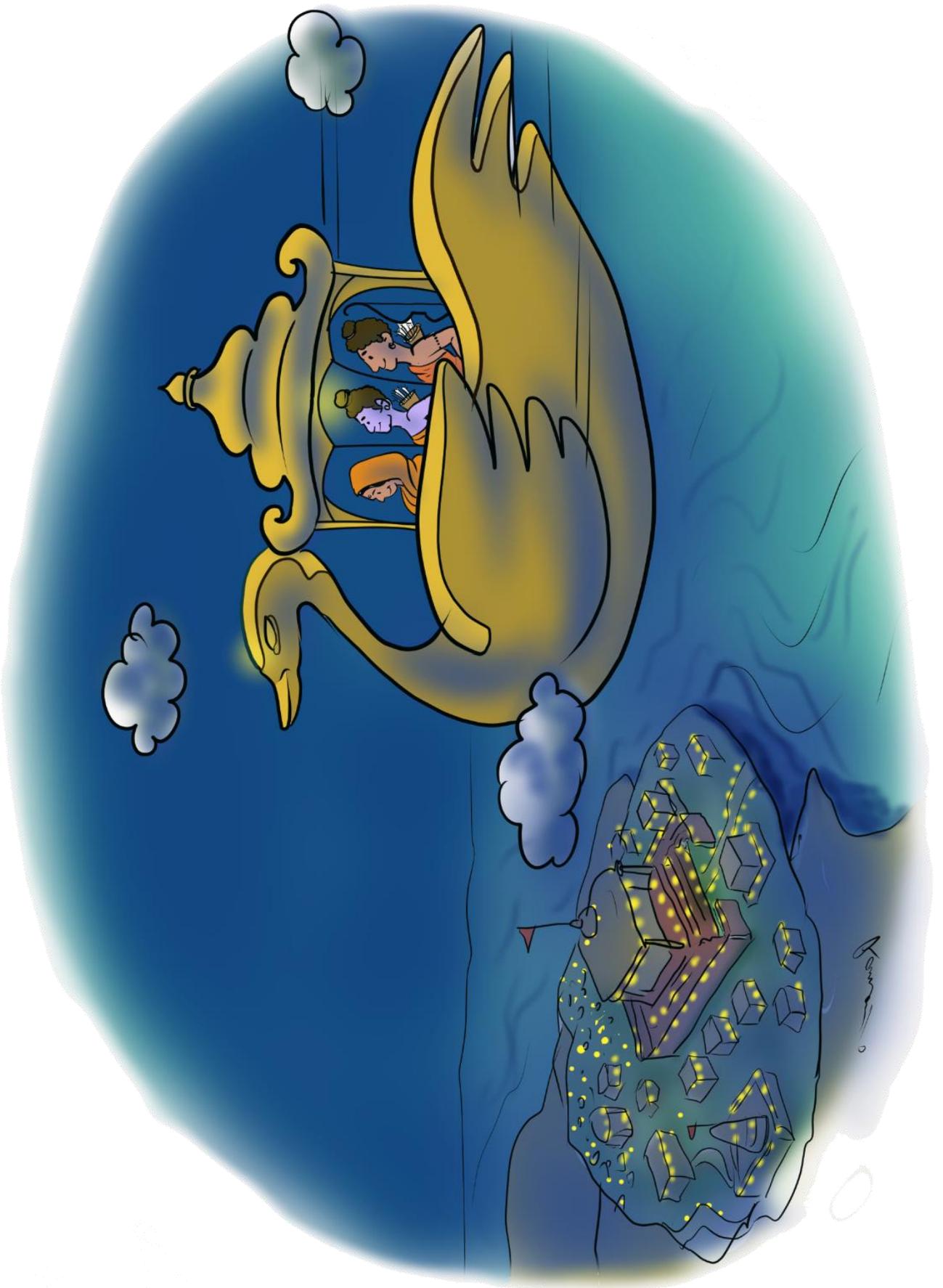
Exhausted and emotionally drained, Prince Rama shot yet another arrow into the air. This time, all the elements of earth and sky came together. The arrow gathered force from the wind, the sun, and the mountains and then pierced King Ravana's heart. Ravana fell to the ground, mortally wounded. When Ravana's troops saw that he had been defeated, they retreated. Rama had won. Finally.

Once Sita was rescued from captivity, Rama awarded the crown of Lanka to Ravana's kinder brother. The new king then offered his magic chariot, so Rama, Lakshmana and Sita could return home quickly. At long last, their 14-year exile in the forest was coming to an end. They waved goodbye as the chariot lifted them high into the sky, carrying them over the island and across the sea. Soon, the mainland came into view. Rama and Sita smiled lovingly at one another. They were almost home.

They were greeted with the warmest welcome they had ever witnessed. The air was filled with the sweet smell of incense, the joyful sounds of music, and the trumpeting of bejeweled elephants. Flowers, in every color imaginable, covered patios and courtyards, and thousands of lamps glowed brightly as if to guide the happy couple home.

What things do you do to welcome people to your home, especially if you haven't seen them in a long time?

Before the chariot even touched the ground, Bharat jumped onto it, and gave his stepbrother, Prince Rama, the biggest hug ever! Bharat then greeted Hanuman, Lakshmana, and the ever-beautiful Sita before allowing Rama to reclaim his rightful place on the throne. It hadn't been easy but, once again, the world was at peace.



Additional Questions

Rama and Sita had to spend 14 years in the forest. Can you count to 14?

As you know, people dress in all sorts of different ways. This story takes place in India, so some of the characters wear outfits that are typical of that part of the world. Look at the first story image. What things do you notice about Sita's appearance that give you hints that she is from India? [wearing a sari, having a bindi – the small dot between her eyebrows]

King Ravana ruled the island of Lanka. This island is a real place, now known as Sri Lanka. [You can show this area on a world map.] Do you know what an island is? Have you ever been to an island before?

Hanuman first turned himself into a giant. Then, he turned himself into a tiny insect. Do you remember why he did that? [as a giant, he could leap across the ocean to the island of Lanka; as a tiny insect, he could sneak around better]

Which would you rather be – really big like a giant or really small like an insect? Why?

Rama was totally exhausted at the end of the fight with King Ravana, but he persevered and finally won. Have you ever felt like you couldn't complete something difficult, but you stuck with it until the end?

After 14 years, Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana were finally able to return to their homeland. Have you ever been away from home for a while? What was it like when you finally returned?

Some people say that Rama and Sita represent "light" and "goodness" while King Ravana represents "evil" and "darkness." That means this story can also be about "light getting rid of darkness" or "goodness overcoming evil." Do you think it's true that good usually wins out over evil? Do you have an example of that?