

Norwich Puppet Theatre Teaching Resources: Diwali

The Ramayana is a Hindu epic story (one of the two great epics of India, the other being the *Mahabharata*). *The Ramayana* is mainly about the duties of relationships. It shows ideal characters and ideal ways to behave- like the ideal servant who is loyal, the ideal brother, the ideal wife and the ideal king.

The Ramayana tells the story of **Lord Rama**. In Hinduism, Prince/Lord Rama is believed to be an incarnation of the God **Vishnu**. This means Rama is an earthly appearance of the God in human form. Incarnations of Gods/Goddesses can also be in animal form too.

The name **Ramayana** is a compound of two words: the name **Rāma** and the word **ayana**- which means 'going' or 'advancing'. So, **Ramayana** can be translated as "**Rama's Journey**".

It is not just an ordinary story: it contains the teachings of ancient Hindu sages and presents them as stories with philosophical and devotional elements interspersed. *The Ramayana* consists of 7 books in total. Each book tells of different events and characters in the life of Rama.

Book 1- describes the birth of Rama, his childhood and marriage to Sita.

Book 2- describes the preparations for Rama's coronation and his exile into the forest.

Book 3- describes the forest life of Rama and the kidnapping of Sita by the demon king Ravana.

Book 4- describes the meeting of Hanuman (the monkey God) with Rama.

Book 5- describes the heroism of Hanuman, his flight to Lanka and meeting with Sita.

Book 6- describes the battle between Rama's and Ravana's armies and Sita and Rama's return after exile.

Book 7- describes the 2nd exile of Sita, the birth of Sita and Rama's twin sons Lava and Kusha, their return from exile and coronation to the throne of Ayodhya, and Rama's final departure from the world

There are many different characters in **The Ramayana**, the main characters are:

Rama - The hero of the tale. Rama is an incarnation of the Hindu God Vishnu. In the story, the character of Rama is meant to be the ideal role model of goodness and virtue.

Sita -The beloved wife of Rama and the daughter of king Janaka. She is the incarnation of the Hindu Goddess Lakshmi. In the story, the character of Sita is meant to be the ideal role model of a good, dutiful wife. Her character is supposed to represent everything that is pure and good. She goes with Rama into exile and is kidnapped by the 10 headed demon king Ravana. She is imprisoned on the island of Lanka until Rama rescues her.

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Dasharatha - The king of Ayodhya, Rama's father. Rama is the eldest son of Dasharatha. Dasharatha has 3 more sons: Bharata and then the twins Lakshmana and Shatrughna. Dasharatha has 3 wives.

Kousalya – First wife of King Dasharatha. Rama's mother.

Kaikeyi – Second and favourite wife of King Dasharatha. Bharata's mother. Kaikeyi forces Dasharatha to make their son Bharata the crown prince and to command Rama (the rightful crown prince) to go into exile for 14 years. Dasharatha dies heartbroken after he banishes Rama to the forest.

Sumitra – Third wife of King Dasharatha. Mother of the twins Lakshmana and Shatrughna.

Bharata - The son of Dasharatha and Kaikeyi. Younger brother of Rama. When Bharata learns that his mother Kaikeyi has forced Rama into exile for 14 years and this banishment has caused Dasharatha to die brokenhearted, he storms out of the palace and goes in search of Rama in the forest. When Rama refuses to return from his exile to assume the throne, Bharata obtains Rama's sandals and places them on the throne as a gesture that Rama is the true king. Bharata then rules Ayodhya as the regent of Rama for the next fourteen years until Rama returns from exile.

Lakshmana - Younger brother of Rama. Son of Dasharatha and Sumitra. The 2 brothers are inseparable and Lakshmana chooses to go into exile with Rama. He spends his time protecting Sita and Rama.

Shatrughna - The son of Dasharatha and Sumitra. He is the youngest brother of Rama and also the twin brother of Lakshmana.

Surpanakha – The sister of Ravana (10 headed demon king of Lanka). Ravana killed Surpanakha's husband.

Surpanakha is bitter after her husband is killed. She visits relatives in the forest. Here she meets Rama and his brother Lakshmana in exile in the forest. She wants to be Rama's wife but he rejects her as he loves Sita. She then wants to be Lakshmana's wife- but he also rejects her. She then is angry and tries to kill Sita but Lakshmana saves Sita and cuts off Surpanakha's nose and sends her back to Lanka. She goes to one of her brothers- Khara- he sends an army to punish Rama and Lakshmana but his army are defeated. Then Surpanakha goes to her brother Ravana and talks to him of Sita's beauty and virtue and persuades him that he should kidnap Sita and make her his wife. Ravana kidnaps Sita and this causes the war that leads to his own defeat.

Ravana -The 10 headed demon king of Lanka. He is a powerful king and is persuaded by his bitter sister to kidnap Rama's wife Sita whilst she and Rama are in exile.

Maricha – A demon who plays a small but important part in the story. Ravana wants to kidnap Sita and so asks for Maricha's help. Maricha turns himself into a golden, enchanted deer.

Sita sees the deer and wants Rama to catch it for her.

Rama asks his brother Lakshmana to take care of Sita while he goes hunting for the deer.

Whilst Rama is out, Sita and Lakshmana are tricked into believing he is in danger.

Lakshmana goes to save Rama and whilst Sita is alone, she is kidnapped by Ravana.

Hanuman – The Hindu monkey God. Hanuman helps Rama. Hanuman plays an important part in finding Sita and in the battle which takes place when Rama takes Sita back from Ravana.

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Here is a short description which summarises some of the key events in *The Ramayana* which are celebrated in the festival of Diwali.

In the kingdom of Ayodhya, circumstances cause Rama and his wife Sita to be banished for 14 years by Rama's father. Rama's brother Lakshmana accompanies them. They live in exile in the forest.

Rama's father dies of a broken heart. Because Rama is banished- his brother Bharata should be crowned king, but Bharata refuses to be king- he goes to find Rama and ask him to come out of exile. Rama says he will follow his dead fathers order to remain in exile for 14 years. So Bharata agrees to rule as regent until Rama returns at the end of the 14 years.

During Rama's exile, one day his wife Sita sees a beautiful deer and asks Rama to capture it for her. Rama's brother Lakshmana stays to protect Sita whilst Rama captures the deer. Whilst chasing the deer, Rama concludes from its behaviour that it is unnatural and evil. He decides to kill it rather than capture it alive for Sita. After a long chase, he shoots it down with an arrow; but as the deer dies, it cries out to Sita and Lakshmana for help, mimicking Rama's voice. Sita is worried and asks Lakshmana to go on a search for Rama. When Lakshmana insists that no one can harm Rama, Sita is distraught as she believes Rama is in danger- she pleads with Lakshmana and then orders him to go and help Rama. When Lakshmana leaves to look for Rama, Ravana the demon king of Lanka succeeds in kidnapping Sita. Ravana had persuaded his demon friend Maricha to be the enchanted deer to trick Rama and Lakshmana into leaving Sita alone.

Ravana takes Sita to his kingdom in Lanka, and keeps her as a prisoner in one of his palaces. During her captivity for 1 year in Lanka, Ravana expresses his desire for her, however Sita refuses his advances and stays faithful to Rama.

Rama meets Hanuman, the monkey king- a brave warrior. Rama asks him to find Sita and eventually Hanuman discovers Sita's whereabouts. Sita gives Hanuman her jewellery to prove to Rama she has been found. However, Hanuman is caught by Lankan forces. Hanuman is about to be executed and burnt in a bonfire when he manages to escape and in return, he burns down the Lanka capital city.

Sita is finally rescued by Rama in a famous battle to defeat Ravana. Since Sita was kept in captivity by Ravana all this time, she had to go through the 'Agni-Pariksha', the test of walking through the fire, in order to prove her faithfulness. She passes the test and then it is the end of Sita and Rama's 14 years of exile in the forest.

They return to the kingdom of Ayodhya and Rama takes his place on the throne. It is this event that Hindu's celebrate during the **Diwali** festival.

Diwali is popularly known as the **Festival of Lights**. It is an important 5-day festival in the religions of Hinduism, Sikhism and Jainism, occurring between mid-October and mid-November. Diwali is an official holiday in India

Diwali involves the lighting of small clay lamps (diyas) filled with oil to signify the triumph of good over evil. During Diwali celebrants wear new clothes and share sweets and snacks with near and dear ones.

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In Hinduism, Diwali marks the return of Lord Rama to his kingdom after defeating the demon king Ravana. To welcome the return of Rama and Sita after 14 years of banishment lamps were lit in rows to light their way back to their kingdom and to symbolise the triumph of good over evil and light over darkness.

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