

If Peter was a tweeter, then what would Peter tweet? If Sita was a tweeter, then what would Sita tweet? What would the angels tweet?

New and cool communication tools like Twitter always invite application to old and significant stories. Here’s a lesson idea that is adaptable to any big story in a faith, and fun to do, but also really makes pupils think about the action, characters and meanings of stories.

Ask the class to think about the story of Holy Week and Easter, and re-tell the story in 8 140 character tweets from Simon Peter’s point of view, or ask pupils tackling the Divali story to do 8 tweets from Sita at key moments in the story. Working in pairs is probably more creative than trying this alone.

To get the idea clear and the pupils going, here are some tweets from Moses’ twitter feed. Cut them out and give a set of cards to pairs. Pupils might put them in order, and suggest a couple more before they do some of their own in relation to another story. To make it simpler, give them 4, 6 or 8 moments in the story from which to tweet, but to make it more challenging

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| Bulrushes and the smell of tar always make me think of my sister, my mum and the Princess. They’re sweet to me! | They say that if you know where the bodies are buried, then you are a danger to the government. I do, but I’m running for the desert | Pharaoh: heart like a stone. Will crack with frogs, blood river, dead cows and all. Let the people go, Rameses, you old fascist! | Leading crowd of slaves to the beach. Egyptians chasing. It’s Pharaoh-Devil or the deep red sea. Wish I’d never listened to the bush. |
| Growing up at the palace makes me feel like the fresh prince of the Nile My (not so) secret plan: to be Pharaoh | Bush that burns & talks? Stick turning into snake? Am going crazy today. Actually I’ve never been saner. Off back to Egypt. | Painted doorposts with blood. Ate roast lamb supper. Bread rather flat, but now we wait in hope, listening. How do angels sound? | You’ve got to be kidding us God. Sea rolled back, slaves all safe. Egyptians all trying to swim home. Promised land here we come. |

The approach to story is fun, as the illustrations below show. It would often be good to ask the pupils to tweet from a peripheral character rather than the central character. If you want some variety of interpretation, then get the pupils to plan the tweets of different characters in the story – for Holy Week and Easter, for example, they could do Judas, Pilate, the Centurion, Mary Magdalene and Joseph of Arimathea. For the Christmas story, how about Herod, the Inn keeper, a shepherd, Mary, a wise man and the Angel Gabriel?

Any well known faith story might be suited to this activity:

Good Samaritan / Life of Gandhi / Jonah / Divali / Prodigal Son / Life of the Buddha / Christmas

Challenge the children to draft and redraft their tweets: can they make them funnier? Deeper? More thoughtful? Cleverer?



What would the angels tweet?

My latest idea for a Christmas RE activity is called 'Angel Tweets': it imagines Angels on twitter

There are five angel messages in the Nativity story. The angel of pregnancy advice speaks to Mary, the angel of relationship counselling to Joseph, The X factor angel choir gives musical performance to some rag tag shepherds on a hillside. The TomTom Satnav angel gives guidance to the wise men about avoiding King Herod and also sends a dream to the Holy Family to be asylum seekers in Egypt.

Ask the class to do the angel's twitter feed: what five angel messages would they send after each of these moments in the story?

What would the angels say to the humans today?

Diwali: A Simple version of the story of Rama and Sita

You could use some props really well here: can you get golden slippers, a chair covered in luxury cloth as a throne, a hoop for a magic circle, a plastic monkey, a diva lamp? Ask all the children to be trees in the forest to begin with, and to chorus ('Evil' ever time Ravana is mentioned. 'Beautiful' for Sita. 'God in disguise' for Rama, 'Monkey chatter, monkey matter' for Hanuman).

Long ago King Dasratha ruled the kingdom of Ayodhya. He had three wives, and four sons. His eldest son, Rama, was heir to the throne. Rama was married to the beautiful Sita. Rama was actually the god Vishnu, living in human form: he was God, in disguise. His special power was to destroy evil. The main evil troublemaker was a terrifying ten-headed demon called Ravana, living on the island of Lanka, over the sea.



Queen Kaikeyi, the king's favourite wife, was jealous that Rama was to become king. She wanted her son Bharat to reign! She told lies to the king about Rama, and the king banished Rama for 14 years. He was exiled and sent away to the deep dark forest of Vrindavan. Beautiful Sita and Rama's loyal brother Lakshman refused to leave him, they went with Rama into exile.

Brother Bharat became king, but he was angry with his mother because of the lies she had told. He took a pair of Rama's golden slippers and placed them on the throne. The slippers were a symbol that Rama was the real king. Bharat said 'I will look after Rama's kingdom until he returns.'

Evil Ravana wanted beautiful Sita for his own. He tricked her by shape shifting. First he appeared to Sita as a wounded faun. She got Rama to come to the rescue, but the faun disappeared. Rama determined to go in search of the wounded creature and give help, but Sita was left alone in the forest in danger. So Rama drew an enchanted circle around her: 'Stay in the circle, and you will be safe.' Then evil Ravana shifted to the shape of an old thirsty beggar. 'Please give me water' he begged. Sita was full of compassion, and she stepped out of the circle to give the beggar a drink. At once, he shifted back to his ten-headed evil demon shape, and carried beautiful Sita away, bundling her into his mighty chariot. He sped off across the skies to the island of Lanka. He was sure that if he married Sita he would rule the world.



The brothers were shocked and upset to find Sita missing from her enchanted circle, and determined to find and rescue her. Hanuman, the monkey king, who was devoted to Rama, helped them. After months of searching, they found her at the island of Lanka, and gathered an army for the rescue! Mostly, the army was monkeys. Hanuman got together all the monkeys in the forest and they built a bridge of their own bodies across the sea to Sri Lanka.

After ten days of fierce fighting they defeated the demon Ravana. Sita and Rama were reunited and returned to the Kingdom of Ayodhya, as their 14 years of exile were now over. The people of the kingdom lit little oil lamps, called divas, all along the way to help the couple find their way home. Rama and Sita followed the row of lights, all the way home and there they became king and queen. The golden slippers were removed from the throne: they could sit in their rightful place again.

First, think about Divali as a topic for primary RE: what's important here?

1. **What's the theme of the Divali story?** Like all great stories, it has many: human weakness and strength, the conflict between goodness and evil, the triumph of light over darkness, the action of the 'little people (or monkeys!)' for the great good, the power of divinity, and the difficulty of understanding spiritual power. Sounds like an Iris Murdoch novel! The theme is not monkeys, rangoli, hand painting, candles, puppets or dressing up! Good RE, even (or especially) with 4 year olds will find the nugget of meaning in the learning, and polish it up for children to see clearly.
2. **Text and telling:** Religious stories are sometimes fixed in text, but never in interpretation. So if you (or the pupils) ask: 'Why would a god do that?' or 'Is it fair', or 'What does this mean?' then they become interpreters. That's what is supposed to happen. Let the questions flourish. This sets the use of the sacred text or story in the religious tradition close to the heart of the RE learning.
3. **Insider stories:** Text is better than textbook. As far as possible, use Hindu insider sources for the story. They may be usable earlier than you thought, as comics, on the web, or in text that will work as literacy and RE. The learning in RE is always alert to whose point of view we are hearing, because in RE different points of view make for good learning. So Sita's point of view is different from Rama's, just as the point of view of people celebrating in Preston varies from those in Mumbai. Both are important.
4. **Sikhs and Hindus** Don't forget that Divali is a sacred time for Sikhs as well. RE teaching can use this diversity for good learning. Upper primary pupils should be learning both that all Hindus are different, and that they have some things in common with Sikhs (who are all different too). The inter faith issue of 'who owns the festival' is a good example of the thinking RE needs for depth. It is very good for children who think they 'know about divali' to find out new things about the celebration as the years of KS2 unfold.
5. **Values in stories:** What place do the values of hope, living patiently with danger, truthfulness, persistence, ingenuity, worship, transcendence, love, find in the story? A conceptual link to the diva-making adds good learning, so we should make it.

So what to do?

And here are some ideas: how you might do it well. All these activities assume telling the stories. Video and retold text versions are only good insofar as they take the original narratives seriously! Sometimes the best way of telling the story is to do it yourself, carefully prepared: teaching is a performance art. Search for the J K Rowling presenter inside yourself.

| | Teaching and learning activity: suggestions, often with a literacy link, never exclusive. There are loads of good ways to teach from the Divali stories. | Outcomes related to levels (in teacher – language, but can be translated to pupil – language) “I can...” |
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| Year 1 | Stories and meanings. Children hear a well told version of the story of Rama and Sita. They sequence 6 pictures of the Divali story. They colour or outline a picture to show who is a ‘goody’ and who is a ‘baddie’ in the story. They choose two words to describe each of the main characters (Rama, Sita, Hanuman, Ravana) | Level 1: Show in my pictures some of the outline of the Divali story. Talk about the people in the story, and say why the story is special for Hindu people. Level 2: Identify some different ways Divali is celebrated and some ways my own special days are celebrated. |
| Year 2 | Generous Lakshmi. Children hear a story of the goddess Lakshmi, and learn that she personifies generosity, beauty, good fortune and prosperity. They discover that Lakshmi Puja (worship) is part of the celebration of Divali, and ask lots of questions about the artefacts. They think about their own ideas about generosity, kindness and good fortune. | Level 1: Talk about times when I have been generous, or received generosity. Level 2: Create labels for a murti (image) of Lakshmi, suggesting many meanings of symbols associated with her. Respond sensitively to ‘Divali values’ such as generosity, family togetherness and kindness. |
| Year 3 / 4 | Making sense of the stories: Pupils enter into the stories via hot seating, dramatising, writing the diaries and/or prayers of Sita at different moments in the story or creating ‘feelings graphs’ for the different characters. They ask: what other stories are like this? They compare the Divali story and a Disney movie (which will not last 4000 years!). | Level 3: Describe key features of the stories, and of celebrations of Divali, linking sources (text), beliefs (about the gods) and forms of expression (drama, puppets, dance). Compare features of these traditional stories from other cultures with other narratives (literacy). Look for meanings and values in the story of Divali and link the values in the story to my own life and ideas. |
| Year 3 / 4 | What matters most at Divali? Children hear the stories of Lakshmi, and of Rama and Sita, and of the celebration of Divali today in India and in (e.g.) Leicester (e.g. on video). From lists of 12 things that might matter at Divali, they choose, rank and explain the 5 things they think matter most. | Level 3: Describe how the Divali celebrations express some Hindu ideas such as community, remembering, sharing, light winning over darkness. Rank ‘what matters at divali’ thoughtfully, making links to my own experience, and asking ‘what matters to me?’ |
| Year 5/6 | Different expressions. Pupils read a story of Divali, watch a video about Divali in Britain today and take part in a shadow puppet play. They are asked: which of these three captures the ‘true meaning of Divali’ best? Why? They hear about the Sikh celebration of Divali, remembering the release of Guru Hargovind from Gwalior Jail. What is the same, and what is different between Hindu and Sikh Divali? Are there shared meanings between the two religions? | Level 3: Describe the practice and identify the impact of Divali in Hindu and Sikh communities. Describe and make links between my own and others’ celebrations: what’s a “big day” in my year, and how does that day use food, gifts, family, community, generosity to mark the occasion? Level 4: Understand how Divali celebrations vary and suggest meanings in different forms of celebration. Apply ideas like ‘diversity’, ‘celebrations’, ‘culture’ and ‘spirituality’ to my understanding of Divali. |
| Year 5/6 | Explaining questions, expressing informed views: Who is most important in Divali festivities: Lakshmi or Rama? What would happen if Divali was banned? Is Sita a ‘feminist hero’? Should all Hindus in Britain be given a day off work for Divali? Why or why not? What is the real meaning of Divali? For higher achieving pupils, discussion, thinking skills (ranking and ordering) and writing structures are needed to explore these questions effectively. | Level 4: Apply my own ideas to these questions thoughtfully, with reference to examples of religious teachings and practices. Show that I understand the celebrations. Level 5: Express clear and well informed views on some of these questions in the light of my learning about Hindu tradition, giving reasons for my answers. |