

Primary

Exploring Celebrations

how and why are religious festivals important?

Edited by Joyce Mackley



REtoday
Services

Exploring Succot through song activities

Information file

Succot is the festival which commemorates when the Jewish people wandered through the desert after the Exodus from Egypt and how God provided for them. They built temporary flimsy huts, Succahs, through which they could see the stars at night. The Etrog (Citron fruit) and the Lulav (three types of bound leaves – traditionally myrtle, willow and palm) are shaken together in all directions to symbolise sweetness and goodness.



Three activities using the song on page 7

Action song

- Provide children with tied bundles of leaves (to represent the Lulav) and large lemons (to represent the Citron fruit).
- Sing the song together.
- At appropriate points shake their Lulav or Citron fruit – up/down/left/right and in a circle).

Make and do

Build a Succah A Succah can be made by using a climbing frame and balancing branches over the top of the frame pre-strung with twine. Decorate with hanging fruit and vegetables. Role-play:

- the rabbi blessing the Succah – shaking the Lulav in all directions
- families eating and sleeping inside the Succah during the festival.

Jewish people often invite others to share a meal in their Succah. Ask the children to invite guests to their classroom Succah.

Make a 'shoebox' Succah: Children could create a mini Succah in a shoebox using Playmobil® people, leaves and cut-out fruits. They could use these to act out what a Jewish family might do at Succot.



Tell the story behind the festival

During the Jewish festival of Succot people remember the time the Jewish people travelled in the desert after escaping from slavery in Egypt, and how God looked after them. They had left all their possessions behind in Egypt. It was often hard and dangerous in the desert and they were often grumpy, but they trusted Moses their leader, and God to get them safely to a new land.

Tell children the story from the book of Exodus in the Bible using a child-friendly version. A good one is 'The Long Journey' by Bob Hartman in the *Lion Storyteller Bible*, ISBN 0 7459 3607 5.

Stop, think, question, share

In pairs, ask children to choose their favourite moment in the story. Gather suggestions and agree one moment to focus on. Retell the story – **stop** at the key moment.

Think: Ask children to focus on Moses and think about the following four questions

- What is he doing?
- How is he feeling?
- What puzzles him? What question might he ask?
- If you could be there, what question would you ask?

Share: In turns each child shares their answers with a partner and then the group. Record responses on the whiteboard.

Personal reflection:

- What would you miss most if you had to leave your home quickly? What would you take?
- Who would you trust to lead you to safety?

Hands and worship

5-7

For the teacher

Hands are put together or held open or aloft in worship; extended as a sign of friendship; decorated, to express happiness, prosperity or beauty, in eastern weddings and festivals. These are just some of the many ways our hands act as symbols, conveying deeper meaning. The following activities focus on the theme of 'hands' as a starting point for learning about Eid and for reflection on how hands are often used to show others our feelings and beliefs.



Starter activity

Ask pupils to

- Talk about how we use our hands.
- Work in pairs and choose two ways we may use them to help and two ways we may use them to hurt.
- Illustrate different hand signals and ask pupils to guess what they are. How many different hand signals can they think of? What do they mean?
- Give pupils a copy of the Eid card illustration below. In pairs ask them to answer the following questions: What are the hands doing on this card? What do you think it means?
- Talk about how the hands show that the person is open to listening to God and to receiving his blessings at Eid.



Ask pupils to

- Talk about how hands can be used to worship. Why are our hands important in worship?
- How would we use our hands to praise someone? To thank someone?
- Why do you think some Muslims decorate their hands?

Celebrating Eid with mendhi patterns

- Display pictures of hands decorated with mendhi patterns.
- Explain how some Muslim women apply henna to their hands and feet to make traditional patterns to celebrate the festival of Eid. Talk about how decorated hands might help worshippers remember God during and after Eid.
- Children could decorate a hand outline with mendhi patterns.



Classroom activities: my Sikh Divali

7-11

1. Why does Butta celebrate Divali?

Give pupils a copy of the account 'My Sikh Divali' on page 24. Ask them to work in pairs to:

- highlight any words or phrases that show why Butta celebrates Divali
- agree a sentence to answer the question: 'Why do Sikhs celebrate Divali?'

2. Exploring Divali as a celebration of freedom

Explain that the name 'Divali' comes from the ancient Sanskrit word 'Deepavali' meaning 'row of lights'. Ask pupils to:

- suggest why a 'festival of lights' is a good way of celebrating a festival of freedom
- complete a spider diagram around the word 'Freedom' to show what freedom means and why it is something to celebrate.

3. An organisation that works for freedom

Sit pupils in a circle, and soften any lighting. Ask them to relax and sit very still. A stilling exercise is useful here.

- Read the story behind the festival of Bandi Chor Divas (see below) and ask pupils to suggest what the story says about 'freedom' and 'justice'.
- Show pupils a candle inside a coil of barbed wire. Light the candle, and ask children to say the thoughts and questions that come to their mind. Explain that it is the symbol of Amnesty International, an organisation that exists today to help people whose freedom has been taken away for unfair reasons
- Ask pupils to draw an outline of the candle surrounded by wire, and to record key words and ideas about freedom and justice around it.
- Ask pupils to decide – Would Butta support Amnesty International? Why or why not?

The story behind Sikh Divali – Bandi Chor Divas

In the time of the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind, the Emperor became very ill. He was told that he would only recover if a holy man prayed for his good health. The Emperor asked Guru Hargobind to stay in the fort at Gwalior to pray for his recovery.

This fort was also a prison, and whilst Hargobind was treated well, he was angered by how badly the prisoners were treated. Fifty-two Hindu princes had been unfairly imprisoned there. They were not given enough to eat and wore only rags. Hargobind did all he could to help them, but it was when the Emperor recovered and ordered his release that he saw his opportunity.

Guru Hargobind told the Emperor that he would not leave without the other prisoners. The Emperor could not understand the Guru and did not want to free the prisoners – but told him he could take as many prisoners as could hold on to his coat as he left.

The Emperor thought this would be only three or four at the most. Imagine his surprise when the Guru left with all 52 prisoners! The Guru, determined to help all of them, had made himself a very long cloak with 52 tassels. Each prisoner held onto a tassel and walked to freedom behind the Guru.



Guru Hargobind leads the 52 princes to freedom