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 State DPI 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) live in India. About 80% of India's population is Hindu. Show students where India is located on a world map.
- Many Hindus practice their religious traditions at home using home altars. They also visit Hindu temples. Show a few images of Hindu temples and home alters. Some examples can be found on pages 2-4. If you have a Hindu temple in your area, visit their website to download an image, or drive by and take your own photo.

  Hindu Temples: Although they come in all shapes and sizes, Hindu temples are often highly-decorated with images of Hindu gods and goddesses. Sometimes, temples are very colorful, but many are also white.

  Home altars: To create a home altar, Hindus find a quiet place in their homes and decorate it with images/statues of Hindu gods and goddesses, candles, and small plates for making offerings of flowers or food.
- Hinduism has many local and regional customs, which means there are lots of different ways to "be Hindu." Two of the most important holydays for nearly all Hindus are Holi, in the spring, and Diwali, in the fall. Diwali is also known as the 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." Indians who are part of other religions – like Buddhism or Jainism – also frequently celebrate Diwali, too.

Diwali Story

There are many legends about how Diwali came to be. One popular story centers on the Ramayana, an epic tale about Prince Rama and his wife, Sita. A short, age-appropriate version is included in this packet on pages 12-21. Questions sprinkled throughout will help keep younger students (K-2) engaged. More advanced questions for older students (Grades 3-5) are found at the end of the story on page 22.



Azhimala Siva Temple in India (Wikimedia Commons: Vinayaraj)



Laxminarayan Temple in India (Wikimedia Commons: A.Savin)



Hindu Temple in Hockessin, Delaware (Wikimedia Commons: Smallbones)



Hindu home altar (Wikimedia Commons: Yann Forget)

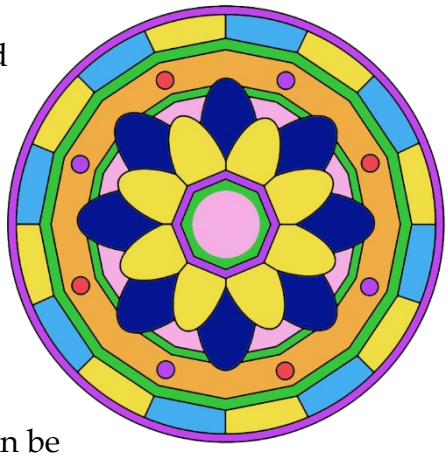


Hindu home altar (Wikimedia Commons: MikeLynch)

Craft #1: Rangoli

A *rangoli* {ran-GO-lee} is a colorful decoration 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. Examples can be found on page 6.

Nowadays, they are often made of colored sand. 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.

Two templates – one that's easier and one that's more complex – can be found on pages 7-8.

Craft #2: Paper Diya

Diwali is all about light, which is why sparklers, firecrackers, lanterns, and colorful light strands are all popular decorations for the holyday. A *diya* {DEE-yuh} is a small lamp. They are often used during Hindu services (*pujas*), and they come in all sorts of styles. They also make great Diwali crafts.



Materials: Background paper (either ½ sheet or full sheet), one lamp template, and two flame templates (one small and one large) per student + glue sticks.

The lamp template can be printed on any color paper. I usually print the flame templates on orange, red, or yellow paper. For younger kids, you can cut out the flame templates beforehand and just let them cut out the lamp template. Older kids can cut out all three pieces.

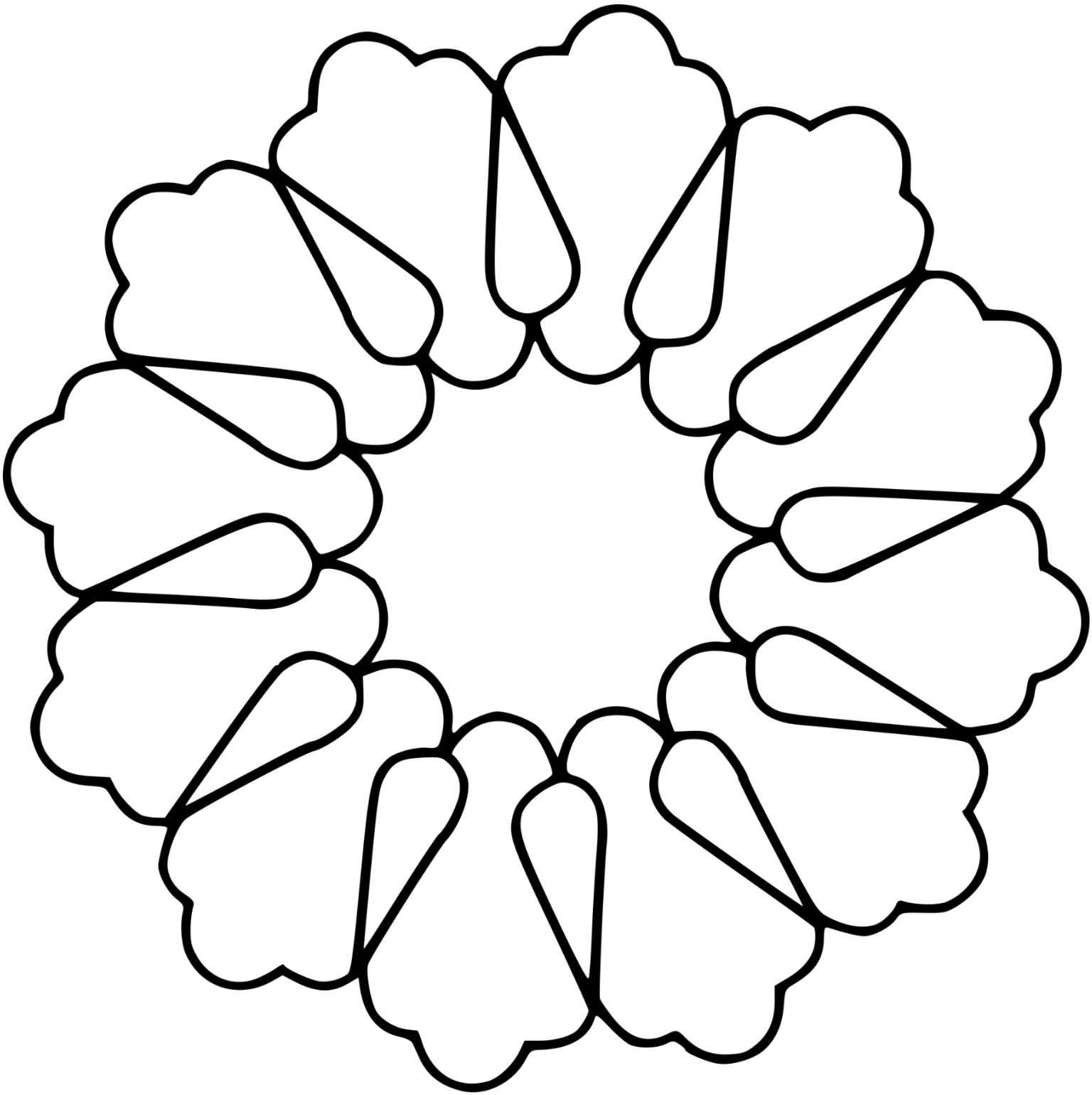
Kids can decorate their *diyas* with gem stickers or with crayons/markers. The *diya* will fit on a ½ sheet of background paper. If you use a full sheet, encourage them to draw fireworks or strands of light around the *diya.* Templates for the *diya* shown here are on pages 9-11.



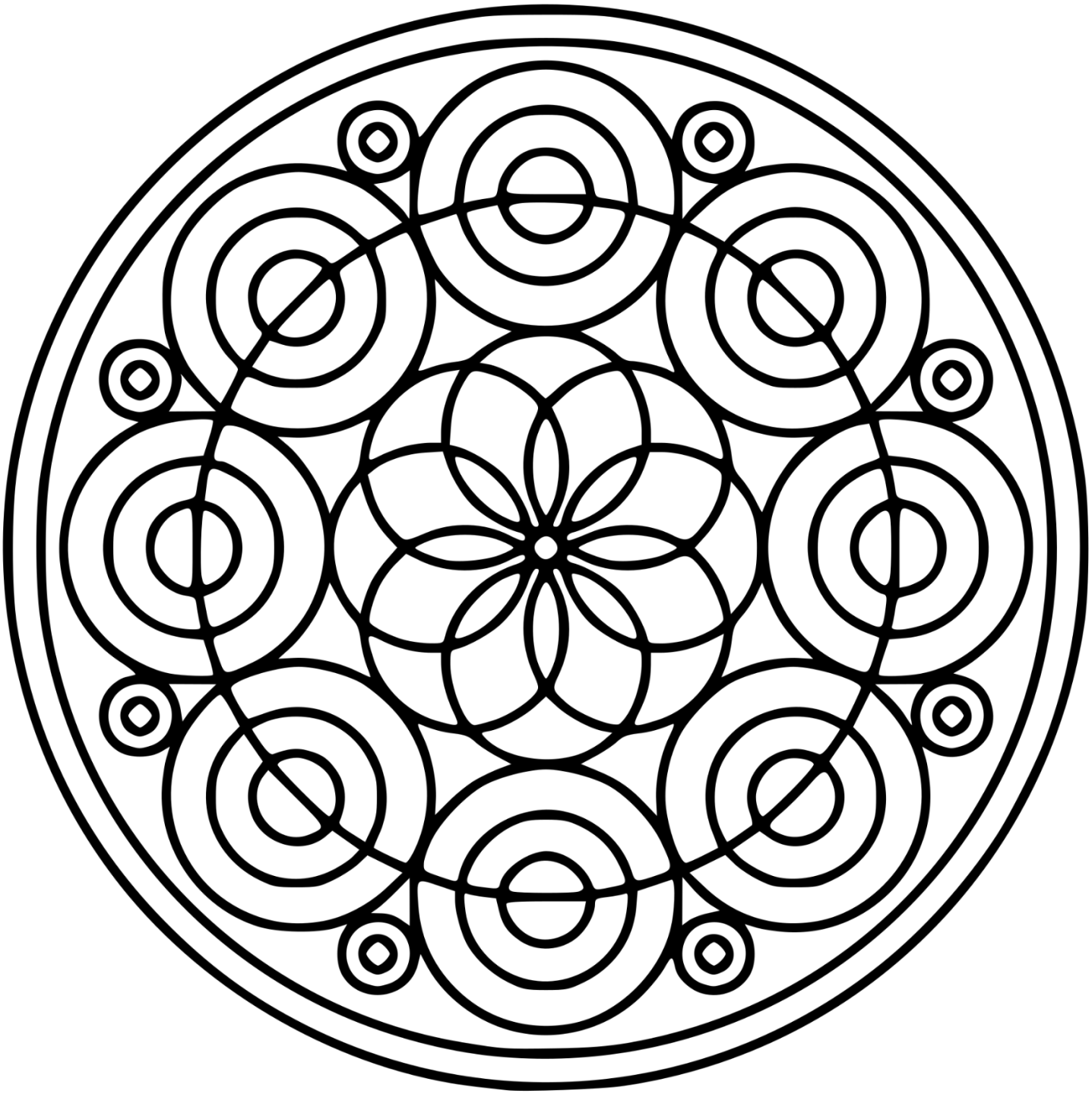
Rangoli (Wikimedia Commons: Obusaranya sekar)



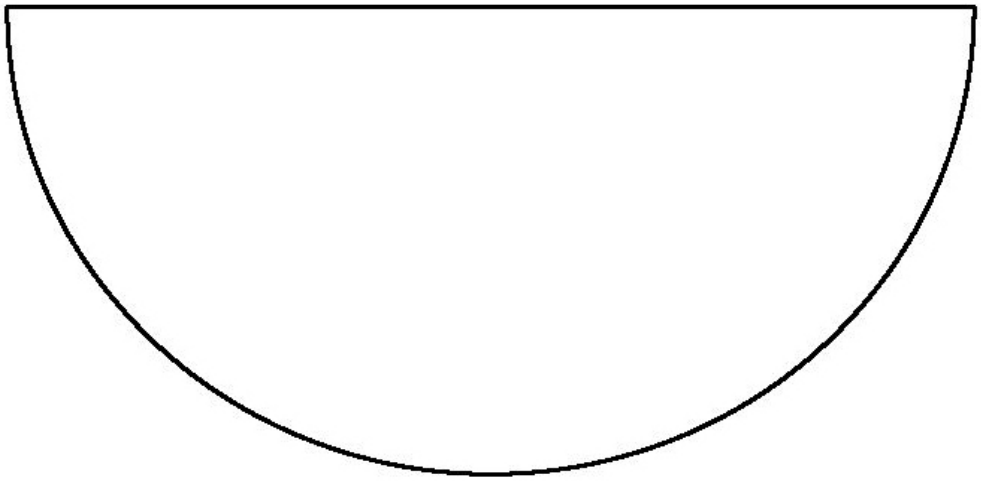
Rangoli (Wikimedia Commons: Yamireddy)

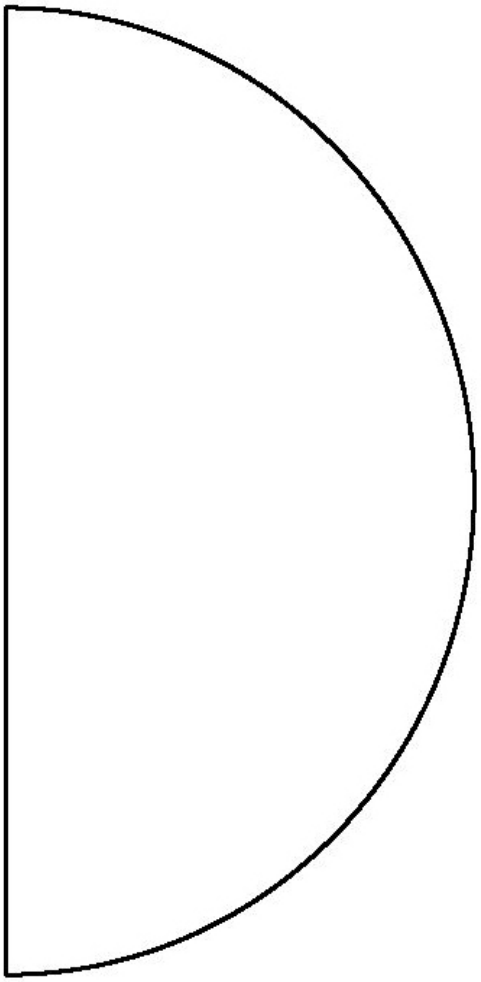


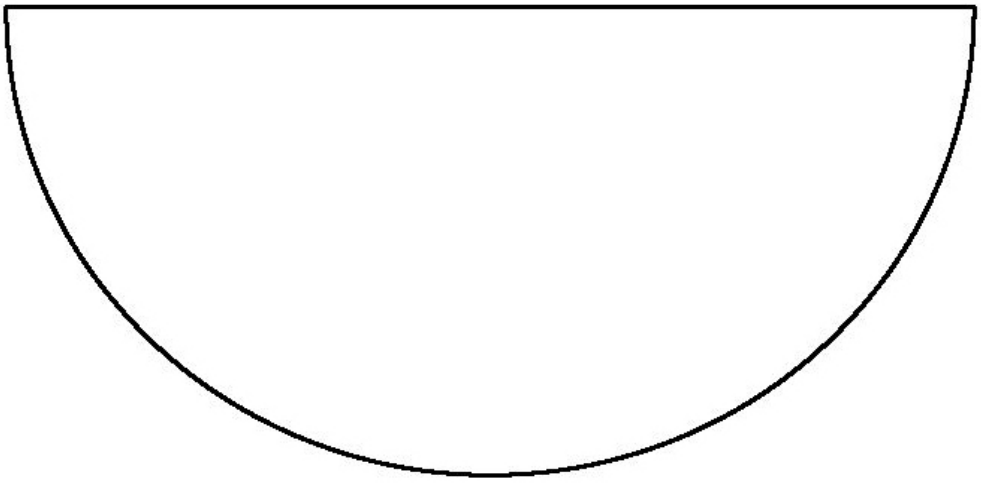
(Wikimedia Common: Mandala 56 by Nevit)

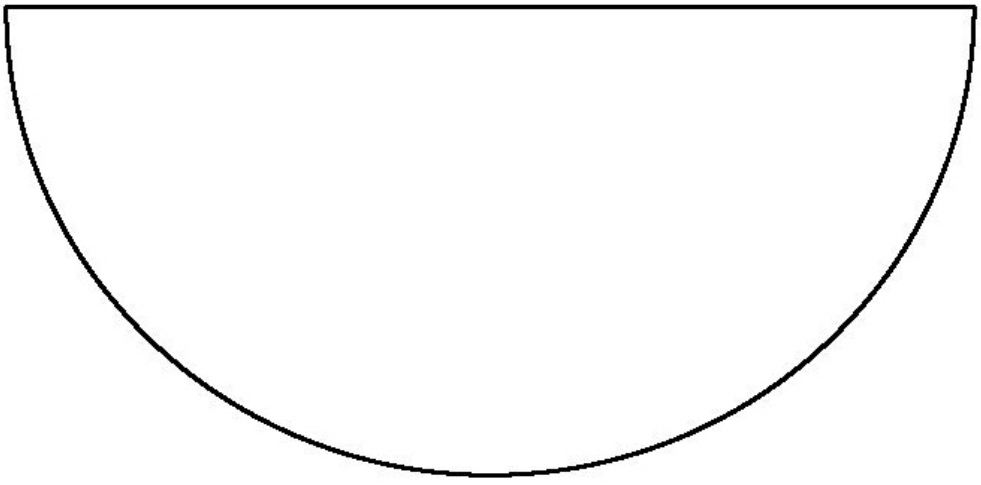


(Wikimedia Commons: Mandala 52 by Nevit)

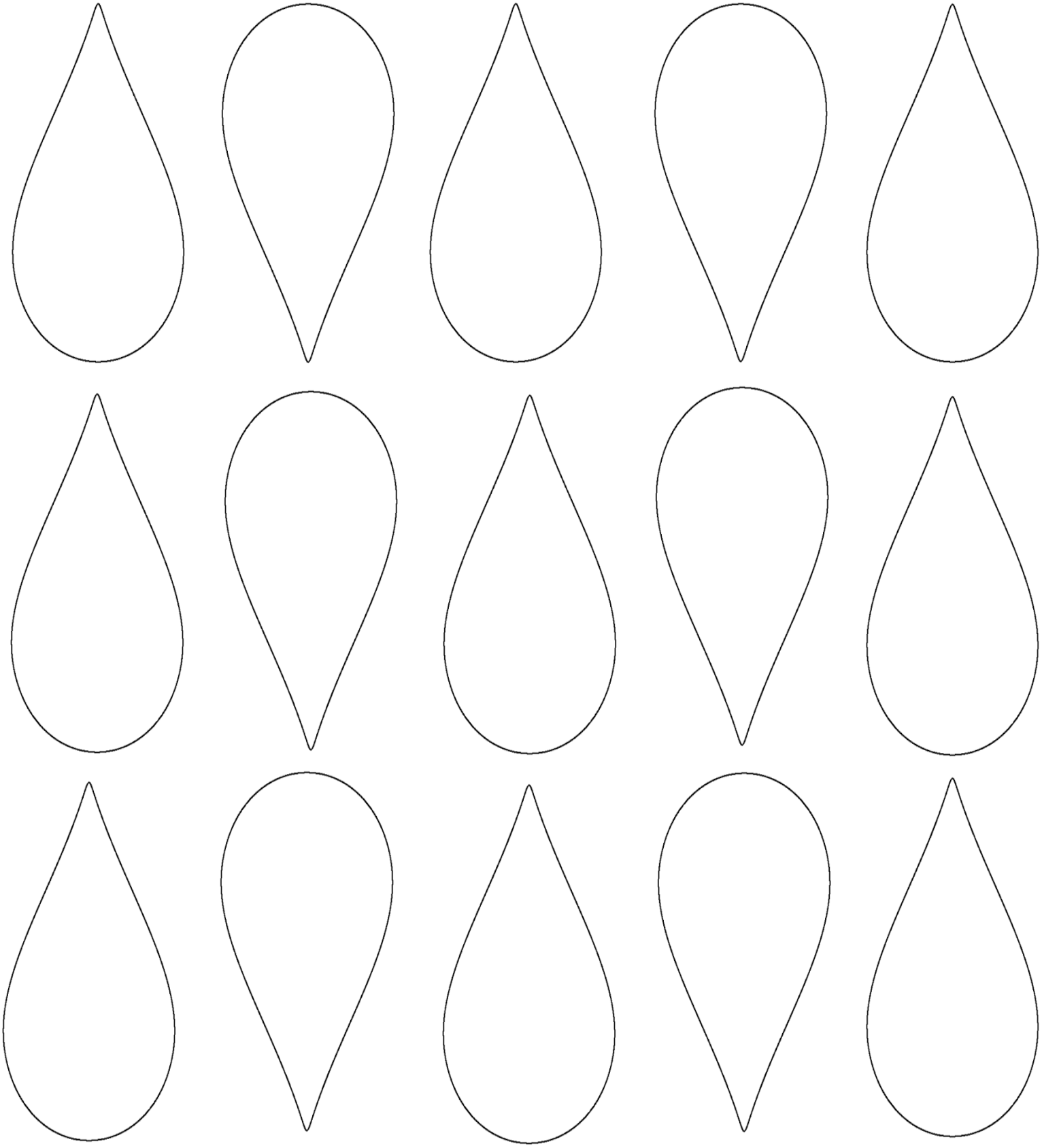


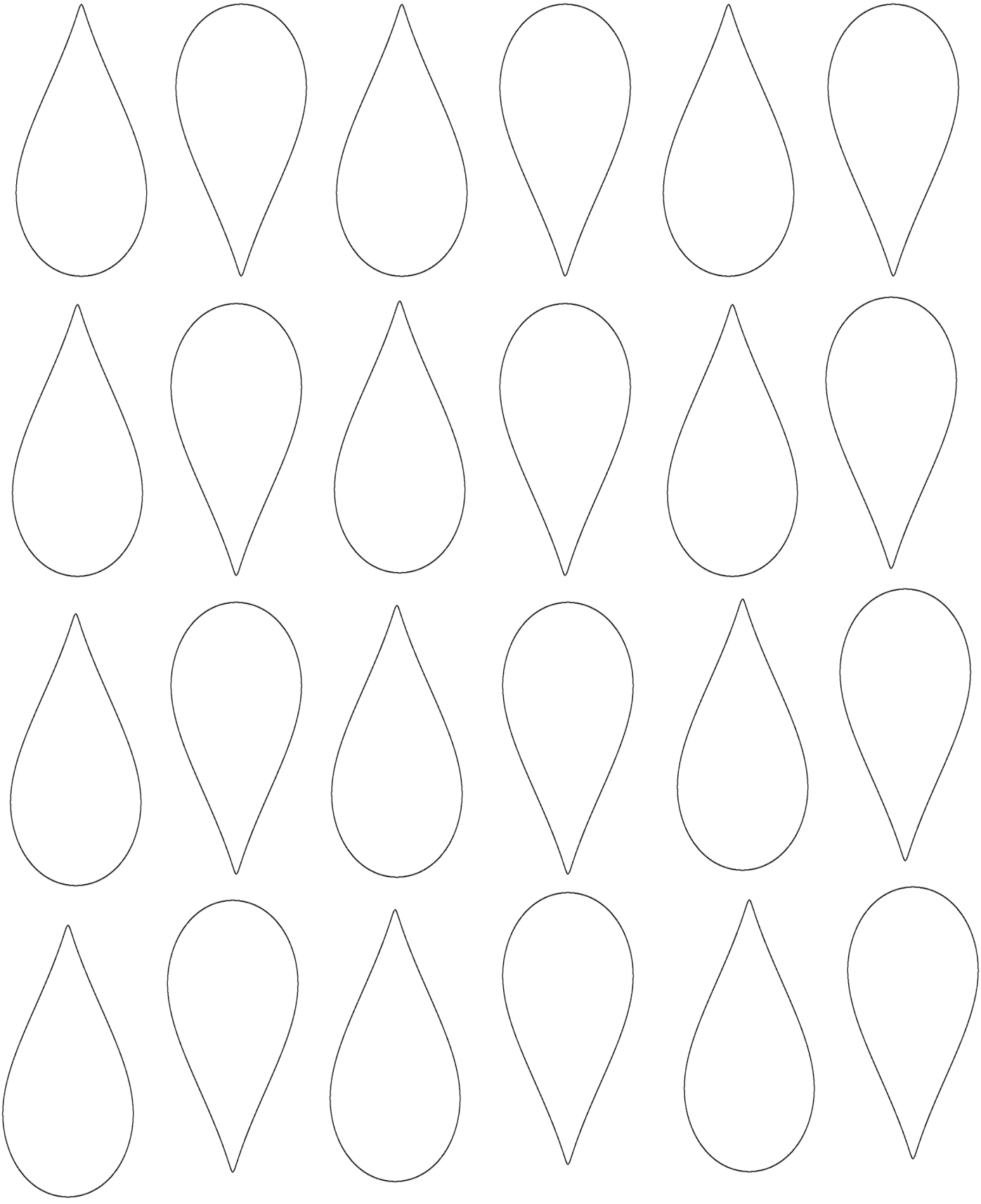






Lantern Templates for Paper *Diya*





Craft #2: Clay Diya

Traditionally, *diyas* were made of clay and burned with oil. Nowadays candles – or even tea lights – are often used. In one version of the Diwali story, *diyas* offered light to Lakshmana, Prince Rama, and his wife Sita when they returned home after 14 years in exile. The light also 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. One simple version is outlined below. Watch it 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 going to be a long 14 years, but Rama was prepared. You see, prince Rama was the oldest son, and everyone thought he would be the next king. But Rama's parents chose one of their other sons, Bharata, to be the next king.

Bharata hated Rama, so he decided that Rama AND his wife AND his other brother would be banished to the forest for 14 years.

Can you count to 14?

Everyone was totally upset! People were yelling and fighting and crying in the streets. But Rama remained completely calm. He knew there wasn't anything he could do about the situation, so he accepted it with kindness and humility.

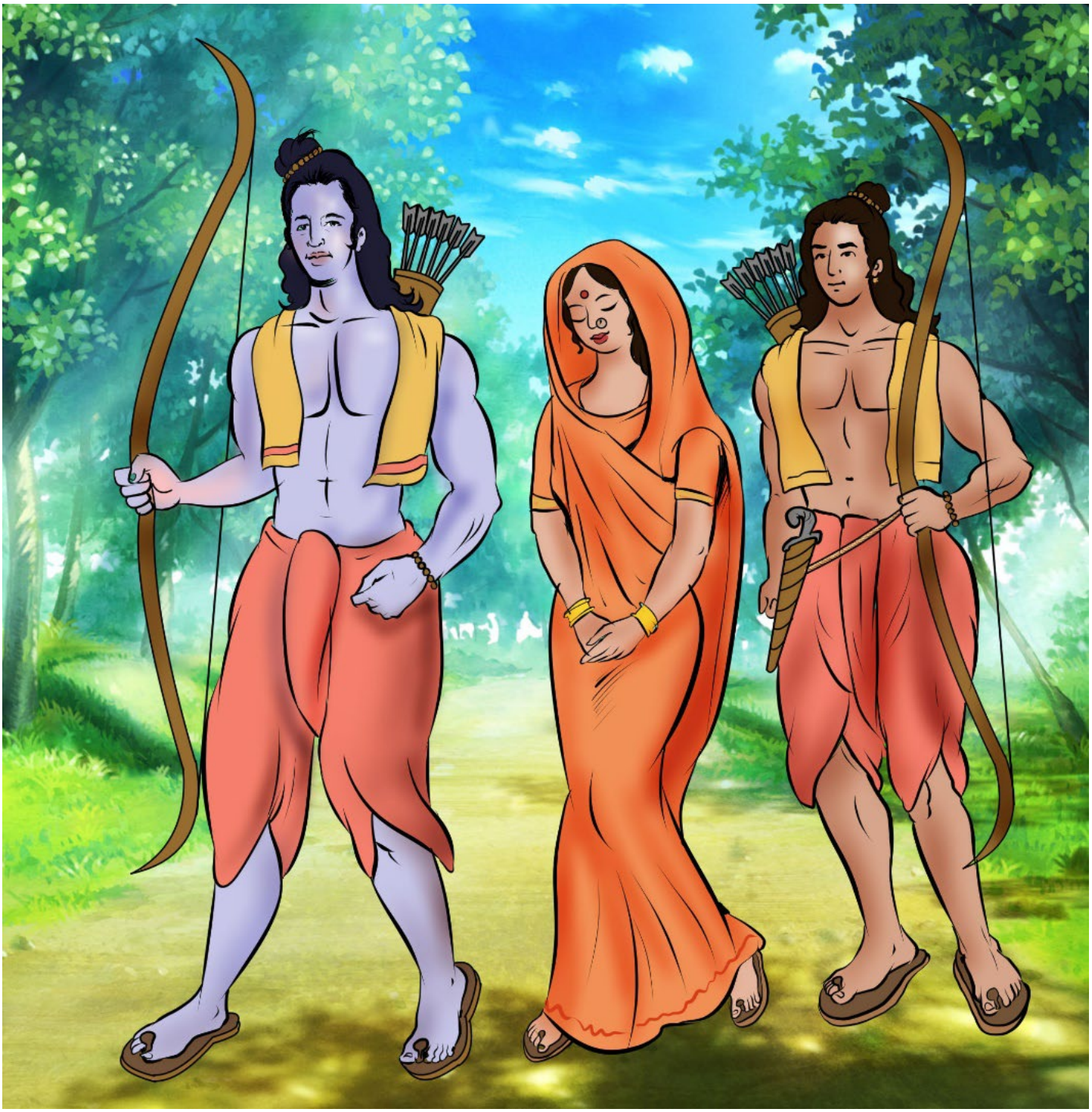
[Image 1, page 14] After some tearful hugs and long goodbyes, Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana headed into the forest. It was very different from life in the palace, but they soon settled into their new routine. The first 13 years passed without any problem. The final year, however, was quite a different story.

Prince Rama had angered the evil King Ravana, and the king wanted revenge. He kidnapped Rama's wife, Sita, when Rama was out hunting and carried her off as his prisoner. When Rama, and his brother, Lakshmana, returned home, they were shocked to find Sita missing.

"Rama!" Lakshmana yelled. "Where's Sita?! I can't find her anywhere. She was here when we left this morning. Where could she have gone?!"

"I don't know," replied Rama. "But I have a bad feeling that King Ravana came and stole her away."

"Well then we have to find her -- now," Lakshmana said firmly.



“I agree,” said Rama. “But first, we have to figure out where that evil King Ravana took her!”

[Image 2, page 16] Rama turned to his friend, Hanuman.

Can you say Hanuman? What does he look like to you?

Hanuman was an ape-man creature who lived in the forest. He also had cool super-powers, like being able to change size and shape. He could grow really big AND he could become really small. And, as you will soon see, he could also jump a very long way.

If you had a special power, what would it be?

Rama, Lakshmana, and Hanuman gathered an army of troops and began searching all over the land looking for any sign of Sita. After traveling for days, they finally reached the ocean. They looked across the vast expanse of water.

Can you pretend you are looking across the ocean?

Way far away, they could see the tiny island of Lanka, the center of King Ravana’s kingdom.

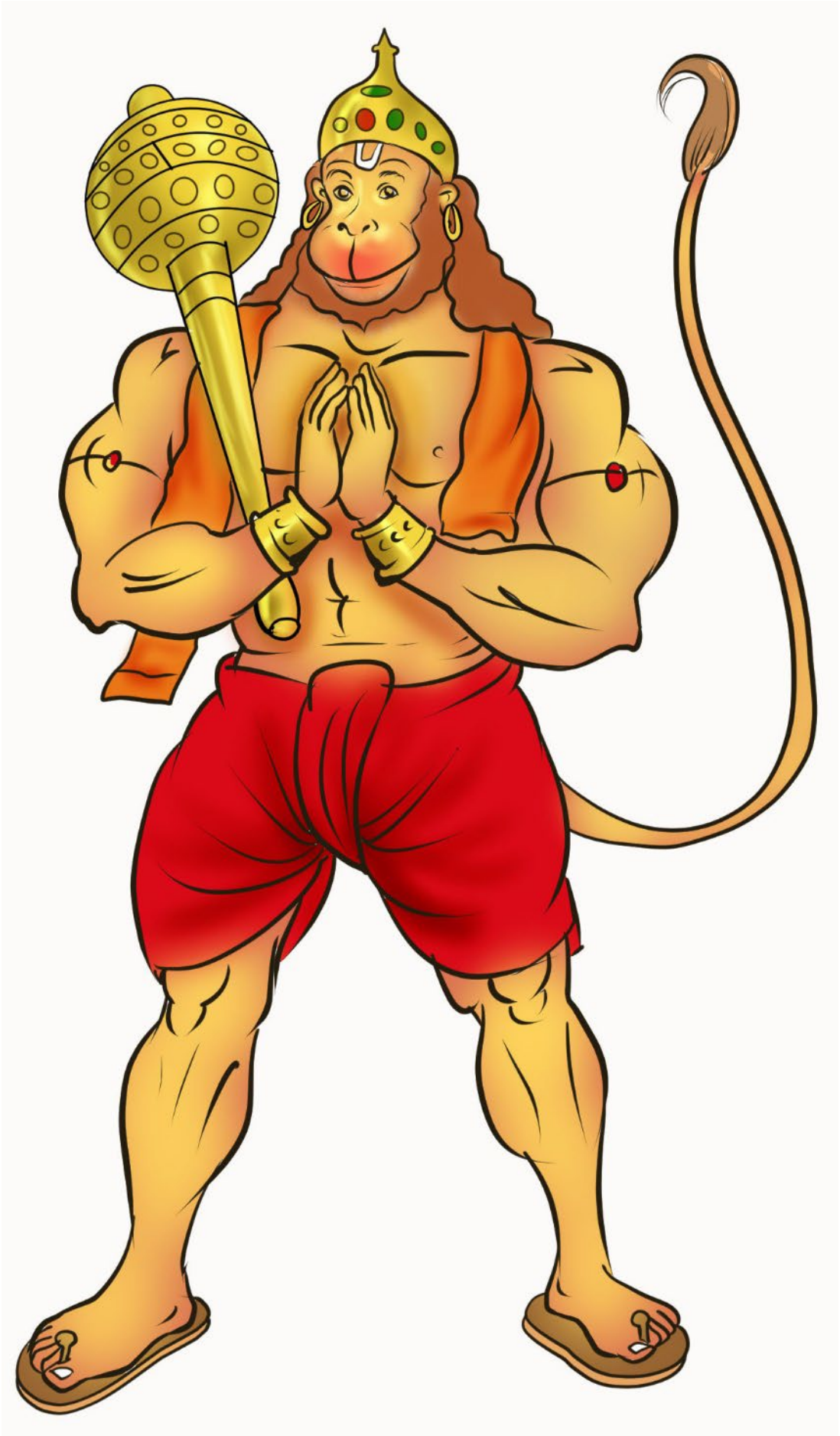
“I believe Siti is on the island of Lanka,” Hanuman said.

“I think you’re probably right,” Rama replied. “We’ve looked everywhere, and she’s not here. King Ravana must have taken her to his palace. But how will we get there? We don’t have a boat, and the island is so far away.”

That’s when Hanuman remembered his super-hero powers.

He gathered all his courage and grew himself into a towering giant.

Can you stand up and pretend like you are growing into a towering giant?



Once he had grown very large, Hanuman took a BIG leap of faith toward the distant island. High in the air he flew, right alongside the birds! And when he looked down, he could see the tiny island below surrounded by the big blue sea.

When Hanuman landed, he discovered he was right next to King Ravana's palace.

Now, it was time to find Sita, but traveling around as a giant would never do. So, he turned himself into a tiny insect. He crawled along on the ground with all the other insects until he found Rama's wife, Sita, in a beautiful garden, guarded by demon warriors.

"Aha," Hanuman thought to himself. "I've found her. And Rama will be very happy to know that she is safe."

Hanuman transformed himself back into a giant, jumped back over the sea, and told everyone waiting for him back on the mainland he had found Sita.

"That's wonderful news!" Rama cried. "Now we must rescue her. Everyone, prepare for battle!"

Hanuman was the only one who could jump all the way to Lanka, so they built a bridge. Now, everyone could cross on foot. Rama, Lakshmana, Hanuman, and Hanuman's entire army set off for Lanka and a battle of the ages.

Of course, the evil King Ravana, and his army of demons, were waiting.

"Stop right where you are!" King Ravana yelled as they approached the land of Lanka. "We've been expecting you, and we have no plans to let the beautiful Sita go. She belongs to me now, and I have my own army of warriors to defeat you!"

"We'll see about that," Rama replied. "We are strong and we have justice on our side. Sita is my wife, and I will not leave Lanka without her."

The war between the forces of good and evil raged for weeks. Both armies fought with all their might but, eventually, it came down to a battle between Prince Rama and King Ravana.

Raise your hand if you think Prince Rama will win. Raise your hand if you think King Ravana will win.

[Image 3, page 19] Each man rode his chariot as 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 never end.

Then, Rama shot one last 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 before piercing King Ravana's heart. Rama had won. Finally.

They rescued Sita from the garden and appointed a new, kinder king for the land of Lanka. The new king gave Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana his magic chariot, which would carry them home.

"Goodbye, my friends!" said the new king. "And thank you from the bottom of our hearts for ending the evil reign of Ravana. Our people are looking forward to living in peace."

"Well, we always try to avoid fighting but, in this case, something had to be done." said Rama. "Thank you for the chariot. We are looking forward to getting home, and I will be forever thankful for your help in returning my beloved Sita to my side."

Everyone waved goodbye as the chariot lifted them high above the island. Soon, the mainland came into view once again. Rama and Sita smiled lovingly at one another, still in disbelief that they were together again AND that their 14-year-exile had finally come to an end.

[Image 4, page 20] Then they saw it…up ahead in the distance. The people of their kingdom were offering them the warmest welcome the world had ever seen. They played drums, flutes, and tambourines. Large elephants, decorated with the precious jewels, and joyful dancers paraded through the streets. The roads were covered with beautiful, colorful flowers.

Can you pretend like you are throwing colorful flower petals into the road?

And thousands of lamps were shining brightly, as if to guide them home.

The chariot touched down lightly and Prince Rama saw his brother, King Bharata, for the first time in 14 years. He had been a good king, but he knew the throne really belonged to Rama. So, he removed his crown and placed it on Rama's head.

Can you pretend to take a crown off your head and put it on Rama's head?

Rama and Sita were wonderful rulers. Everyone had enough food, the children could go to school, and people treated one another with kindness. Most importantly, the world was once again at peace.

Even today, millions of people decorate the streets with flowers and light small lamps. It's called Diwali. And it helps them to remember that day, so long ago, when Rama and Sita finally came home.



Additional Questions

1) As you know, people dress in all sorts of different ways. This story takes place in India a very long time ago, so the images show outfits that were typical in that part of the world back then. Sita's appearance is not so different from the way many women in India still dress today. Do you see any hints that she is from India? [wearing a sari, having a bindi – the red dot between her eyebrows]

   Note: Bindis {BIN-deez} are worn by women around the world for various reasons, but they remain strongly associated with Hindu women from India. Traditionally, bindis were red. Today, they come in different sizes and colors. Wearing bindis in the absence of religious or cultural ties is often viewed as appropriation.

2) 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?

3) 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]

   Would you rather be really big like a giant or really small like an insect? Why?

4) 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?

5) 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? What about when people you haven't seen in a long time visit you. What do you do to welcome them to your home?

6) 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?

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