

The roots of ritual



Lesson Plan

Lesson title	The roots of ritual
Learning objective	Children learn that for many people, including some Christians and Hindus, plants (and especially flowers) have important roles to play in celebrations, commemorations and other rituals on account not only of their beauty and fragrance, but also their symbolic value.
Pupils will:	Learn what a ritual is and look at Christian and Hindu rituals Explore the meaning and purpose of marking major life events and religious observances with plants, particularly within Christianity and Hinduism.
Key words	Commemorate, funeral, wedding, Palm Sunday, Annunciation, symbol, puja, flowers.

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Introduction

Explain to the pupils that in this unit on 'The Roots of Ritual', they will explore how flowers and other parts of plants are used in various forms of worship and other ceremonies including religious ones, particularly those associated with major festivals as well as weddings and funerals. They will find out the reasons why they are valued and why they are an important feature in such contexts.

Introduce to the pupils the word '**ritual**'. Tell the pupils that "a ritual is a set of actions, performed mainly for their symbolic value" These actions may be specified by a religion or by the traditions of a community. A ritual may be performed on specific occasions or in everyday life, by a group of people or by individuals. Clarify that rituals do not need to be religious and we all may have our own rituals i.e. a series of actions or type of behaviour that we follow such as having a cup of coffee or tea in the morning or reading the newspaper, listening to the weather report, simple rituals that can bring a certain amount of comfort and a sense of stability and have a special meaning to people. Ask pupils if they have any personal or family rituals and to say what they mean to them.



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<p>Activity 1 Say to the pupils that flowers and plants in general play an important role in worship and celebration for many Christians and also appear extensively in Christian art, where they are often used as symbols.</p> <p>Show the pupils images from different Christian rituals and ask them to describe the images and say what ritual is captured (Resource 1 – you can print these on cards or put them on a powerpoint presentation). Ask them how flowers are used in each ritual and what they think the flowers may symbolise. Then give the pupils the descriptions of each ritual and ask them to match them with the images (Resource 1 - you can read the descriptions or print them on cards and ask pupils to match them with the images in small groups).</p> <p>Explain to the pupils that plants are extensively used in some Christian rituals but are absent in others.. For example, during Christmas, churches are often festoned with plants, where as during the period of Lent, which is traditionally a time of abstinence and restraint, churches do not exhibit any flowers.</p>	<p>Resource 1: Images and description of Christian rituals</p>
<p>Activity 2 <i>Idea for an out-of-the classroom activity:</i> You may introduce the children to the significant role of flowers within many Christian rituals by taking the children to visit a local parish church.</p> <p>Encourage the pupils to observe and take notes/drawings of how flowers are used around the church, to simply decorate or to highlight particularly important places within the building, such as the altar or statue of Mary for example. Do not forget to take the children outside into the graveyard if there is one there to look at the floral tributes left on graves or where ashes have been buried. Some trees and plants may also have been marked with commemorative plaques to recall loved ones who have died.</p> <p>If possible arrange an interview between the pupils and the priest or minister, or perhaps a couple of members of the congregation or even someone who represents the flower arranging team.</p>	<p>Notepads, pencils, colour pencils, cameras. The pupils will use these resources to record their observations and their interviews from the visit to the church.</p>



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<p>Set up the interview questions with the pupils before the visit to the church. The interviews may include questions about the symbolism of the plants used for church decorations (in paintings, sculptures etc.) and the use of living plants in some key events during the Church's year, such as palms on Palm Sunday, wheat at Harvest time, poppies on Remembrance Day, evergreens at Christmas or rosemary for remembrance at funerals. The pupils interviews of the church staff may also focus on the types of living plants used in and outside the church, with reference to where they are grown locally or overseas, their cost and whether or not they are FairTrade.</p> <p>A follow up activity in school may include the pupils presenting their findings from the visit in a display in the school hall or other communal spaces in the building. The display could include drawings, collages, paintings, photographs, textiles and screen prints.</p>	
<p>Activity 3 Explain to the pupils that they will now play the 'Mystery activity' and they will find out how someone may choose what plants to use in memory of a Christian who passed away. Put the pupils in groups of four or five and give each group a set of cards (Resource 2). Give the pupils the following instructions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Look carefully at the question you have been given: "Jane was a Christian. How should she be remembered with flowers and plants?" 2. In your small group, look at the information you have been given on the different cards. 3. Sort out the cards in whatever way you like and use them to construct an answer to the question. 4. Be ready to present your answer to the rest of the class and to explain the reasons why you think it is a good one! <p>After the groups have finished their discussions bring them together to present their answer to the original question and their justification. At the end, point out that choosing the way, and which plants would be appropriate, to commemorate someone who has passed away is a combination of personal preferences and religious beliefs.</p>	<p>Resource 2: 'Mystery activity'</p>



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Activity 4

Introduce pupils to the way in which flowers are used in various works of art to convey religious beliefs and ideals in symbolic form. For example, use the images of the Annunciation (**Resource 3**), depicting the moment when many Christians believe the Angel Gabriel appeared to the Virgin Mary to declare that she had been chosen to be the mother of Jesus.

Ask the children to see if they can notice any plants in the pictures and invite them to describe the flowers and say their name if they recognise them. If possible, bring some examples of such flowers (lilies) into the classroom or take the children to a place where they are growing. Explain to the pupils that because these lilies (*Lilium candidum*) have been associated with the Annunciation their common name is Madonna lily (Madonna is another title for the Virgin Mary) or Annunciation lily.

Ask pupils 'Why have the artists chosen lilies for this particular scene and what might lilies symbolise about this moment in Mary's life and about Mary herself?' After pupils express their thoughts, point out that lilies symbolise Mary's beauty, grace, purity and simplicity and that lilies also symbolise the sacred nature of the scene. Ask pupils to describe the shape of the flower. Ask them to say if the shape reminds them of anything. After pupils express their thoughts explain that the funnel shaped flowers also remind viewers of the importance of the message which the Angel is proclaiming, as if from a trumpet.

Activity 5

Say to the pupils that flowers and plants in general play an important role in other religions and that you will explore now the significance of plants in Hindu rituals. You will focus on the ways in which flowers are used in Hindu worship or puja. If possible, invite a Hindu parent or visitor to demonstrate to the children the ritual of puja and its meaning.

Point out that puja is a Hindu ritual which involves an offering to various deities, distinguishes persons, or special guests. Puja can be performed in many occasions and different places such as in the home, during temple ceremonies

Resource 3: Images of the Annunciation and background information

Resource 4: Images of Puja and background information

Information about flowers used in Hindu rituals can be also found at:
<http://www.hindu-blog.com/2009/03/about-flowers-used-in-hindu-rituals-and.html>



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and large festivals or to begin a new venture. Puja is based on the idea of giving a gift or offering to a deity or important person and receiving their blessing.

Show the pupils images of puja and ask them to describe the plants that they think are used in the ritual (**Resource 4**).

Explain that in puja a flower must first be offered to God before a human can enjoy its beauty and fragrance. Flowers can be used to symbolise a person's behaviour and actions, providing fragrance and beauty to all living beings without discrimination. Say to the pupils that Hindus believe that people should live their lives like flowers. Ask the pupils: What do you think living your life like a flower means?

After the pupils express their thoughts tell them that living your life like a flower may mean living your life full of love and compassion towards all living beings, sharing their sweetness and goodness with everybody. Give pupils pieces of paper in the shape of petals and use them to write or draw the ways in which they (or someone else) could bring beauty and fragrance to the world through their deeds and actions. The petal papers could then be formed into a large flower display about the meaning of puja for the classroom wall. The flower display may be shaped in the form of a lotus flower which is one of the most important flowers in Hinduism symbolising eternity, purity and good fortune.



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Plenary

Draw up a noughts and crosses grid. Split the class into two groups. Pick a team leader from each team to come to the board. Ask questions about the lesson 'Roots of Ritual'. Pupils will have to put up their hand if they know the answer. The team that puts their hand up first gets to answer the question. If they answer correctly their team leader can put a mark in the grid. If they get it wrong, it is passed over to the other team. The team that gets three marks in a row is the winner.

The questions may include:

- What is a ritual?
- Name two Christian rituals, how plants are associated with these and what do they symbolise.
- Identify three different ways a Christian could be commemorated by plants and what might determine what plants are chosen?
- What is the Annunciation and which flower is associated with this religious moment.
- What is puja and name two ways that flowers are used in this ritual.
- Name a flower that is used in Lakshmi puja and what does it symbolise.
- Identify three occasions/reasons that puja may be performed.

Pupils may be able to:

- Identify Christian and Hindu rituals and plants associated with these.
- Understand how religious beliefs are expressed through flowers and plants in general and what they represent/symbolise to people of faith
- Acknowledge that choosing how to commemorate someone with plants may depend both on personal preferences and religious beliefs.