

The roots of ritual



Lesson Plan

Lesson title	The roots of ritual
Learning objective	Pupils learn how some ritual observances are related to human dependence upon – and interaction with – plants.
Pupils will:	Learn about some plants associated with religious rituals. Write about or discuss family rituals – religious or otherwise – that involve plants.
Key words	Ritual, staff of life, communion, incense

Plan	Resources
<p>Introduction Ask if anyone in the class knows the Christian prayer known as “the Lord’s Prayer”? If yes, ask the pupil to recite it; if no, ask someone to read the first quote in Resource 1. Focus on the line: “Give us this day our daily bread...” Ask the class how many times a day they eat bread? What kinds of bread do they eat at home? What is bread made of?</p> <p>Brainstorm with the class the expression ‘staff of life’, giving them a chance to suggest what they would describe as their chief ‘support’. Ask them if they agree with the old English saying that “Bread is the staff of life.” Can anyone think of a modern equivalent?</p> <p>Introduce the term ‘staple food’ (see resource 2). Does anyone in the class come from a family or culture where bread is not the main food? If anyone in the class has a gluten intolerance, ask them what their ‘staff of life’ might be?</p>	<p>Resource 1: Selected quotes and texts</p> <p>Resource 2: The Staff of Life (staple foods)</p>
<p>Activity 2 Ask a pupil to read the quote 1.2 from Mahatma Gandhi (Resource 1). Can the class imagine this kind of hunger?</p> <p>Using Resource 2 and IWB and Google image search, look at pictures of the various staple foods across the world. Look at various types of bread, including flat breads and matzoh; pictures of milling (both hand-milling with a grindstone and water-driven or oxen-driven mills) and bread-making.)</p>	<p>Resource 2: The Staff of Life (staple foods)</p>



Plan	Resources
<p>Using quotes 1.3-5 (Resource 1), discuss the ways 'bread' or 'staff of life' are being used as metaphors for the human need to feed the spirit as well as the body. Make sure that you remind the class that although bread is traditionally associated with the expression 'staff of life,' there are many different staple foods across the world.</p>	
<p>Activity 3 If the class has studied Judaism, remind them of Shabbat and the blessing said over the Shabbat bread (quote 1.6 Resource 1). Recall the story of the Exodus from Egypt, and how they had to leave in such a hurry they couldn't give their bread dough time to rise, and that this is why Matzoh bread plays an important role in the Jewish festival of Passover (Resource 3).</p> <p>Then, remind the class of the Last Supper, which is believed to have been a Passover meal that Jesus was sharing with his disciples. Ask a pupil to read quote 1.7 (Resource 1). If they have not already covered it, explain to the class how this was the beginning of the important Christian ritual the Eucharist, or Holy Communion.</p> <p>During the last supper, Jesus used the traditional Jewish blessing of the bread to make a statement about what he knew was going to happen (i.e. the Crucifixion). During the communion ritual, Christians fulfil Jesus' commandment to eat bread and drink wine to remember him. Point out that for most Christians Jesus is the staff of life.</p>	<p>Resource 3: Shabbat bread, Passover matzoh and Holy Communion</p>
<p>Activity 4 Show the class examples of turmeric in both root and powder form. If there are Hindu children in the class, ask them to give examples of the various uses of turmeric in Hindu culture, such as bathing a newborn, blessing a wedding couple, applying turmeric paste to the feet of a guest or relative as a show of honour, dyeing religious robes.</p> <p>Remind the class that we are looking at rituals that are related to plants that humans use regularly. Ask if anyone has ever helped a parent or guardian</p>	<p>Turmeric root and powder, and water to make paste. <i>[NB: teachers must get the permission of parents/guardians before hand]</i></p> <p>Utensils: bowls and spoons</p> <p>Resource 4: Background information on Tumeric and Pongal festival</p>

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(or watched them) grate fresh turmeric root for cooking. What happens to their hands?

If permission has been obtained from the pupils' parents/guardians allow the pupils mix turmeric powder and water to make a paste. Let the pupils draw a mark on the hand of one of their classmates as a sign of respect.

If there are children in the class who come from – or who have relatives in – South India, ask them if they've ever celebrated Pongal (**Resource 4**). Let one of the children read the blessing for the Pongal, and show a picture of a Pongal rice pot with a turmeric root tied to it. Looking at the colour of turmeric, ask children to suggest why it might have become a symbol of the sun.

Activity 5

Ask the class if incense is used in their church, synagogue, mosque or temple or even in their home. What are they reminded of when they smell incense burning?

Tell class a bit about myrrh (**Resource 5a**) and let them smell the myrrh oil. Remind class of the story of the birth of Jesus and how myrrh was one of the gifts brought by the Magi to honour the infant.

Show class some pictures of Aquilaria trees (**Resource 5b**). Tell them a bit about how incense from Aquilaria trees is produced. Point out that it was most likely an accident that humans realised that, when burnt, the wood would release a wonderful smell, which they felt would rise up to heaven and be pleasing to their gods (God). Explain that it is valued so highly that in one of the traditions (hadith) of the Prophet Muhammad he reports that Paradise will smell of this incense

An incense burner and sticks of incense. A bottle of myrrh essential oil.

Resource 5a: Background information on myrrh

Resource 5b: Background information on agarwood

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Plenary

Ask pupils to write and/or draw pictures about a family ritual involving plants and the feelings and memories it conjures. Remind them that the ritual does not have to be religious – for example, some families plant a tree in their garden when a new child is born. Ask the pupils to share their stories with the class.

Pupils may be able to:

1. Name some plants or food that come from plants and that are important to them and their family.
2. Describe how a plant or food made from a plant is used in a ritual in their family.
3. Relate a ritual involving a plant or food made from a plant to a specific belief or occasion, religious or otherwise.
4. Make an informed response to how this plant and the ritual came about
5. Express insights into the meaning behind the ritual.