

Celebrating Hindu Heritage

November 2022

A resource for teachers, students, parents and community members.



COHHE

Canadian Organization for Hindu Heritage Education

Hinduism is said to be the oldest living religion (dharma) in the world and is India's indigenous, spiritual and cultural heritage. There are over a billion Hindus worldwide. Hindus prefer the term Sanatana Dharma, which roughly translates into 'eternal truth and teachings'. Hindus celebrate the diversity of their culture, language, philosophy and practice and see it as a strength. They all share core ideas, such as aatman, karma and reincarnation, that unite them as Hindus. The OM, the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, Durga Devi, puja rituals, festivals, Yoga, Ayurveda, music, dance and art unite Hindus as a civilization.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Plan a visit [Hindu museum](#) at Vishnu Mandir in Richmond Hill.

Search for the Hindu temple in your area and contact one to visit.



The BAPS temple in Toronto

SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

Hindu Heritage Month Resource Handbook by Dr. Ragini Sharma [download here](#)

[Read more about Hinduism here](#)

95% of Hindus live in India and speak several different languages such as Hindi, Gujarati, Tamil, Kannada, Assamese, Bengali, Punjabi, Marathi among many others. As a result of the diversity of languages and cultures, there are differences in how customs and traditions are celebrated. Hindus celebrate this diversity and see it as a reflection of richness. All Hindus share common themes such as OM, Sanskrit chants, rituals and beliefs in karma, reincarnation and idea of divine Self.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

On YouTube can you find examples of these languages sound? How are they similar or different than what you speak?

Discuss how your own celebrations are similar or different.



SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

[Oneness and Pluralism in Hinduism](#)
[Learn about the basics of Hinduism here](#)

[Ten questions people ask about Hinduism](#) [Read here](#)

https://www.hinduismtoday.com/resources/Read_about_common_beliefs_and_practices_of_all_Hindus

Did you know that about 500,000 Hindus live in Canada? Hindus represent only 1.5% of the Canadian population. While Hindus began immigrating to Canada over 125 years ago, most Hindus came in the 1970s. They came from different countries, including India, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Fiji, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, East Africa, South Africa among others. There are now many Hindus who were born in Canada.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Draw a map of the world to see the different countries from which Hindus came to Canada.

Mark the different countries that everyone in your class come from.



SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

2011 National Household Survey

Hindus believe in the oneness of all living beings and everything in creation, as explained in the sacred chant: Sarvam khalvidam brahman- All Is One. Another sacred verse talks about Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: The whole world is One family. All Hindu prayers are inclusive – they seek blessings for all humans, all living beings and non-living creation. For example, Loka Samasta Sukhino Bhavantu: May all be Happy.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Do an online search for 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakum' - the Sanskrit expression for 'The World is One Family'.

Name some famous Hindu saints such as Vivekananda.



Freedom of Religion statue, Toronto

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Online resource on Hinduism by Hindu American Foundation

A good online book on Hinduism

A book to explain how Hinduism differs from other religions

In October, Hindus celebrate the festival of Navaratri devoted to the 9 Devis (Divine feminine). Twenty days later is the major festival of Deepawali, festival of Light, the victory of good over evil. The celebration involves lighting of lamps, bursting of crackers and feasts of special foods with family and friends. Hindus offer prayers to Lakshmi Devi, Goddess of wealth, for prosperity.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Draw pictures of diyas or oil lamps.

Visit a temple with you teacher or family to experience Goddess Lakshmi's puja. Hindu temples are open to all.

Look up these other major Hindu Festivals: Holi, Vishu, Onam, Janamastmi, Rakshabandhan, Narvratri, Shivratri, Gurupoomima and many others. Look into the timing of these festivals and links to the lunar calendar.



SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

[Read here to learn about different Hindu festivals](#)

An excellent Diwali Toolkit by the Hindu American Foundation [here](#)

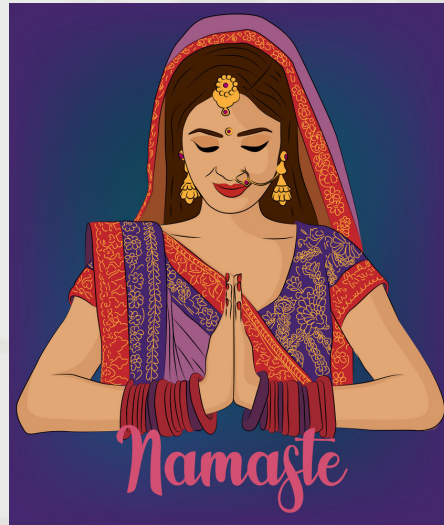
Hindus greet each other by saying Namaste. Palms are held together in a prayer position in front of the heart area, with a slight bowing down of head, to convey humility and peace. A Sanskrit word, Namaste means: the divine in me bows to the divine in you. This greeting conveys the Hindu message that we are all born with a divine spark within. In Tamil we say Vannakam.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Practice saying Namaste or Vannakam to each other.

How is the act of doing Namaste different from when we greet each other with a Hello or Hi?

During COVID many people are now not shaking hands. Do you think Namaste is a good alternative and why?



SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

Video on Namaste,

What to expect when you visit a Hindu Temple

Hindu symbols



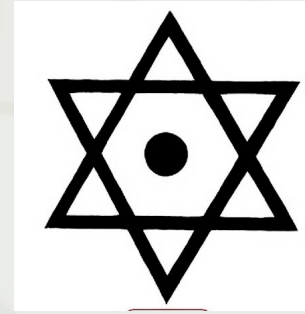
Namaste

The divine in me
bows to the divine in you



AUM or OM

Mantra: A sacred sound
The Sound of the universe



Shatkona

Interlocking Male & female
cosmic energies



Swastika

Wellbeing And
Auspiciousness



Banyan tree

Oneness of Sanatana Dharma
and immortality

Suggested Activity

Try drawing some of these symbols

Sources/Additional Readings

[Read here to learn more about Hindu symbols](#)



Lotus

Purity, beauty and detachment

Sanskrit is the language of most Hindu sacred texts; others are in different languages such as Tamil. Sanskrit is the root of many languages, including English. OM is a well known Sanskrit word. OM, the sound of the universe, is another word for God. OM Shanti (peace) is a common chant that follows all Hindu prayers and is said to bring peace to the body and mind.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Look up the Sanskrit alphabet online and practice a few alphabets to experience the sound of the Sanskrit language.

Look up why is Sanskrit considered to be suitable to develop artificial intelligence.

Listen here to a beautiful, peaceful rendition of a Sanskrit prayer [here](#)



Photo above: A chant in Sanskrit: Hare Krishna, Hare Rama

SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

[TED Talks by a student on Sanskrit](#)

[Effect of Sanskrit on the brain.](#)

[Read about Sanskrit and artificial intelligence](#)

Hindus are seekers of truth and are encouraged to ask and debate questions such as: Who am I? Who created God? What is the purpose of my life? Hinduism teaches about the spiritual, along with the physical life. Hinduism explains that all human bodies are born with a divine spark, the aatma, whose nature is truth, consciousness and bliss, called Sat Chit Anand.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Ask students what brings them peace and joy? Why is it important to seek the truth?

Create a poster to explore these ideas.

What questions do you want an answer for?



SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

[Read answers to some questions provided in the Vedas](#)

Who am I? Where did I come from? Read [here](#)

Hindus believe in reincarnation or rebirth. The aatman, or divine spark within the body never dies but it takes birth in a different body again and again. There is an endless cycles of life and death until the aatman achieved freedom or Moksha. As per Vedic Darshan (philosophy), all living beings including plants have aatman. This idea of reincarnation allows Hindus to feel a connection to nature and see nature as part of them.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Draw a picture of an animal of your choice.

Read about stories of people who remember their past life.



Elephants at a temple celebration

SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

[Read more about this topic here](#)

[Karma and Reincarnation explained here](#)

[Do bacteria have soul? A short video explains](#)

Ayurveda is known as the mother of indigenous health knowledge. It is a holistic health system discovered by ancient Hindu sages to bring harmony to the body, mind and emotions. Thousands of years ago Ayurvedic doctors in India were performing surgeries using metal tools, similar to today. These doctors could diagnose the health of a person by feeling the pulse on their arm. Ayurveda created a body of knowledge about plants now called botany. Medicinal plants and herbs were catalogued for their healing qualities.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Look up some Ayurvedic medicinal herbs, such as turmeric, that are being used in modern medicine to fight diseases.

Find out what the ancient metal surgical tools looked like.



SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

Shroff, F. (2000). Ayurveda: Mother of Indigenous health knowledge In G. Dei, B. L. Hall & D. Goldin Rosenberg (Eds.), *Indigenous knowledges in global contexts: Multiple readings of our world*, Toronto, ON: OISE/UT, University of Toronto Press. 215-233.

Video on Sushruta, father of surgery, in Ayurveda [here](#)

[Article on use and misuse of indigenous knowledge](#)

Hinduism has a strong tradition of Shakti, worship of the Divine in the feminine form. There are many Devis or Goddesses, including Saraswati Devi, the Goddess of knowledge, Lakshmi Devi, the Goddess of Wealth and Durga Devi, the Warrior Goddess. The festival of Navratri celebrates the 9 forms of Durga Devi. Since ancient times there have been important Hindu female scholars, leaders, warriors and saints.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

See pictures of the different Goddesses online. What is the significance and symbolism of the objects they carry in their hands?

Read on Shaktism; one of the four main branches of Hinduism (the other 3 are Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Smartism)

Watch and Listen to a beautiful chant on Devi [here](#)



Photo of warrior queen Rani Laskhmi Bai, Queen of Jhansi - by Dharmadyaksha

SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

Read about the tradition of Shaktism [here](#)

India is the birthplace of the Hindu civilization. In the past Hinduism spread peacefully across Asia in countries such as Afghanistan, Thailand, Indonesia Cambodia, Vietnam, Japan among others. The Angkor Wat temple in Cambodia, the largest Hindu temple complex in the world, was built by a Khmer King for Vishnu Bhagavan. Even today, the King of Thailand is called Rama, after Sri Rama, who was a Hindu avatar. Hindus have historically given refuge to those seeking refuge including Jews, Zoroastrians, Syrian Christians, Ahmadis, Buddhists etc.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Make a map of the world to show the spread of the Hindu civilization and the location of the Angkor Wat temple.

How did Hindu Gandhara become to be know as Kandhara?

Why was Sri Rama called an avatar?



Photo of Angkor Wat temple

SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

[Read about the Jews of Kerala, India](#)

Wink, Andre, 1999, "The Making of the Indo-Islamic World. Volume I – Early Medieval India and the Expansion of Islam 7th-11th Centuries", Oxford University Press, New Delhi

Yoga and meditation are some of Hinduism's important contributions to world civilization. Today yoga poses and meditation are practiced by millions of people worldwide. Yoga is known to help calm the body and mind, and to connect to the peace that lies within us, as a divine spark. In December 2014 the United Nations declared June 21st as the International Yoga Day.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Learn and practice some simple Yoga poses and/or breathing exercises to experience how it can help to calm the body and mind.

Watch this documentary on "History of Yoga – the Path of my Ancestors" [here](#)



Shiva is known as Adi Yogi, known as the first Yogi, doing the cosmic dance.

SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

[Read how Yoga can effect your genes](#)

[Read about health benefits of Yoga \(Harvard\)](#)

[Read about Hatha Yoga about some yoga asanas \(postures\) here](#)

Hindus love and revere Gurus (roughly translated into teachers). A guru not only gives education, but also gives inspiration and direction. Hindus also revere books and therefore do not allow their feet to touch books. Did you know the word Guru, used commonly today, comes from the Sanskrit word for a spiritual teacher. There is a ceremony called Guru Vandana that is performed to honor one's guru on special occasions.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Write a letter to your teacher to say thank you for helping and guiding your learning.

Look up the ancient Hindu system of schooling called Gurukuls which continues today.

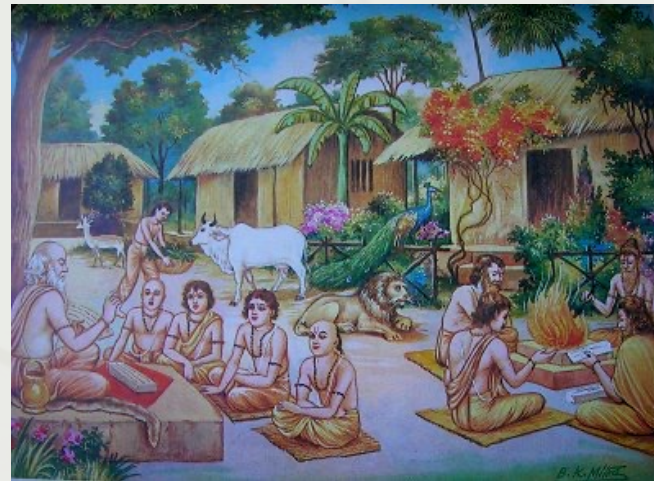


Photo of ancient Gurukul school

SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

Dharampal (2000). The Beautiful Tree. Goa, India: Other India Press. Available from at [Free download of this book here](#)

This book documents the ancient Hindu system of education of Gurukuls in India.

Hindus are taught to follow personal ethics or Niyamas. The Yoga Sutras mention 5:

- Shauch – cleanliness of body and mind
- Santosh – contentment and gratitude
- Tapas – Self control and self discipline
- Swadhyaya – Study of the self and abiding in the self
- Ishwarpranidhana – Knowing that there is a higher force taking care of everything in the world

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Ask students to start a gratitude journal and write down what they feel grateful for and why.

Which personal ethic is most important to you and why?



SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

[Read here about Hinduism's Code of Conduct](#)

Hindus are asked to cultivate the quality of ahimsa – which means causing least harm to others and to nature. There have been many Hindu saints and activists who have spread this message of peace and non-violence to people all over the world. Mahatma Gandhi was one such person who inspired great world leaders such as Martin Luther King in the US and Nelson Mandela in South Africa.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Read on how Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela were influenced by Hindu ideas See film [here](#)

View Hollywood film 'Gandhi' by Sir Richard Attenborough



Photo: Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela

SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

[Learn more about the Hindu idea of Ahimsa here](#)

Love and protection of animals is part of Hindu culture and civilization. Hindus respect all living beings and believe all animals have an aatman or divine spark. A majority of Hindus are vegetarians and cows are revered as mother because they give milk that sustains life over many years. Different animals play a role in religious celebrations and different Devis and Devatas are shown with different animals and birds as their companions.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Is vegetarianism growing in the Canada? Why or why not?

What is carbon footprint of eating meat as compared with eating vegetarian food? Why?



Photo: Cows are loved by Hindus as mother

SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

[Learn why many Hindus promote vegetarianism here](#)

[Learn about the carbon footprint of beef here](#)

[Do animals have aatmaa? \(soul is a limited translation\)](#)

Each Hindu deity, whether a Devi or Devata, is associated with some animal or bird. For example, Sarasvati Devi, the Goddess of art and knowledge, has a swan as a companion. Sri Shiva is shown with a bull and Durga Devi is seated on a tiger. Each animal is a symbol that conveys a quality about a particular Devi or Devata. For example, the snake around Shiva's neck symbolizes alertness.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Make a list of different animals associated with different deities.

What is the symbolism of these animals with the Goddess?



SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

Read here about the symbolism of Sri Ganesh and [Goddess Saraswati](#)

Hindus consider all nature as sacred and they worship nature in all its forms as Mother Earth or Bhumi Devi. Therefore, environmentalism has been part of Hindu culture and heritage for thousands of years. Similar to other indigenous cultures across the world, Hindus offer prayers to rivers, mountains, animals and plants. The tulsí or holy basil plant is worshipped as mother. Many different plant, flowers and herbs are offered in prayers.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Do research on the Tulsí plant (Holy Basil) and its medicinal properties.

What activities in nature make you happy and help you feel connected to mother earth?



Photo: Tulsí plant

SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

Read about Hindu idea of Earth as Bhumi Devi, Sacred Mother earth [here](#)

A guide on taking care of mother earth from Chimaya Mission, Niagara (posted with permission) [view here](#)

“The mind acts like an enemy for those who do not control it” This quote is from the Bhagavad Gita, which is one of the most important texts in Hinduism. The sacred text describes the nature of Ishwar or Paramatma, creation, and the human mind. It explains the many different ways for humans to develop spiritually and live happily, in harmony with others.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

What is the main story told in the Bhagavad Gita?

What are the names of other sacred texts of Hinduism? For example: Vedas, Upanishads, the Ramayana



Photo of Lord Krishna and Arjuna on the battlefield: The Bhagavad Gita

SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

[This is a online resource on views on the Bhagavad Gita.](#)

Info sheet on the Bhagavad Gita [here](#)

Did you know that thousands of years ago, ancient Hindu sages, who were trained scientists and researchers, discovered the idea of infinity? They called it shunya or void which refers to space. Hinduism teaches that there is neither beginning nor end to the universe. There are only endless cycles of creation and dissolutions of yugas, going back to eternity, which is another Hindu idea known as Ananta.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

What is the symbol used for infinity today? Draw it.

What are the many sacred symbols of Hinduism?

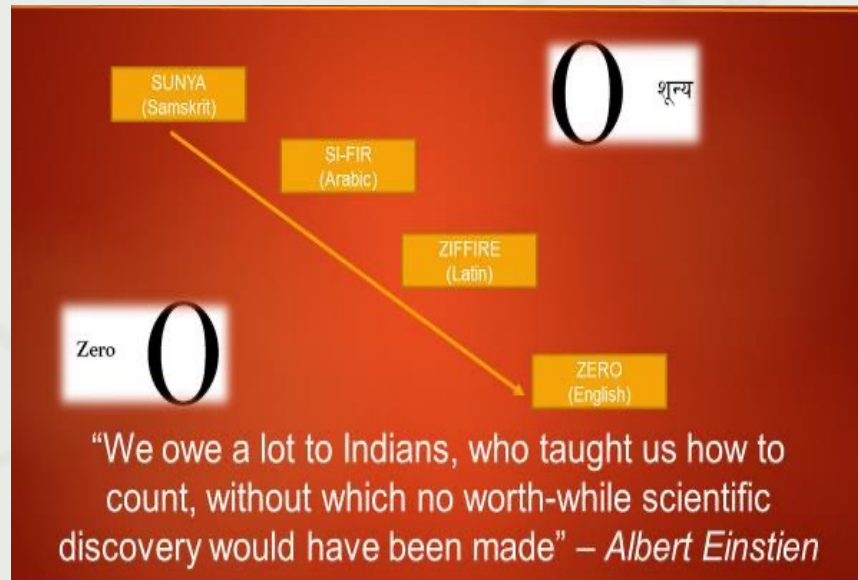


Photo of Shunya or Zero in Hinduism

SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

[Read about the Hindu idea of Infinity](#)

[Read article about Zero originated in India](#)

Did you know that North America was discovered accidentally by Europe when their explorers set out to find a sea route to India for trade? That is why they called the indigenous people they met in North America “Indians”. The ancient Hindu civilization of India was at the time a dominant economy, with a rich culture and trade.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Look up and/or draw a map of the world to trace the route taken by Columbus to North America and by Vasco Da Gama to India.

Look up the size of ships built in ancient India by Hindu rulers.

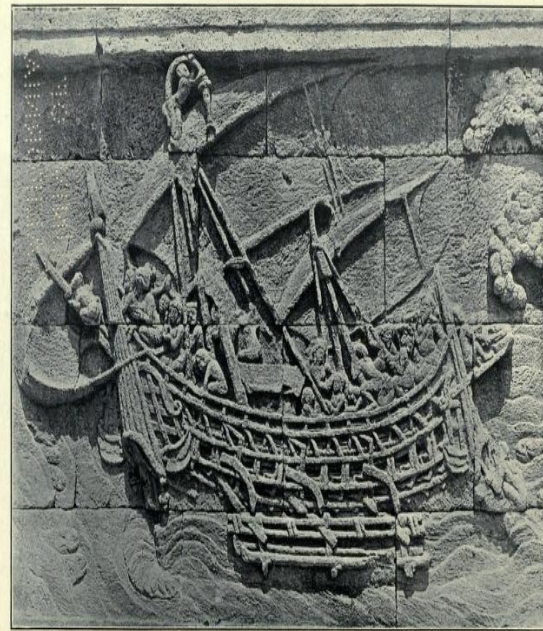


Photo of stone sculpture of an ancient Indian Ship

SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

[Table on World GDP from 0 AD to 1998](#)

[Read about Shipping in Ancient India](#)

November 11 is Remembrance Day. Did you know that an estimated 3.8 million soldiers from India volunteered and fought valiantly in the two World Wars? There were 1.3 million soldiers in WW1 and 2.5 million in WW2. A third of them were Hindus, the others were Sikhs and Muslims. To commemorate the 1000s of lives lost, a single memorial names Chattri can be found in Brighton, England, the site where many Hindu soldiers were cremated. There is also a memorial for the fallen soldiers in Delhi, India.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

As part of Remembrance Day lesson, learn more about the contributions of Hindu soldiers.



SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

[Forgotten Indian Soldiers of WW1](#)

[Forgotten Soldiers of India in WW2](#)

[A tribute to fallen soldiers in WW2](#)

Did you know that ancient Hindu scientists had a monopoly on Zinc distillation technology for almost 1400 years? Thousands of years ago, Hindus had mastered the knowledge in iron, steel, textiles, astronomy, physics, mathematics, engineering, medicine, botany, architecture, farming, urban planning, ship building, navigation and many other fields.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Find out about some of the discoveries made by ancient Hindu scientists and engineers in some of the fields mentioned here.



Photo: Modhera Stepwell, Gujarat

SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

India's central role in the history of science and technology

JS Kharakwal, (2011) Indian Zinc Technology in a Global Perspective, Infinity Foundation series

Can you imagine science or technology without the discovery of Zero as a mathematical place marker? We can thank Hindu mathematicians who not only discovered the zero but also algebra, square root and cube root, geometry, trigonometry and calculus. Famous mathematicians include Aryabhata, Brahmagupta and the more recent ones, Ramanuja and Bose.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Research famous Hindu mathematicians Aryabhata, Brahmagupta, Ramanuja and Bose.

Watch the Hollywood film, The man who knew Infinity - a film on Ramanujan.

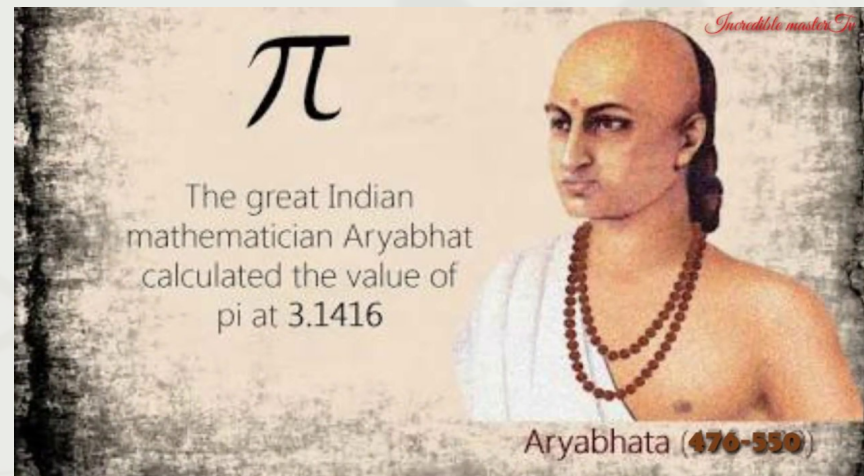


Photo of Aryabhata who discovered Pi

SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

Five ways Ancient India changed the world with Math

Video Professor Kak on impact of ancient Hindu mathematics on the modern mathematics

Ancient Hindu scientist and researchers, known as rishis, were experts in astronomy. For example they knew the distance of the earth from the sun and moon and the circumference of the earth, moon and sun. Hindus knew the earth was round, not flat thousands of years ago. In fact, the ancient Sanskrit word for geography is Bhugol, which means round earth.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Learn more about Hindu cosmology.

Look up why the number 108 is seen as significant in calculating the distance between the sun or moon and the earth.



SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

[Video on ancient Indian knowledge about the earth being flat.](#)

Photo of Bhugola or Earth-Ball by Ksema Karna, India, 1571 [Inv.51703] © Museum of the History of Science, University of Oxford.

Did you know that games like Chess, Snakes and Ladders, Playing cards, and Polo originated in India? The game of Snakes and Ladders was invented by the 13th century poet and saint, Gyandev. The ladders in the game was about good actions or good karma that helped one make progress on the spiritual path. The snakes were about wrong actions or bad karma that made one go backwards. The game was originally played with shells and dices.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Learn how the games of Chess and Snakes and Ladders are played.



Photo: An ancient artifact showing chess game in ancient India

SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

Shimkhada, D. (1983). A Preliminary Study of the Game of Karma in India, Nepal, and Tibet. *Artibus Asiae*, 44(4), 308-322. doi:10.2307/3249615

[Read A brief History of Chess](#)

Kolam (Rangoli) is an art form in which powdered rice, to which color can be added, is used to draw designs on the ground or floor to beautify and create good vibrations. It also teaches to live in harmony with nature. The rice powder feeds birds and ants. Rangoli art is a traditional art form which is passed on from mother to daughter.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Create rangoli art designs using pastels, chalk or pencil crayons. Decorate on paper or using floor space.



SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

[How to make Rangoli art](#)

[Rangoli is an ancient art form](#)

Do you know the children's stories of the lion and the mouse or the tortoise and the hare? Many of these popular children's stories as in Aesop's Fables and Arabian Nights are said to have originated from ancient Hindu fables written in the Panchatantra and Hitopadesha texts. Often these stories teach about life lessons and wisdom.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITY

Look up and read/tell some stories from Panchatantra and Hitopadesha online.

Draw some pictures about these stories.



SOURCES/ADDITIONAL READINGS

<http://www.chinmayakids.org/>

<http://chandamama.in/>

Sites for stories from Hindu contexts.



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