

Diwali

by Asha Patel

Overview

This third-person recount, set in New Zealand, describes an Indian girl's experience of the five-day festival of Diwali. There is an audio version on the Ready to Read CD *Readalong 2007. White Sunday in Sāmoa* (Purple) is another book about celebrations.

Suggested purposes

This text supports the comprehension strategies of making connections, summarising, and analysing and synthesising. It provides an opportunity for Indian children to share their experiences and for other children to increase their awareness of celebrations in other cultures.

Text features

(Focus on only one or two per session.)

- the information about Diwali
- the clear text structure, with an introduction, a sequence of events, and a conclusion
- the framework for the text that is provided by Alisha's chart
- the indicators of time and place
- the inclusion of Hindi words
- the pronunciation guide and footnote
- the use of bold print for the topic-specific vocabulary
- the third-person narration
- the many references to light – “beautiful”, “bright”, “colourful”, “flicker”, “sparkle”, and the diva motif around the page numbers
- the suffix “ful” in “beautiful” and “colourful”
- the verb “celebrates” and the noun form “celebrations”.

Introducing the text

If you're not confident with pronouncing the Hindi words in this text, listen to the audio version before you use the book with the children.

Introduce the subject of festivals. *What happens in your family when there is a festival or special celebration? Tell your partner some of the things your family does when you celebrate.* Using festivals within the children's experience, like Christmas, White Sunday, Easter, Chinese New Year, or Matariki, draw out common threads, like family gatherings, decorations, special food and clothes, and giving gifts. Record these ideas to return to later.

Tell the children that you have a book for them to read about a girl called Alisha, who is getting ready for the festival of Diwali. If you have Hindi children in the group, encourage them to share their experiences but note that not all Indian children celebrate this Hindi festival. Show the children where India is on a world map. Introduce the cover of the book

and draw attention to the way Alisha is smiling at the readers, inviting them into the book. *I wonder why she's showing us this chart.* Encourage the children to share their thoughts about the numbered days and the candles.

During the reading

Read the title and the name of the author. Draw the children's attention to the pronunciation guide on the inside front cover. Explain that it's there for readers to refer to when they come across Hindi words in the text that they don't know how to say. Point out that the words are in alphabetical order (like a dictionary or an index) to make it easier to find each word when it's needed.

Title page – Model your thinking. *There were lights on Alisha's chart on the cover, and there are candles here. I wonder if Diwali has something to do with candles or lights ...*

Page 2 – Study (preview) the page before reading it. *What do you notice?* For example, the first word is the title of the book, and it's in bold print; and there are two more photographs of lights. The children may also recognise the names of the months and may notice that there are quite a few other words with capital letters. Encourage them to predict what they will find out on this page. Refer to the guide to confirm the pronunciation of "Diwali", then have the children read the text. Together, review (summarise) what they have learned about Diwali. Confirm that it's celebrated at a different time to the New Zealand New Year. You could refer to a calendar to clarify this. Encourage the children to share their experiences of New Year celebrations.

Page 3 – Draw out the idea that the text has moved from the general information about Diwali on page 2 to Alisha's particular experience of the festival. *Have you ever used a chart or crossed off days on a calendar when you were waiting for something to happen?* The children may have experiences of using advent calendars. Enjoy their discovery of the diva motif around the page numbers.

Ask the children to read the text silently, pausing at various points for discussion or clarification.

Pages 4 and 5 – Allow plenty of time to discuss making the rangoli pattern and barfi. Support the children with using the pronunciation guide for the words in bold. Together, summarise what Alisha has done on day 1 of the Diwali festival. Make connections to the children's list about common features of celebrations.

Pages 6 and 7 – Write all the words in bold in the group reading book or on the whiteboard and practise their pronunciation before reading these pages to avoid interrupting the flow of the reading. Then have the children read the text and use the information from the text to identify the characters in the illustrations. Discuss the story and its theme of good triumphing over evil. Explore the visual references to light in the page 6 illustration (the "glow" behind the main characters, the diva in the people's hands, and the twinkling stars). On the whiteboard, clarify the link between the words "Diwali" and "Diva", showing how the spelling has changed. Note that on this day, many Indian families would also go to the temple for pooja or prayers.

Pages 8 and 9 – *What do you notice about all of these photographs?* Identify the lights as the common feature and make links to other festivals that include fireworks as part of their celebrations.

Pages 10 and 11 – Encourage the children to use both the pronunciation guide and the footnote to support them with “Saal Mubarak”. Prompt them to make connections to their own experiences of giving gifts on special occasions.

Pages 12 and 13 – If necessary, refer to the indicator of time on page 10 (“The fourth day”) to confirm that this is the evening of the same day. Prompt the children to make the link back to the page 4 idea of making a rangoli pattern to welcome visitors.

Page 14 – Remind the children of other stories they may have read where children perform for an audience, for example, *The School Band* (Blue), *I Want to be the Fox* (Green), or *White Sunday in Sāmoa* (Purple).

Page 15 – Encourage the children to try to use the pronunciation guide independently and to make connections to their experiences of special family occasions, festive food, and gifts.

Page 16 – If necessary, reassure the children that “begun” means “started”.

Have the children summarise what happened on each day during the festival. Encourage them to infer how Alisha feels about Diwali. *What makes you think that?*

After the reading

(Choose only one or two per session.)

Many of the aspects raised in During the Reading are revisited in more depth in this section. As always, choose the activities according to the needs of your children.

Listen to the children reread the text with a partner, noting their strategies for managing the unfamiliar vocabulary and their use of expression.

Look through the book, identifying all of the visual and text references to lights. Make connections to the use of lights in other celebrations.

Create a word “cline” (a continuum of intensity of meaning), using all of the words in the text that refer to light. Think of others that could be added, for example, “twinkle” or “glow”.

Refer to the introductory discussion and explore further the common links between celebrations that children are familiar with. This could be in the form of a comparison chart. Together, decide on some headings, such as Dates, Decorations, Food, Traditional stories, Customs and traditions, or Clothes, and fill in what the children know. Identify any gaps that the children could research. Alternatively, you could focus your comparison on one particular aspect, for example, the role of lights or special food or clothing in cultural celebrations. Draw out the idea that many people who live in New Zealand have come from other countries and that they can help us learn a lot about other cultures.

Identify the structure of this recount: the introduction with general information, the sequence of events organised according to Alisha’s chart, and the conclusion. You could also identify the indicators of time in the text and discuss how they help the reader follow the sequence of events in more detail. For example, you could construct a timeline of

events that take place on the third and fourth days to show how markers like “After breakfast”, “In the evening”, and “After dinner” contribute to a much more interesting and precise picture of the day than the phrase “and then”.

Locate “celebrates” and “celebrations” on page 2 of the text. Using the context, identify them as the verb and noun forms of the same word. Explore other forms of the verb (“celebrate”, “celebrated”, “celebrating”).

You could also discuss how “celebrated” can be both the past-tense form of “celebrate” or an adjective, meaning “valued” or “famous”. Some children may also be interested in the link to the words “celebrity” or “celebrant”.

Write the words “beautiful” and “colourful” on the whiteboard and encourage the children to identify the common suffix. Draw out the meaning “full of” and have the children think of other examples, for example, “wonderful” and “powerful”.

Suggestions for further tasks

Listen to the audio version on the CD *Readalong 2007*.

Read or reread *White Sunday in Sāmoa*.

Read the *School Journal* articles referred to on the inside front cover of *Diwali* to find out more about rangoli and making barfi. You could also read the article “Bells and Butterflies” in *School Journal*, Part 2 Number 1, 2005, which is about Indian dancing.

Find out more about Diwali by using library books or the Internet or by talking with members of the local Hindi community.

Read the article “Celebrating Matariki” in *School Journal*, Part 2 Number 2, 2005.

Use the book *Diwali*, including Alisha’s chart, as a model to write about another festival or celebration. This could be shared writing with a group or the whole class.

Write a pronunciation guide for some Māori words commonly used in the classroom or for words that are from other languages and are associated with festivals celebrated by the children in the class.