



CELEBRATIONS

onestopenglish

Vesak Day

Teacher's notes

Age: Adults and teenagers

Level: Pre-intermediate–Intermediate (A2–B1)


Time: 60–90 minutes


Activity: In this lesson, students will:

1. read a text about Vesak Day;
2. look at the language associated with the festival – in particular, vocabulary that describes human and spiritual characteristics and attributes;
3. look closely at an object from the natural world and describe what they see.

Language focus: vocabulary related to Vesak and sensory experiences

Materials: one copy of the worksheet per student; one copy of the Trees worksheet per student (optional)

 **Teaching Tip:** Vesak is a lunar festival that traditionally takes place on the day of the first full moon in May. You may wish to look up the exact date before the lesson to share with your students.

 **Teaching Tip:** This lesson is aimed at pre-intermediate to intermediate level learners (approximately A2–B1). However, certain vocabulary from this lesson would typically belong at higher levels. Tell students that they shouldn't worry if they find the lesson challenging or if they encounter certain words that they don't understand.

Procedure

1. Warmer

Students match the words to the images that are closely related to Buddhism.

Key:

1b, 2e, 3f, 4d, 5a, 6c

2. Key words and expressions

Students match the words to the meanings, and then find and underline the words in the text.

The words are numbered in the order that they appear in the text. Then students should carefully read the text and notice how the words are used in context.

Key:

1. enlightenment
2. Nirvana
3. released
4. compassion
5. kindness
6. charity
7. chant
8. meditate
9. incense
10. lanterns
11. joy
12. reflection

3. Understanding the text

Students read the text and choose the best option – a, b or c – to answer each question.

Key:

1c, 2a, 3c, 4b, 5a, 6b

4. Vegetarian food

Students talk about their answers to the questions about vegetarian food, either in pairs or groups. Monitor to help students as necessary, and feed back as a whole class to share answers.

5. Creative thinking

As trees are needed for this task, choose the option below that best suits your teaching situation:

- **Option 1** Students contemplate a tree that is outside the classroom. Either through the window, or preferably by going outside and being close to it.
- **Option 2** Students close their eyes and contemplate a tree they see regularly, e.g. in their garden, near their house, next to the bus stop they use every day, etc.
- **Option 3** Tell the students to look at the six images of trees and choose the one which most appeals to them. Then ask them to cut out their chosen tree and contemplate it.



CELEBRATIONS

onestopenglish

Vesak Day

Teacher's notes

Whichever option you choose, tell the students to first read the questions and then take two to five minutes on their own to quietly and closely study their tree and to circle (or write other) words and expressions that they could use to talk about the tree.

Stop the task when you see that students are finished. Then ask them to sit together in pairs or

small groups and describe to each other in detail what they saw, felt and pictured.

As a final step, ask each pair or group to make a note of any words or expressions they wrote or used and share these with the class.

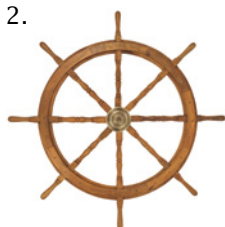


CELEBRATIONS

Vesak Day

Exercise 1: Warmer

Match the images connected with Buddhism (1–6) with their descriptions (a–f).



a. lotus flower

b. meditating Buddha

c. temple

d. incense

e. Dharma Wheel

f. Buddhist monk

Exercise 2: Key words and expressions

Match the key words to their meanings and then find them in the article to read them in context.

charity	compassion	enlightenment	kindness	Nirvana	released
---------	------------	---------------	----------	---------	----------

- in Buddhism this is the moment when a person understands the truth of everything (part 3)

- a state of complete happiness and peace that Buddhists try to find, where life isn't important any more (part 3)

- let animals and birds leave their cages and be free (part 4) _____
- a feeling of sympathy for someone who is in a bad situation because you understand and care about them (part 4) _____
- behaving in a way that shows you care about other people and want to help them (part 4)

- organizations to which you give money so that they can help people who are poor or ill (part 4)

reflection	meditate	lanterns	joy	incense	chant
------------	----------	----------	-----	---------	-------

- sing a word or phrase many times (part 5) _____
- make your mind empty of thoughts, or concentrate on only one thing, in order to relax or as a spiritual or religious exercise (part 5) _____
- something that gives a strong but nice smell when burned, often in a church or a temple (part 5) _____
- lights inside paper containers (part 5) _____
- a feeling of great happiness (part 6) _____
- when you think carefully about something (part 6) _____



What is Vesak Day?

1. Vesak Day is a special day for millions of Buddhists all over the world. It celebrates the three most important events in the Buddha's life: his birth, the day he became the Buddha and his death.
2. Siddhārtha Gautama was born in Nepal around 2,500 years ago. When he was a young man, he left his family and his home and travelled around India for six years. On his travels he met poor, sick and dying people for the first time in his life.
3. At the age of 35, after meditating under a tree for 49 days, he obtained enlightenment and became the Buddha. Enlightenment happens when a person sees and understands all things. At the age of 80, Buddha died, or passed into Nirvana. Buddhists believe that Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death all happened on the day of the first full moon in May, Vesak Day.
4. Every year on Vesak Day, Buddhists promise to live a good and compassionate life. Vegetarian food is eaten and in many places birds and other animals are released to show compassion. It is also important to do good things and to show kindness by sharing your food and giving money to charity.
5. On Vesak, Buddhists decorate their houses and wear white clothes. They go to the temple, raise the Buddhist flag, chant, sing, meditate, listen to stories, bring flowers, burn incense and light candles. In the evening, colourful lanterns are lit and often released into the dark sky.
6. Vesak is also called Wesak Day or Buddha Day. It is a day of joy, peace and reflection that is celebrated in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Singapore, India, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar and other Southeast Asian countries.



Exercise 3: Understanding the text

Choose the best answer for each question.

1. What three things are celebrated on Vesak Day?
 - a. Kindness, compassion and charity.
 - b. The sun, the moon and the stars.
 - c. The Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death.
2. What do Buddhists not do at Vesak?
 - a. Eat meat or fish.
 - b. Release birds and animals.
 - c. Prepare food.
3. Where do Buddhists go on Vesak Day?
 - a. To visit family.
 - b. They stay at home.
 - c. To the temple.
4. What do they do there?
 - a. Write stories about Buddha.
 - b. Chant and meditate.
 - c. Make paper lanterns.



CELEBRATIONS

Vesak Day

Worksheet

5. What do Buddhists promise on Vesak Day?

- a. To live a good and compassionate life.
- b. To go to the temple every day.
- c. To give half of their money to charity.

6. Vesak is a day of ...

- a. ... birth and death.
- b. ... joy, peace and reflection.
- c. ... health and happiness.

Exercise 4: Vegetarian food



Although most Buddhists are vegetarians, some are allowed to eat meat and fish. However, at Vesak, animals may not be killed and so Buddhists only eat vegetarian food. Discuss these questions in pairs or groups.

- How often do you eat meat or fish?
- Are there any special days when you do not eat meat or fish?
- What is your favourite vegetarian meal?

Exercise 5: Creative thinking

Siddhārtha Gautama meditated under a tree for 49 days before he became the Buddha.

Look at a tree for two to five minutes. Then circle the words and expressions that you could use to answer the questions. Add any more you may know.

- What does it look like?

tall thin strong old young beautiful majestic ...

- What does it feel like?

cold warm hard smooth rough ...

- What does it give people, birds and animals?

fruit nuts shade protection a home ...

- How does it change throughout the year?

It grows leaves / flowers / fruit / nuts / ... in ...

- How does the tree make you feel?

small safe happy annoyed close to nature ...

Use these words and expressions to talk about the tree.



CELEBRATIONS

onestopenglish

Vesak Day

Trees

