



# CELEBRATIONS

one stop english

## Vesak Day

Teacher's notes

**Age:** Adults and teenagers

**Level:** Upper-intermediate–Advanced (B2–C1)

**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. describe in detail what they see, feel and experience when they look closely at an object from the natural world.

**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.

## 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. suffering
2. Nirvana
3. scriptures
4. reaffirm
5. slaughterhouses

6. compassion

7. donations

8. congregate

9. sermons

10. decay

11. reflection

12. spirituality

### 3. Understanding the text

Students read the text and find the information to answer the questions.

**Key:**

1. On the day of the first full moon in May. According to Buddhist scriptures the three most important events in the life of the Buddha happened on the first full moon in May: being born, obtaining enlightenment and dying, or passing into Nirvana.
2. Their commitment to Buddha and his teachings and to living a moral and compassionate lifestyle.
3. Eat meat or allow animals to be killed for their meat.
4. They go to the temple, raise the Buddhist flag, chant, sing hymns, meditate, listen to sermons, lay flowers, burn incense and light candles. After sunset, colourful lanterns are often released into the dark night sky.

### 4. The Buddhist flag

Students decide what part of Buddha's body each of the colours of the flag represent and read about the attributes each colour symbolises. Ask them to discuss their decisions in pairs, before giving them the answers. You could widen this out to a group / whole class discussion, talking about what these and other colours represent or symbolise for students.

**Key:**

**White** – This colour of light came from the Buddha's teeth and bones and symbolises purity.

**Red** – This colour of light came from the Buddha's flesh and symbolises the blessings that practising the Buddha's teaching brings.

**Orange** – This colour of light came from the Buddha's palms, heels and lips and symbolises wisdom.

**Yellow/gold** – This colour of light came from the Buddha's skin and symbolises the 'Middle Path' and balance (avoiding extremes).

**Blue** – This colour of light came from the Buddha's hair and symbolises compassion for all beings.



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## Vesak Day

Teacher's notes

### 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.

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 contemplate their 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 had to look up and share these with the class.

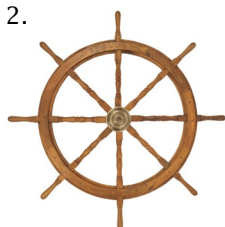


# CELEBRATIONS

## 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.

compassion  
Nirvana  
sermons

congregate  
reaffirm  
slaughterhouses

decay  
reflection  
spirituality

donations  
scriptures  
suffering

1. mental or physical pain or problems \_\_\_\_\_
2. a state of complete spiritual happiness that Buddhists try to achieve in which human existence no longer seems important \_\_\_\_\_
3. the holy writings of any religion \_\_\_\_\_
4. formally and officially state something again \_\_\_\_\_
5. buildings where animals are killed for their meat \_\_\_\_\_
6. a feeling of sympathy for someone who is in a bad situation because you understand and care about them \_\_\_\_\_
7. giving money or goods to an organization \_\_\_\_\_
8. gather together in a group \_\_\_\_\_
9. speeches made by a religious leader, especially as part of a religious ceremony \_\_\_\_\_
10. the gradual destruction of something as a result of a natural process of change \_\_\_\_\_
11. careful thought about something \_\_\_\_\_
12. the belief or feeling that humans are more than their physical bodies and that something greater than us exists \_\_\_\_\_



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## Vesak Day

Worksheet

### What is Vesak Day?

Vesak Day (also known as Wesak or Buddha Day) is the most important and sacred day to millions of Buddhists all over the world as it celebrates the three most important events in the life of the Buddha: birth, enlightenment and Nirvana.

Siddhārtha Gautama was born into a royal family in Nepal around two and a half millennia ago. He lived a life of luxury, never leaving the palace. At the age of 29, he finally left his palace to visit the city. He learned something he hadn't been aware of before: that all humans will experience old age, sickness and death. He left his family and his privileged life and travelled around India for six years, meeting people who were suffering, and spending time meditating.



At the age of 35, after meditating under a tree for 49 days, he obtained enlightenment and became the Buddha. Enlightenment occurs when a person sees and understands the true nature of all things.

At the age of 80, Buddha died, or passed into Nirvana, therefore breaking out of the cycle of life, death and rebirth.

According to Buddhist scriptures, the three events of the Buddha's life all happened on the day of the first full moon in May, Vesak Day.

On this day, Buddhists the whole world over reaffirm their commitment to Buddha and his teachings and to living a moral and compassionate lifestyle. Around Vesak, slaughterhouses are closed and vegetarian meals are eaten because no creature may be harmed. In many places, caged birds and other animals are released as a symbolic gesture of compassion.

On Vesak it is important to do good deeds, which are called Dana, and to show kindness to those less fortunate than yourself by sharing your food or making donations to charity. Acts of happiness and celebration, such as decorating the temple and creating scenes from Buddha's life, are also carried out on Vesak.

Buddhists often congregate at their local temple on Vesak Day. Many wear white clothes which symbolise purity. They raise the Buddhist flag, chant, sing hymns, meditate, listen to sermons, lay flowers, burn incense and light candles. After sunset, colourful lanterns are often lit released into the dark night sky.

Wilting flowers, flickering candles and burnt joss sticks symbolise the impermanence of life and its ultimate decay.

Vesak is a day of joy, peace and reflection that is celebrated in many parts of the world, but especially in Singapore, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Japan, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar and other Southeast Asian countries.

You do not need to be a Buddhist to celebrate Vesak. In 1999, the UN officially recognized Vesak Day and the contribution that Buddhism has made to spirituality and humanity.



# CELEBRATIONS

## Vesak Day

### Exercise 3: Understanding the text

Answer the questions with information from the text.

1. When is Vesak celebrated and why?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What do Buddhists reaffirm their commitment to on Vesak Day?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What don't Buddhists do at Vesak?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Where do Buddhists go on Vesak Day and what do they do there?

\_\_\_\_\_

### Exercise 4: The Buddhist flag



The Buddhist flag was created in 1880 in Sri Lanka and is now used by Buddhists all over the world, especially on festival days. The colours on the vertical stripes of the flag represent the different kinds of light that came from parts of the Buddha's body (his 'aura') after he achieved enlightenment. The final stripe, which combines all five colours, symbolises the truth of the Buddha's teachings.

Read the descriptions and write the colours of the Buddhist flag next to the things you think they symbolise. Discuss your choices with a partner. Do these colours represent or symbolise anything for you?

<i>orange</i>	<i>yellow/gold</i>	<i>blue</i>	<i>white</i>	<i>red</i>
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This colour of light came from the Buddha's teeth and bones and symbolises purity. \_\_\_\_\_

This colour of light came from the Buddha's flesh and symbolises the blessings that practising the Buddha's teaching brings. \_\_\_\_\_

This colour of light came from the Buddha's palms, heels and lips and symbolises wisdom. \_\_\_\_\_

This colour of light came from the Buddha's skin and symbolises the 'Middle Path' and balance (avoiding extremes). \_\_\_\_\_

This colour of light came from the Buddha's hair and symbolises compassion for all beings. \_\_\_\_\_



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## Vesak Day

Worksheet

### Exercise 5: Creative thinking

Siddhārtha Gautama meditated under a tree for 49 days before he obtained enlightenment and became the Buddha. Take two to five minutes to quietly and closely study a tree and contemplate these questions in detail.

- What does it look like?
- What does it feel like?
- What does it smell of?
- What does it provide for people, birds and other creatures?
- How does it change throughout the year?
- How long might it have been there?
- What changes might have happened around it in the time it has been there?
- What would it be like if it were no longer there?

Afterwards, share your thoughts with others in your class.



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## Vesak Day

Trees

