DIWALI

Victory of Light over Darkness

A practical guide to teaching or presenting Diwali for the first time

For parents, teachers, student presenters, and community volunteers • Elementary, middle, high school, and general audiences

You do not need to be an expert to lead a meaningful Diwali session. Start with what Diwali means, tell the story of Shri Rama's homecoming, introduce a few traditions, and invite questions. This guide gives you the background and ready-to-use language to do that with confidence.

Table of Contents

A practical guide to teaching or presenting Diwali for the first time 1
Start here: your five-minute orientation 2
1 | Your first presentation, step by step 3
A ready-to-use opening (about 60 seconds) 3
Choose a session length 3
2 | What Diwali means: clear explanations 3
3 | Shri Rama's Homecoming: The Victory of Dharma 4
A two-minute storytelling script 4
A useful transition 4
4 | The five-day celebration: what to explain 4
If someone asks whether these are the "only" traditions 4
5 | The other stories and traditions you may mention 5
6 | How Diwali looks and feels in a Hindu home 5
7 | Regions, communities, and Diwali around the world 5
8 | Adapt your language to your audience 6
9 | Frequently asked questions — answers you can use 6
Is Diwali just the Festival of Lights? 6
Why does Diwali fall on a different date each year? 6
Do all Hindus celebrate for five days? 6
Why is Devi Lakshmi worshipped? 6
What is Dharma? 6
Can non-Hindu students take part? 6
Do all Hindu families light fireworks? 6
What if a student asks something I cannot answer? 7
10 | Classroom do's and don'ts 7
11 | Easy activities that work 7
12 | A natural closing script (30 seconds) 7
13 | Final checklist before you present 7
14 | Quick glossary 7
15 | Further resources 7

Start here: your five-minute orientation

- Diwali, also called Deepavali, means “row of lamps.” It is one of the most cherished Hindu festivals.
- The central theme is the victory of light over darkness, truth over untruth, knowledge over ignorance, and Dharma over Adharma.
- A much-loved Diwali story is Shri Rama, Devi Sita, and Lakshmana returning to Ayodhya after fourteen years of exile.
- Diwali traditions differ across Hindu communities. Lakshmi Puja, Naraka Chaturdashi, Govardhan Puja, Kali Puja, regional New Year observances, and family customs all matter.
- Diwali often falls in October or November, based on the Hindu lunisolar calendar; not everyone celebrates the same number of days.

1 | Your first presentation, step by step

Before you go	During the session	At the end
Choose the right HPN deck and check the age group.	Begin with a warm welcome and explain Deepavali.	Recap three things: meaning, Rama’s homecoming, one tradition.
Plan for 15–30 minutes and decide whether to include an activity.	Tell the Rama story clearly, then introduce other traditions without rushing.	Invite one reflection or knowledge-check question.
Check the slides, room setup, school rules, images, and materials.	Explain puja and symbols respectfully; pause for questions.	Thank the audience and share HPN’s resources.

A ready-to-use opening (about 60 seconds)

> *SAY THIS: Namaste, and thank you for having me. Today I would like to share Diwali, one of the most cherished Hindu festivals. You may have seen beautiful lamps, rangoli designs, festive clothes, or family celebrations. But Diwali is about more than lights. It celebrates the victory of light over darkness, truth over untruth, and knowledge over ignorance. We will learn a beloved story behind the celebration, explore how different families observe it, and see what these traditions mean today.*

Choose a session length

Time	Suggested flow
10–15 minutes	Welcome (1) • Meaning (2) • Rama’s homecoming (4) • Traditions (4) • One question (2)
20–25 minutes	Welcome (2) • Meaning (3) • Rama story (5) • Five days and diversity (7) • Q&A (5)
30–40 minutes	Welcome and meaning (5) • Rama story (6) • Five days (9) • Global celebrations (4) • Art or quiz (10) • Closing (3)

These are sample agendas, not requirements. School presentations should follow the teacher’s timing and participation rules.

2 | What Diwali means: clear explanations

The Sanskrit name Deepavali is commonly explained as “row of lamps.” A diya is a small oil lamp. Lighting a diya can be an act of worship and a symbol of welcome, hope, and knowledge. In the Hindu understanding, light also points toward a better way of living.

Theme	Plain-language explanation	Everyday example

Light over darkness	Goodness and clarity overcome harm and confusion.	Helping someone feel included.
Satya over Asatya	Truth and honesty matter, even when inconvenient.	Admitting a mistake rather than hiding it.
Knowledge over ignorance	Learning helps us replace misunderstandings with understanding.	Asking a thoughtful question before judging.
Dharma over Adharma	Choosing the right and responsible course over wrongdoing.	Standing up for someone treated unfairly.

Dharma is broader than a simple English equivalent. In this setting, explain it as right conduct, responsibility, and the order that sustains life. You do not need a philosophical lecture to convey the idea.

> *SAY THIS: When a family lights a diya, the flame is beautiful, but it also reminds us to bring truth, knowledge, compassion, and right action into our own lives.*

3 | Shri Rama's Homecoming: The Victory of Dharma

This is a central Diwali narrative for many Hindus. Tell it as a respected Ramayana tradition; there is no need to analyze Rama's character in detail.

A two-minute storytelling script

> *SAY THIS: Long ago, Shri Rama of Ayodhya went to live in the forest for fourteen years. His wife Devi Sita and his brother Lakshmana went with him. During their time in the forest, Ravana forcefully took Sita to Lanka. Rama and Lakshmana searched for her. With help from Hanuman and other allies, Rama reached Lanka, defeated Ravana, and was reunited with Sita. When the fourteen years came to an end, Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana returned to Ayodhya. According to a cherished Diwali tradition, the people welcomed their prince (Rama), Devi Sita, and Lakshmana with rows of lamps. Imagine a whole city glowing with joy as loved ones return home. This homecoming represents the victory of Dharma and the triumph of light over darkness.*

Clarify if asked: The story of exile, Sita's abduction, Hanuman's help, and Rama's victory belongs to the Ramayana tradition. The rows-of-lamps homecoming is a widely cherished Diwali association. Diwali also has other Hindu narratives and observances.

A useful transition

> *SAY THIS: Rama's return is one of the best-known Diwali stories. But India has many regions and Hindu families have different traditions, so Diwali is also connected with other sacred stories and practices.*

4 | The five-day celebration: what to explain

This is a common framework, not a universal schedule. Different regions may observe fewer days, different names, or different practices.

Day	What to explain simply
1 — Dhanteras	Associated with health, well-being, and auspicious beginnings. Bhagavan Dhanvantari is honored in many traditions; some families prepare homes and make auspicious purchases.
2 — Naraka Chaturdashi	Remembers the victory over Narakasura and the release of those held captive. Shri Krishna and Satyabhama feature in different traditional retellings.

	Early oil baths and festive lights are part of some communities' customs.
3 — Diwali / Lakshmi Puja	Many families light diyas and offer prayers to Devi Lakshmi for well-being, auspiciousness, and prosperity. Some also worship Shri Ganesha.
4 — Govardhan Puja / other observances	Shri Krishna protects the community by lifting Govardhan Hill; Annakut is an offering of food. Other regions celebrate Bali Padyami or the Gujarati New Year. These are distinct traditions.
5 — Bhai Dooj	Celebrates the bond between siblings through visits, tilak, blessings, meals, and gifts in many families.

If someone asks whether these are the "only" traditions

SAY THIS: No. This is an easy way to introduce five familiar days, but families may celebrate one, several, or all five days. In some places, Kali Puja, regional New Year customs, and other celebrations are especially important.

5 | The other stories and traditions you may mention

You do not need to tell every story. Choose one or two that fit your audience and time.

- Shri Krishna, Satyabhama, and Narakasura: A story remembered at Naraka Chaturdashi. Traditional accounts differ about Satyabhama's precise role in defeating Narakasura; the common theme is the end of oppression and the liberation of captives.
- Devi Lakshmi: During Lakshmi Puja, families welcome the Divine through prayer, cleanliness, light, and hospitality, seeking blessings for prosperity and well-being.
- Devi Lakshmi and the elderly woman: A popular folktale tells of an honest elderly woman whose house was the only one lit on Diwali night; Devi Lakshmi visited and blessed her home. Introduce it as a folktale, not a Ramayana episode or universally shared scriptural account.
- Govardhan Puja: Krishna lifts Govardhan Hill to shelter the community from destructive rains. This observance is also connected with food offerings, gratitude, and care for the natural world.
- Bhai Dooj: Some traditional stories tell of Yama visiting his sister Yamuna, who welcomes him with food and tilak.

For longer storytelling, HPN's separate Diwali Stories resource can be used alongside this guide.

6 | How Diwali looks and feels in a Hindu home

Diwali is not only a set of ideas; it is a lived tradition. Many homes are cleaned and decorated. Families prepare food, put on festive clothes, visit temples, exchange sweets, make rangoli, and gather for puja. Some also give to charity or take part in community service. Not every family does every activity.

What children may see	How to explain it
Diyas	Small oil lamps used during worship and celebration; they also represent the victory of light.
Rangoli	Colorful designs near entrances, often made with powders, rice, or flower petals to welcome guests and create an auspicious space.
Puja	Devotional worship with prayers and offerings. Explain respectfully; do not ask students to perform worship.
Sweets, food, and visits	Families share happiness and hospitality.

Fireworks	Part of some celebrations, but not required. Safety, local rules, air quality, and neighbors matter.

7 | Regions, communities, and Diwali around the world

Across India, different Hindu communities emphasize different parts of the season. Rama's homecoming is familiar in many northern traditions; Lakshmi Puja and New Year observances are important in parts of western India; Kali Puja is prominent in parts of Bengal; Naraka Chaturdashi and early oil baths are important in several southern communities. Nepal's Tihar includes distinctive observances for animals, Lakshmi, and siblings.

Around the world, diaspora families celebrate Diwali in homes, temples, community halls, and sometimes large public gatherings. HPN's presentations include celebrations in Singapore, London, India, and the United States. Use verified photos when showing a particular city or country.

Jains mark Mahavira's liberation (moksha), and Sikhs observe Bandi Chhor Divas, associated with Guru Hargobind's release and that of 52 princes. Some Buddhist communities have Diwali-related customs. These events occur around the same season but have distinct religious meanings.

> *SAY THIS: Diwali is rooted in Hindu tradition, and its celebrations vary widely. Other religious communities also mark important occasions around this time, each with its own history and meaning.*

8 | Adapt your language to your audience

Audience	Emphasize	Try this question
Elementary (K–5)	A diya, the homecoming story, simple traditions, kindness, and hands-on art.	What is one kind thing you can do to bring light to someone's day?
Middle (6–8)	Meaning of Dharma, calendar, five-day celebrations, differences across regions.	Why might two families celebrate Diwali differently?
High (9–12)	Tradition, cultural continuity, moral choices, the meaning of truth and responsibility.	What could the victory of light look like in everyday school life?
Mixed community/workplace	A welcoming introduction, beliefs and celebrations, regional variety, food, family, and public observances.	What was one new thing you learned about Diwali today?

Keep the religious concepts accurate without assuming your audience already knows Sanskrit terms. Say "Shri Rama," "Devi Lakshmi," and "Dharma" naturally, then explain them in everyday language. This guide uses simple English spellings, without IAST diacritics.

9 | Frequently asked questions — answers you can use

Is Diwali just the Festival of Lights?

It is often called that, but the lamps also convey the victory of light over darkness, truth over untruth, and knowledge over ignorance.

Why does Diwali fall on a different date each year?

The Hindu lunisolar calendar follows lunar months with adjustments to remain aligned with the solar year. The principal Diwali night for many communities is Amavasya, the new moon.

Do all Hindus celebrate for five days?

No. Dates, names, and the number of days vary by region and household.

Why is Devi Lakshmi worshipped?

Many Hindus seek her blessings for well-being, prosperity, and auspiciousness.

What is Dharma?

It includes right conduct, responsibility, and the order that sustains life. A helpful simple explanation is choosing what is right, even when it is difficult.

Can non-Hindu students take part?

Everyone can learn about Diwali through discussion, stories, and non-devotional art/craft activities. Follow school policy and do not require participation in puja.

Do all Hindu families light fireworks?

No. They are part of some celebrations, and many families celebrate without them.

What if a student asks something I cannot answer?

It is fine to say: “That is a thoughtful question. Traditions vary, and I do not want to guess. We can consult the HPN resources or a reliable source.”

10 | Classroom do’s and don’ts

Do	Avoid
Say “many Hindus” or “in some traditions” when customs differ.	Claiming every Hindu family worships the same deity or celebrates the same number of days.
Describe beliefs and sacred narratives respectfully.	Presenting devotional stories as independently proven history.
Use discussion, crafts, and voluntary knowledge checks.	Requiring children to perform puja or devotional acts.
Use paper or unlit clay diyas and school-approved supplies.	Open flames, fireworks, or unapproved food in classrooms.
Invite questions and welcome different family experiences.	Treating regional differences as contradictions to be “fixed.”

11 | Easy activities that work

- Five-minute paper diya: Have children decorate a printed diya and write one word inside it—truth, kindness, knowledge, or courage.
- Rangoli art: Make a simple geometric rangoli on paper or a tray; explain the tradition of welcoming guests.
- A one-question reflection: Ask what “light over darkness” could mean outside the festival.
- Knowledge check: Use the age-appropriate HPN quiz to reinforce factual points from the lesson.
- Community contribution: Invite participants to think of a helpful act they could do at home or school.

Practical note: Check with the school before bringing food; account for allergies, photography permissions, and fire-safety rules.

12 | A natural closing script (30 seconds)

SAY THIS: Diwali brings families and communities together through stories, lights, prayers, and celebrations. At the heart of the festival is a meaningful reminder: light is more than something we see. It can also be the truth we speak, the knowledge we seek, and the care we show others. Thank you for learning about Diwali with me. Shubh Diwali!

13 | Final checklist before you present

- I know the audience, time limit, and presentation format.
- I can explain Deepavali, diya, Dharma, and Shri Rama's homecoming in simple terms.
- I can explain that the five-day outline and regional customs vary.
- I have one audience question and a closing statement ready.
- I have checked the slides, links, photo captions, and any planned activities.
- I know whom to ask or what to consult if an unfamiliar question comes up.

14 | Quick glossary

Term	Simple meaning
Adharma	Wrongdoing or conduct contrary to Dharma
Amavasya	New-moon night
Annakut	Mountain-like offering of food
Deepavali	Row of lamps
Dharma	Right conduct, responsibility, and sustaining order
Diya	Small oil lamp
Lakshmi Puja	Worship of Devi Lakshmi
Moksha	Spiritual liberation
Puja	Devotional worship
Rangoli	Decorative design made on floors or near entrances
Satya / Asatya	Truth / untruth

15 | Further resources

Presentation:

https://www.hinduparentsnetwork.org/HPN-Diwali-Presentation-Elementary-School.pptx.pdf

https://www.hinduparentsnetwork.org/HPN-Diwali-Presentation-Middle-School.pdf

https://www.hinduparentsnetwork.org/HPN-Diwali-Presentation-High-School.pdf

Activities and Stories:

https://www.hinduparentsnetwork.org/Activity-book.pdf

https://www.hinduparentsnetwork.org/Diwali-Stories.pdf

One-Pager

https://www.hinduparentsnetwork.org/Diwali-One-Pager.pdf

Additional Reading

https://cohna.org/diwali/

https://cohna.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Diwali-Info-kit.pdf

https://diwali.day/