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## **Diwali—the Hindu *Festival of Lights***

Today is the fourth day of the festival of *Diwali*. Diwali, commonly referred to as the *Festival of Lights*, is the most important holiday in the Hindu religion and marks the start of the Hindu New Year. The festival begins two days before the new moon and lasts for five days. The exact dates change each year, depending upon the position of the moon. This year the festival is celebrated from November 2<sup>nd</sup> through November 6<sup>th</sup>.

Diwali is festival of hope, happiness, and peace—a celebration of the triumph of light over darkness and the power of good over evil. For religious Hindus, it is also a time to honor the Hindu gods and goddesses—especially *Lakshmi*, the four-armed goddess of wealth, and *Ganesh*, the elephant-headed god of good luck.

During the festival, people decorate their homes with lights and oil lamps, called *diyas*. (The word *Diwali* means ‘row of lights’ in Sanskrit, an ancient Hindu language.) The lights and lamps are said to help Lakshmi and Ganesh find their way into peoples’ homes, bringing good fortune and prosperity in the year to come!

The entrances to homes and buildings are also decorated with complicated designs called *rangoli*. These are usually made on the ground using colored sand, rice, or flour. These are meant to welcome the gods and are supposed to bring good luck.

There are many Hindu myths and legends associated with Diwali. One of the most popular myths tells of the return of the deities (gods) Rama and Sita to the city of Ayodhya after defeating the evil king Ravana. According to the myth, the people of Avodhya placed small clay lamps in their windows to help light the couple’s journey home.

But Diwali isn’t just about lights and legends; It’s a time to have fun with friends and family. People prepare for the holiday by cleaning and their homes and putting on new clothes. During the festival, they celebrate by exchanging gifts, enjoying delicious foods, and watching huge firework displays.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

In recognition of Diwali, we are going to watch a short video that tells the story of Rama and Sita. <https://vimeo.com/273818726>

After watching the video, answer the following questions:

1. How many arms and heads does the demon king Ravana have?
2. What does Rama do to keep Sita safe while he goes off to find the wounded deer?
3. How does Ravana trick and capture Sita?
4. Why does he want to capture her?
5. Who finds Sita for Rama?
6. How are Sita, Hanuman, and their animal army able to reach the island where Sita is imprisoned?
7. How does Rama finally defeat Ravana?
8. Why is the myth of Rama and Sita told during Diwali? (What does it try to explain?)