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A journey of discovery for 8-year-olds

○ From: Forest of Galtres

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To: Hindu mandir, Bradford

Rachel Oates, who teaches RE in Yorkshire, describes the impact of taking her class from the Forest of Galtres to the Bradford Hindu mandir.

Last summer I wanted to show the children in my class more about multi-religious Britain. We took Class 4 from Forest of Galtres Anglican Methodist (VC) Primary School to the Shree Lakshmi Narayan Hindu Mandir in Bradford and were generously welcomed.

The children were shown the downstairs meeting area, where groups of women were sewing red poppies, and food was being prepared for the elderly people of the community. Next we were taken to a small room to take off our shoes and wash our hands. Everyone does this before entering the beautiful prayer hall. Even the Queen and Prince Philip did this when they opened the mandir in 2007. Our guide explained that the taking off of shoes kept the carpets clean and was a sign of respect to others.

The prayer hall was stunning: the shrine at the front gleamed white with the most amazingly decorated statues of the gods and goddesses. The theme throughout the visit centred on respect and love, not just for other people, but also for animals and the environment. The children were able to relate this to their own lives and discuss how they showed respect to others and the natural world. Using knowledge

learnt during RE and Literacy lessons, the children were given the opportunity to ask and answer questions on some of the gods, especially Rama, Sita and Hanuman, whom they had portrayed in a small play recently.

The children were then privileged to watch a Hindu service. During the service the devotees sang and clapped hands. From the back I noticed some of our children happily joining in.

Something to talk about
We ended our time in the mandir with questions from the children such as:

Why are there domes on top of the shrine?
Answer: They are a physical sign of a temple.

How long does a priest train for?
Answer: About five years.

What clothes do you wear?
Answer: Normally jeans and casual clothes. I have worn this sari to show respect to you.

What festivals do you have?
Answer: Diwali and lots of other festivals, but we also like to celebrate Christmas and Easter.

Dance after dinner
After lunch the children had a workshop at a multifaith community centre on Indian dance. The silk scarves were enjoyed by all. The children tried traditional and Bollywood dance. They then got the chance to experiment and make up their own dance, using movement to represent the gods and their visit to the mandir.

Great respect and love was shown to the children and by the children throughout the entire day. The whole trip was an amazing experience, which both children and staff enjoyed.

Children's quotes from the day:
Brilliant, fantastic, nice to learn about another religion, absolutely amazing, flabbergasted by the shrine.

Beautiful, breath-taking, colourful, clean, very different. Opened my eyes to a different culture. The Dance was fun.

A teaching assistant said:
Privileged to witness a Hindu service and see similarities and differences between our cultures and religion.

The school chaplain responded that the trip:
opened my mind to a different culture and was intriguing. It was interesting to see a practising Hindu in their religious environment.

Another of our TAs evaluated it like this:
I felt that the trip was an immensely important experience for the children in terms of seeing another city, Bradford, which is very different from York and the environment and people of the temple. The children had already learnt about the Hindu religion and culture in class and this was a means of immersing themselves, for a short while, in

another tradition. Talking and sharing with members of the mandir temple brought another dimension to their understanding of the Hindu religion and the people who practise it as opposed to just talking about it and hearing second-hand experiences.

Aims fulfilled: worth the demands!
My aims were to further children's learning by experiencing first-hand what it is like to be in a different place of worship and how other cultures worship. You can't replicate that in the classroom. The big experience of the beauty and awe and wonder of the mandir and experiencing an actual service made children think

more and respect the Hindu religion in a fresh way.

Back at school, children did a Hindu play as part of their Literacy and now had a real experience to relate to. As the visit came at the end of the RE topic, the children reviewed their previous learning in the classroom and used their experience and photographic evidence to bring their learning together.

Editor's comment:
Everyone knows that children living in 'all white rural communities' need this kind of experience, but not every teacher arranges it. Could you copy Rachel this term?

Hindu mandir Bradford



Nothing quite matches the big experience of visiting a mandir for opening minds to Hinduism



Murtis of Hanuman, Lakshman, Rama and Sita focus worship and devotion



Journey start:
Forest of Galtres



Journey destination:
Bradford Hindu mandir



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