

Diwali:

MERL Collection Resource



About this Resource

This resource is designed to be used with Reading Museum's Loan Box Activities Resource:

<https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/loan-box-activities-resource>

It can also be used with Reading Museum's Literacy Resource:

<https://www.readingmuseum.org.uk/teachers-creative-writing-resource>

The objects below are some of the objects you can explore in the MERL's online database:

<http://www.reading.ac.uk/Adlib/search/simple>

The database contains information about the history of the objects in our boxes and how they were used.

You can also explore the MERL learning resources here: <https://merl.reading.ac.uk/learn/schools-and-colleges/school-resources/>

Seasonal Celebrations in Rural England

There are many local seasonal traditions from all around England, linked to harvest and shorter days. Many celebrations were to ensure a good crop in the new year. Celebrations like Harvest, Bonfire night and Christmas celebrate good food, seasonal changes and looking forward to the new year.

You can learn more about some of these traditions from around the UK in the MERL's online exhibition, Folks and Customs: <https://merl.reading.ac.uk/explore/online-exhibitions/folk-and-customs/>

Diwali is similar to these seasonal celebrations and traditions in that it welcomes in the new year, encouraging visits from the Goddess Lakshmi to bring good luck.

During in Diwali people will buy new clothes, decorate their houses with Rangoli and light Diya Lamps. Diwali is also known for the excellent feasts. Food is considered to be a gift from the Gods and a portion will be set aside for the shrine to Lakshmi before any is eaten.

Candlestick

This is a wooden wych elm candle holder, consisting of a wooden bowl with a candle socket in the centre and a handle at the side. It has been made partly by cleaving and partly by turning on a machine called a lathe.

The wood is secured and then turned. As it is turned a blade is pushed against the wood lightly to trim off wood until it is the shape and size you want.

Light is very important in Diwali and in many UK celebrations as the days get darker. In the UK people used candle sticks to hold lit candles as they moved around a house or to decorate their houses and trees at Christmas.



Crusie

A crusie is a simple form of oil lamp that was used in the western coastal regions of the British Isles, including Cornwall, Wales, Ireland, Scotland and the Western Islands. This crusie originated in Scotland.

It is made of wrought iron and was designed for a single wick. It consists of two lipped bowls: the top one, containing the oil, would be suspended from a notched rack so that it can be tipped forward when the oil supply is low, and the bottom bowl would hold the oil which trickled over the top lip. It has a hook from which it could be hung.

It works in a similar way to the Diya lamps, that are lit during Diwali, using oil and fats rather than candles which were expensive in the past.



Strickle Horn

This is a strickle and horn. The strickle was a Welsh tool for sharpening scythe and sickle blades, especially in areas where there was no sandstone to make whetstones.

It is made of a piece of wood, shaped like a small bat, and would be smeared with pig fat, onto which pepper sand would be smeared and mixed. The greasing fat was kept in the horn.

This would be used, especially, during harvest as the Summer is drawing to a close and the days get darker in Autumn.

Harvest celebrations can be linked to celebrations like Diwali, that give thanks for the food that has been grown each year and asks for good luck in the new year.



Bird Scarer

Bird clappers were used for protecting crops from birds, making a noise when waved which scared them away. The donor said that boys were employed for 'crow-starving' when corn was planted and when it was 'in the ear' (when it was ripe, it would be described as an ear of corn).

These would be used to protect the crops in the field when they were ripening but not quite ready to harvest.



Plough Model

This is the model of a single furrow plough. The real plough would be used to turn the soil ready for planting.

Ploughing is the initial stage of preparing a fine tilth to grow the next season's crop.

Plough Monday - the first Monday after the twelfth day of Christmas - was traditionally the start of a new ploughing season and was celebrated by ploughmen in fancy dress hauling a plough through the village collecting money for the festivities.

In the UK, the plough would have been connected with seasonal celebrations, much like Diwali, for the coming new year and preparing for a good crop.



Bed Warmer

This is a flat cylindrical copper bedwarmer, with small iron handle, which can be filled with hot water and used to warm up a bed.

This bedwarmer was filled with hot water. It was placed between the sheets to warm up a bed. The metal would get very hot, so it should be moved around to stop the sheets getting burnt.

Bedwarmers are found in countries that have cold winters. Historically houses heated by open fires left unheated bedrooms cold, so warming a bed made it nicer to climb into.

This is another one of our objects that would have been used seasonally! As the nights get darker and the days get colder, we use water bottles to warm up the bed!



Object Investigation Activity

Starter activity:

Use the questions below to investigate these unfamiliar objects in our collection.

- Does it look familiar?
- What does it look similar to?
- Who do you think might use this?
- What is it made from?

Activity 1:

Choose an object and Explore our collection online and the internet to answer the questions below.

- What is this object made from?
- Who used this object?
- What was this object used for?
- Does it have moving parts?
- Does it seem heavy?
- Do you think it would have been difficult to use? Why?
- When was it used?
- Is the object old or new?

Object Investigation Activity

Activity 2:

Once you have investigated your object, use the information you gathered to write a description for your object for a leaflet about South Asia and Diwali.

Use the Questions below to help you write a description for someone who might have never seen or heard of your object before!

- What is it?
- What is it made from?
- What colour is it?
- Is this kind of object always made from the same materials?
- Who uses it?
- How do they use it?

Activity 3:

Make a detailed drawing of your object to put in your leaflet.

- Make a large drawing to show the whole object
- Zoom in on details in your object that people might miss in the bigger picture
- Use different materials to make your drawings, different materials and different colours can show your object in a different light!