




Strand | Europe and the wider world

Strand Unit: People and places	
Stage	Stages 4 (Fifth and sixth classes)
Subject	History/Geography – Religions, Beliefs and Worldviews
Learning Outcome	<i>Through playful and engaging learning experiences, children should be able to investigate and reflect on the ethnic and religious traditions and practices of different groups of people.</i>
Relevant Key Competencies	AL – Being an active learner AC – Being an active citizen W – Being well
Topic: Festivals of light around the world	The topic of Festivals of Light explores how communities around the world use light to celebrate a range of themes such as hope, joy, renewal and belonging, symbolising values such as positivity, kindness and remembrance, the victory of good over evil, spiritual enlightenment, and the human desire for warmth, community, identity and connection between people and places. Through stories, inquiry and creative engagement, children investigate the historical, geographical and RBW contexts of festivals such as Diwali (<i>Hindu</i>), Hanukkah (<i>Jewish</i>), St. Lucia Day (<i>Scandinavian/Christian</i>) and the Lantern Festival (<i>Chinese</i>). Children learn that some festivals are religious, some are cultural and many are shaped by seasonal, solar or lunar cycles. Learning about this topic supports intercultural understanding and appreciation of shared human experiences.

Why is learning about this topic important?	What will this look like in the classroom?
<p>Exploring the topic of <i>Festivals of Light</i> invites children to make meaningful connections between various social, environmental and RBW dimensions of life. It helps them see how light can symbolise hope, joy and belonging across communities and traditions.</p> <p>Through playful, inquiry-based experiences, children learn to respect diversity of religions, beliefs and worldviews, and to reflect on the ways people use light to express identity and celebration.</p> <p>Learning about <i>Festivals of light</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> inspires curiosity about global traditions and their shared meanings supports appreciation of diversity of religions, beliefs and worldviews through creative exploration connects ideas from other curriculum areas (e.g., <i>STEM, Arts Education and Language</i>) to deepen understanding and nurture empathy and inclusion through recognising shared human values (e.g., <i>kindness, respect, togetherness</i>) 	<p>Children have opportunities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> research global festivals of light and present findings creatively (e.g., <i>digital posters, drama and/or art</i>) use maps to locate each festival's origins, meanings that may be attributed to them in different countries and possible migration routes that brought the traditions to Ireland invite community members or families to share artefacts, stories or demonstrations of celebration



A menu of content ideas for religious and/or belief systems for children to engage with in working towards the Learning Outcome:

- the origins of an associated religion, belief or worldview
- key beliefs and teachings
- guiding principles
- historically important texts/writings
- sites of pilgrimage
- key beliefs and teachings
- rites of passage
- main countries of worship/importance
- key figures and leaders
- major festivals and celebrations.

Ideas for children working as historians

Concept	Ideas
Time and chronology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sequence and discuss the origins and development of different festivals of lights (e.g., <i>Diwali, Hanukkah, St. Lucia Day and the Chinese Lantern Festival, etc.</i>) to understand that traditions evolve at different times and in different contexts • Create a 'Calendar of Light' showing when and where these festivals occur throughout the year
Change and Continuity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare historical and contemporary practices of the same festival (e.g., <i>traditional oil lamps vs. electric lights in Diwali or modern menorahs in Hanukkah</i>) to identify what has changed and what has stayed the same (e.g., <i>using 'then and now' photos</i>) • Investigate how values such as sustainability and inclusivity have reshaped aspects of celebration (e.g., <i>eco-friendly lanterns, community and family-based celebrations</i>)
Sense of place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and map where key light festivals originated and where they are celebrated today (e.g., <i>Diwali in India, lantern festivals in China, Hannukah in Israel, etc.</i>) • Explore how the local environment influences how festivals are celebrated (e.g., <i>outdoor lantern parades in warm Asian climates, indoor candle-lit services in cold European winters, floating lanterns in riverside Japanese communities, etc.</i>)
Sense of space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use maps and digital tools (e.g., <i>Google Earth, GIS story maps, etc.</i>) to explore how light festivals have travelled globally and reached other countries (e.g., <i>mapping Diwali's arrival through South Asian migration or tracing Chinese New Year lantern traditions brought by East Asian communities</i>) • Investigate how light festivals create symbolic and physical connections between people and places (e.g., <i>candles used across cultures for remembrance, town-centre light displays bringing communities together</i>)
Multi-perspectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse stories and/or images from people of different religions, beliefs and worldviews to understand multiple interpretations of what "light" represents (e.g., <i>spiritual enlightenment, victory of good over evil, renewal, etc.</i>) • Compare how the same symbol (e.g., <i>candles, lanterns or fire</i>) carries different meanings across festivals and communities
Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify some of the common human motivations behind festivals of light (e.g., <i>the desire for light, warmth and community to nurture understanding of shared human experience</i>) • participate in reflective exercises (e.g., <i>journals, art, drama, etc.</i>) imagining what it might be like to take part in different celebrations

Skill	Ideas
Using evidence and sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine and compare a range of sources such as photographs, artefacts (e.g., <i>menorahs, diyas, lanterns, etc.</i>), oral histories and short video interviews to gather evidence about how different communities in Ireland, Europe and the world celebrate festivals of light • Interpret similarities and differences across visual and written sources to identify how festival practices change across place and time (e.g., <i>comparing how lantern festivals are shown in rural China and urban European cities today</i>)
Questioning / investigating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support/scaffold children in formulating open-ended historical and geographical questions (e.g., <i>'How did this festival begin?'</i>, <i>'What does light symbolise for this community?'</i>, <i>'How has migration changed how this is celebrated today?'</i>, <i>'How is this festival marked in Ireland?'</i>, <i>'What else would I like to find out about this festival?'</i>, <i>'Can I find any similarities with a festival that I celebrate?'</i>) • Plan and carry out small-scale inquiries, for example, investigating how light is used in celebrations in their local area through interviews, surveys or digital research
Historical thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate cause and effect in the evolution of festivals of light, for example, how historical events like exile, migration, or colonisation have influenced the continuation or transformation of certain practices • Create timelines showing when different festivals of light emerged, noting key turning points that affected their form or spread (e.g., <i>the global popularity of Diwali</i>)
Visual interpretation and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communicate findings about where and how light festivals are celebrated around the world (e.g., <i>through maps, infographics, collages, digital imagery, etc.</i>) • Evaluate how visuals convey messages about religions, beliefs and worldviews, encouraging critical thinking (e.g., <i>looking at festival imagery in advertisements or tourism campaigns</i>)

Ideas for children’s learning through the elements:

Inquiring	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore origins and meanings behind some festivals of light guided by teacher-led (or teacher-guided) inquiry questions such as “<i>Why do so many cultures use light in celebration?</i>”; “<i>How does light connect to belief or identity?</i>”; “<i>Is / how is this festival marked in Ireland?</i>”; “<i>What else would I like to find out about this festival?</i>”• Investigate photographs and artefacts to uncover how and why light festivals began and how they are celebrated today• Reflect on aspects of festivals across the world, identifying similarities and differences
Communicating	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share their ideas and new learning through multimedia (e.g., <i>digital slideshows, podcasts, classroom exhibitions, etc.</i>) finding similarities and differences across global festival of lights• Engage in discussions about their interpretations of symbols and stories associated with some festivals of light• Work collaboratively to produce a class ‘<i>Map of Light</i>’ showing how festivals are celebrated around the world
Understanding and connecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make connections between festivals studied and Ireland’s own seasonal or religious celebrations, identifying shared themes such as hope, renewal and community• Understand how geography and history influence how and when people celebrate (e.g., <i>winter light festivals in darker climates in contrast to those linked to harvest</i>)• Reflect on how festivals of lights’ celebrations build belonging and identity, both locally and globally

Ideas for teaching:

Pedagogical approach	Ideas
Story	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Share short stories or animated videos of children in different countries celebrating festivals of light (e.g., <i>Diwali in parts of the Balkans, Hanukkah in Croatia, Saint Lucia Day in Slovenia, etc.</i>)• Share personal accounts of local families preparing for festivals of light and then hold a 'Story Circle' where children share their reflections
Explicit teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Present short multimedia lessons highlighting key festivals of light (e.g., <i>Diwali, Hanukkah, Saint Lucia Day, etc.</i>), providing background information on religions, beliefs and worldviews• Use a comparative chart to teach children about similarities and differences between the festivals (e.g., <i>types of lights used, foods, rituals, time of year, etc.</i>)
Play/Playful pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Design a role-play activity where children set up a '<i>Festivals of Light Fair</i>' representing different countries, with stalls showing foods usually associated with the festival, decorations, lamps or candles• Create a collaborative '<i>Festivals of Light Map</i>' with puzzle pieces or interactive posters representing each country's festival

Ideas for integration:

Subject	Learning Outcome	Ideas
STEM Education	Strand: <i>Energy and forces</i> Learning Outcome: Through appropriately playful and engaging learning experiences children should be able to research how electricity works and conduct open-ended scientific inquiries using electric circuits. Identify and classify materials as electric conductors or insulator	Children investigate how electricity creates light by designing and building a simple electric lantern inspired by world festivals of light (e.g. <i>Diwali diyas, Hanukkah menorahs, Chinese lanterns, etc.</i>).
SPHE	Strand: <i>Emotional and relational education</i> Learning Outcome: Through appropriately playful and engaging learning experiences children should be able to apply a range of strategies to nurture their emotional wellbeing and cope with day-to-day stresses of life and employ empathetic skills in response to peers experiencing emotional challenges, when appropriate	Children explore the idea of light as a metaphor for positivity, hope and kindness and work collaboratively in small groups to create a festival display, encouraging teamwork, empathy and appreciation of diverse religions, beliefs and worldviews.
Art	Strand: <i>Exploring and creating</i> Learning Outcome: Through appropriately playful and engaging learning experiences children should be able to plan, design, reimagine, create and refine art using design principles (including light, contrast, scale and symmetry) and line, shape, form, colour, tone, texture, space, pattern and rhythm.	Children will design and create an 'Illuminated Window Panel' display inspired by global festivals of light (e.g. <i>Diwali, Hanukkah, Christmas, Chinese Lantern Festival, St. Brigid's Day, etc.</i>), exploring how light interacts with materials and experimenting with colour and contrast.

Ideas for assessment:

Assessment method	Ideas
Conferencing	Engage in discussion with children where they explain their understanding of a festival, belief, or ritual. Children's empathy, understanding of diversity and ability to make connections between beliefs can be assessed through questions such as: "Why is light important in this festival?" or "How do people show respect in this ceremony?"
Teacher observation	Observe children as they participate in activities such as storytelling, drama, or role-play related to religious or cultural practices, focusing on expression and communication of ideas about beliefs and values, respectful interaction with peers, demonstration of cultural awareness and sensitivity, and ability to make links between rituals, symbols and meaning.
Project-based learning	Assess children's engagement and collaboration when creating projects related to religions or festivals (e.g., <i>designing a model of a sacred space, preparing a class display of global festivals, or making symbolic artefacts, etc.</i>), evaluating their understanding of the significance of symbols, rituals, or practices; the ability to work respectfully with peers from diverse backgrounds; and reflection on what the festival or belief reveals about human values and culture.

Progression

Progression in Social and Environmental Education involves the gradual development and extension of key concepts and the skills of working as a historian and geographer, enabling children to question, investigate and interpret the world around them - past and present - with increasing depth and confidence. Please note that more detailed, specific guidance on progression within Social and Environmental Education will follow in due course.

For example, in the case of the concept of 'Empathy', children's learning across the four stages could be described as follows:

'Empathy' involves fostering children's understanding and respect for different perspectives, enabling meaningful contributions in a diverse society.



The child:

begins to show understanding and respect when considering how people may live, work and celebrate differently

begins to show curiosity and appreciation for how people live, work, and celebrate in other places, cultures and religions

demonstrates an understanding for how celebrating cultural and religious events and traditions can foster a sense of pride and belonging

analyses how people in the past made sense of their world, how their locations, cultures and traditions shaped society, and how social and environmental contexts motivated their decisions

For example, in the case of the skill of 'Questioning', children's learning across the four stages could be described as follows:

"Questioning" involves the ability to seek information, clarify ideas and explore deeper understanding through inquiry



The child:

considers simple 'why' and 'how' questions about (people, places and events) in their locality, noticing similarities and differences

asks open and closed questions to clarify thoughts about social and environmental topics and issues

asks meaningful and thoughtful questions to better understand people and places in the world around them

frames questions that guide investigation and promotes deeper thinking

Ideas for resources

- Books and Stories based on the themes of light and darkness; diverse celebrations; festivals
- Websites with articles and photographs (e.g., *about festivals across the world*)
- Age-appropriate videos about celebrations in Ireland and around the world
- Traditional songs and melodies (e.g., *Diwali songs and Hanukkah melodies etc.*)
- Artefacts (such as lamps and lanterns)
- Practical and Classroom Materials for experiments (e.g., *circuit kits including bulbs, batteries and wires for STEM investigations on light and electricity; coloured tissue paper, cellophane and black card for illuminated art projects*)

Glossary

Belief System

A set of ideas and values that help people understand life, the world, and their place in it. This can be religious or non-religious.

Diwali (Hindu Festival of Light)

A major Hindu festival celebrated in India and around the world. It marks the victory of good over evil and light over darkness. Homes are decorated with small oil lamps called diyas and colourful designs.

Diya

A small clay oil lamp used during Diwali to represent light, goodness and protection.

Hanukkah (Jewish Festival of Light)

An eight-day Jewish festival remembering the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem. A special candle holder called a menorah is lit each night to symbolise faith and hope.

Lantern Festival (China)

A traditional Chinese festival marking the end of the Lunar New Year celebrations. People light and release lanterns to symbolise good luck, family reunion, and new beginnings.

Menorah

A nine-branched candle holder used during Hanukkah. One candle is lit each night to remember the miracle of light.

Ritual

A special action or set of actions that are repeated as part of a celebration, belief, or tradition.

Saint Lucia Day (Scandinavia)

Celebrated on December 13th in countries such as Sweden and Norway. It honours St. Lucia and symbolises bringing light during the darkest time of the year. Children often wear white clothing and carry candles in parades.

Festivals of Light at a glance

Festival	Belief system/ worldview	Religious/secular/ seasonal	Season/time of year	Countries/regions commonly linked	Meaning of light
Diwali	Hinduism	Religious	Autumn (October – November)	India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, global Indian diaspora incl. Ireland & Balkans	Light over darkness, good over evil, hope, renewal
Hanukah	Judaism	Religious	Winter (November – December)	Israel, Europe, USA, Jewish communities worldwide (incl. Ireland, Croatia)	Miracle of light, faith, perseverance
Saint Lucia Day	Christianity (Scandinavian tradition)	Religious and seasonal	Winter (13th December)	Sweden, Norway, Finland, parts of Europe including Slovenia	Bringing light during the darkest time of the year
Chinese Lantern Festival	Chinese cultural tradition (Taoist & Buddhist influences)	Seasonal/cultural	Late winter (January – February, Lunar calendar)	China, East & Southeast Asia, Chinese diaspora worldwide	New beginnings, family reunion, good fortune
Orthodox Christmas	Eastern Orthodox Christianity	Religious	Winter (Jan 6–7)	Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Serbia, Eastern Europe	Birth of Christ as the "Light of the World"
Chaharshanbe Suri	Persian cultural tradition (pre-Islamic, Zoroastrian roots)	Secular & Seasonal	Late winter (before Persian New Year in March)	Iran; Persian & Kurdish communities worldwide	Fire as cleansing, renewal, letting go of the old year
St. Brigid's Day	Irish Christian & Pre-Christian Celtic tradition	Religious & Seasonal	Early spring (1st February)	Ireland	Returning light, growth, hope after winter