

Embracing Cultural Diversity: India

A Cross-Curricular Lesson Plan

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The Government

India is a republic with 28 states. It has three branches of government: the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the judicial branch.



The head of state is the President of India. An electoral college that consists of elected members of both houses of Parliament and the legislatures of the states elects the President for a five-year term. After the elections, the Parliamentary members of the majority party choose the Prime Minister, who has more executive power than the President.

India's legislature is a Parliament that consists of the upper house, called the Council of States, and the lower house, called the House of People. The Council of States has 245 members who are elected for six-year terms by the Indian states. 543 of the House of People's 545 members are elected for five-year terms to represent their individual districts; the other two are nominated by the President.

The President, Vice President, and the Council of Ministers compose the executive branch. The Prime Minister heads the Council of Ministers.

India's judiciary branch consists of a Supreme Court, 21 High Courts, and many trial courts. Like the U.S. Supreme Court, the Supreme Court of India is the ultimate court that interprets the Constitution.

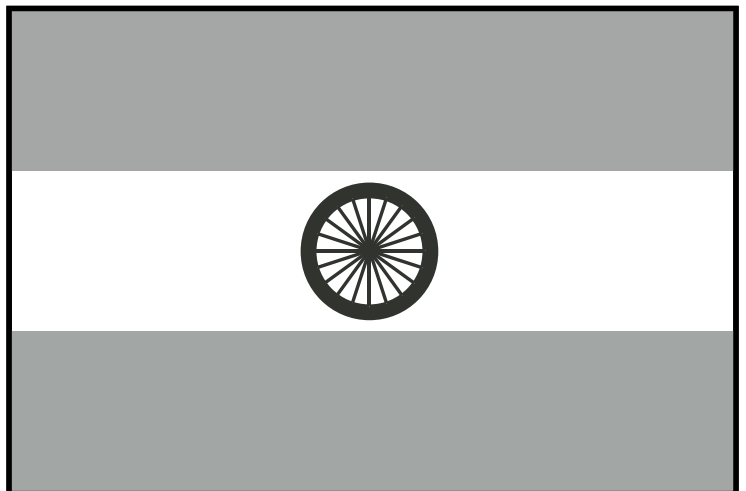
The Land

India is a land of extreme contrasts. In the north and northeast are the Himalayan Mountains, the world's tallest mountain range. The Indo-Gangetic Plain (a large, fertile area) occupies most of northern and eastern India. The region is named after the Indus and the Ganges, the two main rivers there. The Deccan Plateau occupies most of southern India. In the west is the Thar Desert, also called the Great Indian Desert.

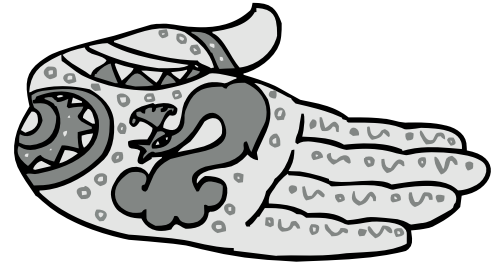
Because the land is so diverse—ranging from mountains to deserts, rainforests, and plateaus—the climate ranges from very cold to very hot and tropical. The four seasons include winter (January and February), summer (March to May), a monsoon (rainy) season from June to September, and a post-monsoon season from October to December. Droughts are common, as are floods from the monsoons.

The Flag

The National Flag of India was adopted in 1947 and stands for freedom. It has three bars of color: saffron (orange) on the top for courage and sacrifice, white in the middle for purity and truth, and dark green at the bottom for faith and fertility. In the center of the flag, on the white band, is a spinning Chakra (*chakra* (SHAH-Krah) means *wheel* in Sanskrit). This ancient Buddhist symbol is meant to represent peaceful, positive change.



Mehndi—henna painting that is a temporary form of tattooing—is an enormously popular body art. Henna is a red-orange dye that comes from the henna plant. Women’s and children’s hands and feet are decorated with elaborate designs for festivals and celebrations. If left on overnight, the designs can last up to one month.



Indian literature is thought to be some of the world’s earliest. Much of it was handed down orally from generation to generation and written down centuries later. Some of India’s most famous texts that still provide inspiration today are the Vedas. These are the oldest sacred writings of Hinduism that were written in ancient Sanskrit and are still honored throughout the world.

With so many languages in India, many regions produced famous writers and equally famous literature. But Rabindranath Tagore is the one writer for which all of India is known. He won India’s first Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. However, he was not only a writer! He was a poet, playwright, composer, and visual artist, and is still respected today for his contributions to the art world. He is called the father of modern art in India.

Although Indian kids still read the classics, they’re reading popular literature, too. You’re likely to find comic books, graphic novels, magazines, and kids’ books translated from other languages on their bookshelves.

Music & Dance



Indian music probably began with chanting sacred hymns in Sanskrit. By the 16th century, songs were being composed in Hindi and other languages. Classical instruments included drums, stringed instruments, and wind instruments. By the mid-1700s, violins were commonly used—an instrument Indians still love today. Traditionally, classical Indian music would have been performed in temples and in the homes of the wealthy. Today, people flock to concert halls to hear it.

The British rock group The Beatles brought awareness of Indian music to the world in the 1960s. Ravi Shankar, a famous Indian musician, played the sitar on one of the Beatles’ albums. (The sitar is a long-necked Indian stringed instrument with a unique sound.) Shankar has worked with many Western musicians since then and was nominated for an Oscar for co-writing the musical score for the film, *Gandhi*. Indians in the 21st century are likely to be listening to filmi (songs from films), folk music, classical music, rock, jazz, or fusion music that blends the Indian and Western styles.

There are two main types of Indian dance: classical dance and folk dance. Classical dances tell stories with spiritual themes. Centuries ago, classical Indian dancers performed in the temples. Classical dances have been handed down through the centuries. Every one of them has a different meaning. Those who make a career of classical dancing begin training as young as age six! Classical dance festivals are held throughout India every year.

Folk dances originated in the Indian rural areas. Each area of India has its own special folk dances. Many are performed by ordinary people who gather for special occasions, like the yearly harvest or planting. Some of the dances are performed by women, some by kids, and some by anyone who wants to participate.

