




Strand | Europe and the wider world

Strand Unit: Identity and heritage	
Stage	Stages 4 (Fifth and sixth classes)
Subject	History/Geography – Religions, Beliefs and Worldviews
Learning Outcome	Through playful and engaging learning experiences, children should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the attitudes, beliefs and practices of different groups of people and communities in the past, and their impact on the world today.
Relevant Key Competencies	AL - Being an active learner AC - Being an active citizen CL - Being a communicator and using language
Topic: <i>The history of Buddhism and its continuing influence on modern life</i>	Buddhism is a spiritual tradition and way of life that began in India about 2,500 years ago. It is based on the teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, who is known as the Buddha, meaning 'the Enlightened One'. The ideas for learning experiences below introduce children to key aspects of Buddhism, including its historical development, core beliefs and varied cultural practices as lived by Buddhists around the world today.

Why is learning about this topic important?	What will this look like in the classroom?
<p>Learning about religions, beliefs and worldviews (RBW)—such as Buddhism—helps children appreciate the diversity of human experience. By exploring Buddhist beliefs, values and practices past and present, they see RBWs as a lived reality that shapes people’s identities, cultures and daily lives in Ireland, Europe and around the world.</p> <p>Through dialogue, engagement with real stories, artefacts, places of significance and cultural practices in Buddhism, children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop an awareness and understanding of the history of Buddhism and its associated beliefs and practices • foster empathy and multi-perspectivity, encouraging children to see the world through the eyes of others and to reflect on their own values and assumptions • explore how Buddhist thought influences wellbeing, environmental awareness and peace movements • enrich cultural awareness and understanding necessary to participate actively in a diverse, democratic society 	<p>Children have opportunities to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • investigate the life of Siddhartha Gautama and trace the origins of Buddhism • participate in class discussions where they reflect on Buddhist values—such as compassion, mindfulness, and interdependence—and consider how these values might be practiced differently across Buddhist communities • use historical sources alongside contemporary voices from Buddhist communities to explore how these teachings are interpreted today • learn about key Buddhist practices such as meditation and mindfulness, including how and why they are used by different communities today • explore how different Buddhist communities in Ireland, Europe and around the world live out their beliefs today by engaging with videos, interviews, and first-person accounts from practitioners of various traditions (e.g., <i>Theravāda, Tibetan, etc.</i>) • explore how Buddhist beliefs and/or values have shaped art, daily life and social action—such as environmental movements or peacebuilding—by engaging with case studies and narratives from individuals in diverse contexts (e.g., <i>Zen Gardens in Kyoto, Thai Monks Environmentalism, etc</i>)



A menu of content ideas for children to engage with in working towards the Learning Outcome:

- *the origins of the 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 and as geographers:

Concepts	Idea
Time and chronology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sequence key events from Siddhartha Gautama's life, e.g., <i>birth, asceticism, enlightenment, teaching, etc.</i> • Understand that Buddhism originated at a specific time in a specific place and evolved over time
Cause and effect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse the role of Emperor Ashoka in spreading Buddhism • Investigate how ancient Buddhist teachings continue to influence modern life (e.g., <i>meditation, mindfulness, peaceful protest, ethical living, etc.</i>)
Change and continuity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore how Buddhist beliefs and practices have evolved over time (e.g., <i>compare how teachings like the Five Precepts have influenced societies over time</i>) • Compare early Buddhist monks (e.g., <i>living simply, wearing robes, depending on alms</i>) with modern-day Buddhist monks/practitioners (who might live in temples or urban areas and may be laypeople)
Sense of place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appreciate how geography and culture shape Buddhist identity and practice (e.g., <i>compare Tibetan traditions like prayer flags and mandalas with Thai Buddhism's emphasis on monks and temples</i>) • Recognise how places shape and are shaped by religion (e.g., <i>explore how Lumbini became a sacred pilgrimage site, influencing local culture and economy</i>)
Sense of space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore how the natural and built environments contribute to Buddhist attitudes, beliefs and practices (e.g., <i>the Buddhist belief that all life is interconnected and exploring how this relates to caring for the environment and avoiding exploitation of resources</i>) • Examine how Buddhist communities advocate for climate action, conservation and ethical consumption (e.g., <i>Dalai Lama and environmental protection, Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings on ecology, etc.</i>)
Multi-perspectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with multiple perspectives on the teachings of Buddhism and how individuals live their lives through Buddhism (e.g. <i>explore short video interviews, podcasts or written accounts of Buddhist practitioners from different traditions identifying similarities and differences in how each person understands and applies the teachings</i>) • Research and compare rituals and customs from different places and explore how cultural contexts shape how festivals are observed and celebrated (e.g., <i>consider how Vesak - Buddha Day - is celebrated in different Buddhist communities such as in Thailand, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and among diaspora communities in Ireland using photos, short videos, or articles</i>)
Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore core Buddhist values such as the 'eight-fold path' which focus on treating others with kindness and fairness, prompting children to consider how their actions affect others • Foster empathy through narratives about notable Buddhist practitioners and their acts of compassion and peacebuilding (e.g., <i>the life story of Thich Nhat Hanh</i>)

Skill	Ideas
Using evidence and sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine images, artefacts, art and sacred spaces from various Buddhist traditions and regions (e.g., <i>Buddha statues, mandalas, temples, etc.</i>) • Observe, ask questions and make inferences from physical or visual sources (such as <i>Buddhist stories, the meaning of the eight-fold pathway wheel, visual imagery of key Buddhist figures</i>)
Questioning/ Investigating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions to better understand how Buddhist beliefs and practices impact people in the world, e.g., “<i>How are Buddhist values/beliefs expressed today?</i>”, “<i>What can I learn from Buddhist practices?</i>” • Ask a range of questions to explore the similarities and differences of Buddhist traditions (e.g., “<i>How are these traditions similar or different?</i>”, “<i>Why did they evolve this way?</i>”)
Interpreting and analysing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyse how geographical and historical contexts influenced the development of Buddhist traditions through identifying key details from sources of information (e.g., <i>Sacred texts, artefacts, mandalas, etc.</i>) • Interpret key stories and how they guide modern Buddhist practices (e.g., <i>the life of the Buddha and teachings such as the ‘Four Noble Truths’ and the ‘Eight-fold Path’</i>)
Historical thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine how Buddhism spread from India to other places (e.g. <i>China, Sri Lanka, Japan</i>) over time (e.g., <i>through trade routes like the Silk Road or via missionaries</i>) • Explore and discuss the spread of Buddhism historically and how it shaped different cultures
Chronological thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a timeline of key events in the Buddha’s life within a wider historical timeline • Identify aspects of Buddhism that have remained the same and aspects that have changed over time
Mapping/Graphicacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map key locations in the Buddha’s life (e.g., <i>Lumbini (birthplace), Bodh Gaya (enlightenment), Sarnath (first teaching), Kushinagar (death)</i> on modern maps of India and Nepal • Trace the historical spread of Buddhism across the Asia region on a map (e.g., <i>from India to Sri Lanka, China, Korea, Japan, Tibet and Southeast Asia</i>)

Ideas for children’s learning through the elements:

Inquiring	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Investigate key events in the life of ‘The Buddha’, using a range of sources such as books, videos and/or interviews with Buddhists to gather evidence• Examine Buddhist symbols (e.g., <i>the lotus flower, the eight-fold wheel, etc.</i>) asking questions such as ‘<i>What do these symbols represent? Why are they important in Buddhist worship and daily life?</i>’• Compile a class question board or “<i>Wonder Wall</i>” where they display questions they have about Buddhism, its beliefs, or its practices; revisit and discuss these questions as learning progresses
Communicating	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• After encountering Buddhist stories, create written reflections expressing what they learned, found surprising, or would like to know more about.• Interview a practising Buddhist and engage in a discussion reflecting on what they have heard• Collaborate on a class book or digital slideshow capturing key learnings about Buddhism (e.g., <i>a quote that resonated, a personal reflection, or a response to a practice like mindfulness</i>) rather than solely factual accounts
Understanding and connecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explore the five precepts of Buddhism, comparing them with their own classroom rules, making meaningful connections between Buddhist teachings and their own lives• Engage in reflective conversations in pairs or small groups about Buddhist values such as compassion, mindfulness, and non-violence, comparing how these values are expressed within Buddhism and in the children’s own lives or communities• Explore how Buddhism is practiced today in Ireland and in different countries around the world and create a display demonstrating cultural expressions of Buddhism (e.g., <i>food, art, temples</i>)

Ideas for teaching:

Pedagogical approach	Ideas
Dialogic pedagogy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitate 'Circle Time' discussions where children reflect on 'big questions' from a Buddhist perspective (e.g., 'What does it mean to live a good life?') and compare and/or contrast this with their own experiences or worldviews• Provide opportunities for children to explore and discuss reasons behind moral guidelines (e.g., <i>an example of the Five Precepts of Buddhism</i>) and how they influence behaviour
Inquiry	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gather a variety of visual, written and other physical sources or pieces of evidence related to Buddhism which children can engage with to reflect on how symbols (e.g., <i>Dharma wheel, lotus flower, Buddha statue</i>) help express beliefs• Provide child-friendly excerpts of Emperor Ashoka's inscriptions detailing Buddhist values which children can analyse, identifying ways in which historical sources can teach us about beliefs and leadership
Story	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tell the story of Siddhartha Gautama's encounter with the Four Sights (<i>old age, sickness, death and a holy man</i>) that led him to leave his life of luxury in search of a deeper meaning and ask children to create a story board, comic strip or short role-play showing each sight and how it affected Siddhartha• Read child-friendly version of Jataka tale of 'The Monkey King' and ask children to retell the story in creative ways, using their preferred method(s) of communication to explore multiple viewpoints

Ideas for integration:

Subject	Learning Outcome	Ideas
English	<p>Strand: <i>Oral Language</i></p> <p>Describe, predict, reflect upon and evaluate actions, events, processes, feelings and experiences relating to a wide range of real and imaginary contexts</p>	<p>Children may discuss a question inspired by Buddhist teachings, such as “<i>Is it possible to be happy with very little?</i>” or “<i>Why do Buddhists practise mindfulness?</i>”.</p> <p>Children can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • share personal perspectives and compare them with ideas drawn from Buddhist stories or values (e.g., <i>compassion</i>) • practice respectful turn-taking and responding constructively to differing views
Art	<p>Strand: <i>Responding and connecting</i></p> <p>Connect arts-making to their lives and to traditions from local, national and international communities and cultures with sensitivity to and understanding of the context</p>	<p>After viewing examples of Buddhist mandalas and learning about their symbolic meaning (e.g. <i>balance, impermanence, meditation</i>), children may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • design and colour their own mandalas using radial symmetry • reflect on how creating the artwork made them feel and what it represents
SPHE	<p>Strand: <i>Emotional and relational education</i></p> <p>Explore the link between thoughts, feelings and behaviours</p>	<p>Children may be introduced to a simple breathing or walking meditation technique inspired by Buddhist practice and may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participate in a short daily or weekly mindfulness session • write or draw in a mindfulness journal, reflecting on how it influenced their mood or focus

Ideas for assessment:

Assessment method	Ideas
Observation	During class discussions, the teacher may observe how children link Buddhist history to modern practices such as mindfulness and meditation. In group activities, observation allows the teacher to assess participation, collaboration and the accuracy of information presented. While children complete individual tasks, the teacher can monitor engagement and critical thinking, noting how well they apply Buddhist ideas to contemporary life
Tasks	Children may work in pairs or groups to explore the symbolism of Buddhist artefacts or practices (e.g., <i>designing a simplified mandala or exploring the purpose of a meditation space</i>). After completing the task, they may engage in group discussion considering questions such as “ <i>Why did we choose these colours or symbols?</i> ” or “ <i>How do these practices help Buddhists express their beliefs?</i> ”
Self-assessment	Following learning about Buddhist values (e.g., <i>compassion, mindfulness, non-attachment</i>), children may reflect using their preferred method (e.g., <i>journal entry, voice note, drawing, or comic strip</i>) on questions such as “ <i>What did I learn about how Buddhists try to live?</i> ” and / or “ <i>Did this change how I think about my own actions?</i> ”

Glossary

Ascetism	Asceticism means giving up comfort, pleasure, or luxury on purpose – usually to become more spiritual, disciplined, or closer to God
Enlightenment	In Buddhism, enlightenment (bodhi) is the awakening to the nature of reality, bringing complete liberation from suffering and the cycle of rebirth
Mandala	Mandala is a circular design or pattern, used in both Buddhist and Hindi art, that shows wholeness, balance, and harmony

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. disciplined, or closer to God.



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/Investigating', children's learning across the four stages could be described as follows:

'Questioning/Investigating' involves the ability to seek information, clarify ideas and explore deeper understanding through inquiry and to systematically explore and gather information to understand a topic or solve a problem.



The child:

responds to questions, with prompts, to clarify their thinking

begins to make and describe connections as they engage in research

interrogates information and identifies similarities and differences

develops higher-order questions to explore issues from multiple angles, formulating comparative questions