

Key end points for this unit on Buddhism are:

- Buddhists do not worship a god.
- Buddhists work to free themselves from suffering.
- The Middle Way explains how Buddhists can lead a good life.
- Many Buddhists meditate, which means quiet thought.
- Wesak celebrates the Buddha's birthday, his enlightenment and death.

This unit builds on pupils' prior learning about Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism, enabling them to make meaningful connections with the beliefs and practices of Buddhism. Through comparing ideas like worship, teachings, key figures, and religious festivals, children can begin to recognise both similarities and differences across traditions. For example, while Buddhism does not involve belief in a god, pupils will recall how other religions understand divine beings, helping them explore how different faiths approach spirituality, morality, and human purpose.

Having studied concepts such as prayer, sacred texts, rituals, and community life in other religions, pupils are well-placed to understand Buddhist practices like meditation, chanting mantras, and the importance of temples and monks. These comparisons support religious literacy, encouraging pupils to view religious ideas thoughtfully and respectfully. The unit also offers opportunities for rich cross-religious dialogue—exploring how people seek peace, wisdom, and kindness in various faiths, while recognising the unique features of Buddhist belief.

This unit introduces pupils to the foundational beliefs and practices of Buddhism, beginning with the life of Siddhartha Gautama, the historical figure known as the Buddha. By exploring his journey from prince to spiritual teacher, pupils gain insight into the origins of Buddhist thought and the values that underpin the religion. This narrative approach helps children connect with the human story behind the belief system and sets the stage for understanding key teachings.

Building on this, the unit explores the Four Noble Truths, which form the core of Buddhist philosophy. These truths help pupils understand how Buddhists interpret suffering and its causes, and they provide a framework for thinking about personal responsibility and wellbeing. The Eightfold Path is then introduced as a practical guide to living wisely and compassionately. Pupils learn how these teachings influence Buddhist behaviour and decision-making, encouraging reflection on ethical choices and mindfulness.

The unit then focuses on Buddhist meditation, highlighting its role in developing calmness, insight, and spiritual growth. Pupils explore different types of meditation and how they support the journey toward enlightenment. This is followed by a study of the Buddhist Festival of Wesak or Buddha Day, which offer opportunities to understand how beliefs are expressed through celebration, community, and ritual. These lessons help pupils appreciate the diversity of Buddhist practice and its relevance in everyday life.

The unit concludes with an assessment that allows pupils to showcase their understanding of Buddhism through a study of its branches, such as Theravada and Mahayana. This final task encourages comparison, critical thinking, and synthesis of knowledge, while also recognising the global and varied nature of Buddhist belief. Overall, the unit is designed to be knowledge-rich, inclusive, and reflective, supporting pupils in developing both religious literacy and personal insight.

Lesson Sequencing:

In the first lesson, children are introduced to Buddhism by exploring the life of Siddhartha Gautama and his journey toward enlightenment. They learn how his experiences—especially the Four Sights—led him to seek answers about suffering and shaped his teachings. Pupils build on previous learning about religions from India (such as Hinduism and Sikhism), make meaningful links between beliefs and practices, and begin to understand how Buddhists meditate to find peace. Vocabulary, discussion, reflection, and visual prompts help children connect ideas and prepare for deeper learning across the unit.

In lesson 2, children explore one of the most important teachings in Buddhism—the Four Noble Truths, which explain why people suffer and how they can find peace. Building on last week’s learning about Siddhartha Gautama’s journey to enlightenment, pupils learn how the Buddha used his insights to help others understand life’s challenges. Through discussion, vocabulary work, and reflection, children begin to see how Buddhists understand and respond to suffering, including letting go of strong desires and finding balance through the Middle Way. The lesson invites personal reflection and comparison with other religions, helping pupils connect Buddhist ideas to wider themes of morality and wellbeing.

In lesson 3, pupils explore the Buddhist concept of the Middle Way—a balanced approach to life that helps reduce suffering and lead to enlightenment. Building on their understanding of Buddhist beliefs about suffering, pupils are introduced to ideas like karma, reincarnation, and the cycle of samsara, deepening their grasp of Buddhist thought. The lesson focuses on how actions, speech, and understanding can help people live kindly and wisely. Pupils compare these teachings with other religions they've studied and reflect on how words and choices affect themselves and others, encouraging empathy and moral awareness across faiths

In lesson 4, children deepen their understanding of how Buddhists try to break free from the cycle of samsara and reach Nirvana, a state of peace beyond suffering. Building on their previous learning about the Middle Way, pupils explore how meditation supports this journey by helping Buddhists develop calmness, focus, and connection. The lesson introduces key practices such as chanting mantras, making offerings, and visiting important temples and monasteries, allowing pupils to see how worship in Buddhism encourages both personal reflection and community support. Through discussion, reflection, and comparison with other faiths, pupils recognise the importance of quiet thought in Buddhist life and its role in achieving enlightenment.

In lesson 5, children learn about Wesak, the most important Buddhist festival, which celebrates the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and death. Through stories, images, and discussion, pupils discover how Buddhists around the world mark this joyful occasion—visiting temples, chanting, making offerings, and performing kind acts to honour the Buddha's teachings. The lesson reinforces the significance of the Three Jewels (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha) and encourages reflection on values like compassion and gratitude. Pupils are invited to compare Wesak traditions with light-themed festivals in other religions they've studied, deepening their understanding of how faith is expressed through ritual, celebration, and community.

During the final lesson, children will demonstrate their understanding of Buddhism by engaging in a variety of tasks, including a multiple-choice quiz, a knowledge organiser assessment, and an extended writing task. The activities are designed to assess their grasp of key concepts such as the Middle Way, meditation, and the significance of Wesak, while also encouraging reflection on Buddhist beliefs about suffering and the teachings of the Buddha.

The key concepts: karma, meditation, enlightenment, suffering

Key terms: Buddha, Samsara, dharma, meditation, nirvana, enlightenment, chant, mantra