

Appearance of Lord Rāma: Viṣṇu/Caitra śukla-pakṣa Navamī

GENERAL IDEAS:

1. Decorate the house or altar for Rāma's arrival. Make flags with colorful cloth, garlands, scatter fragrant water around the house...
2. Discuss how you would feel if someone very special returned to see you after being away for a very long time.
3. Write a song or poem in prayer to Lord Rāma. Then decorate it and hang it on the wall.
4. ॐ Make a batch of Simply Wonderful sweet mix using a touch of green food color. Offer to a Deity or picture of Lord Rāma.
5. ॐ Using colored play dough; make all different variety of foods to offer Sītā & Rāma. Then, chanting the Sītā Rāma bhajan, ring the bell & "offer" to a picture of Sītā & Rāma.
6. Find pictures of Lord Rāma and things in relationship to Lord Rāma (ie. Hanumān, a golden deer, a bow...). Stick them on the walls. Pretend to be a tour guide & give people a tour of Lord Rāma's story.
7. Discuss how Rāmacandra had a golden Deity of Sītā made when she went to the forest, & how Viṣṇupriyā worshipped a Deity of Lord Caitanya when He took sannyāsa. Compare & contrast spiritual separation with separation from people we love in the material world.
8. Make, out of paper, cardboard, clay, cloth, or any combination of these, various articles to offer to a Deity of Rāma, such as quiver, arrows, bow, helmet, belt, shoes, etc.
9. Hear about the rivers that Rāma bathed in, both in Ayodhyā and on His travels. Pretend to gather water from all these rivers & then bathe a Deity made from earth or sand outside with the sacred water.
10. Pretend to be Lakṣmaṇa, going outside to collect fruits & roots to give Sītā & Rāma in the forest
11. Study edible wild plants in your area (Research, books, photos).
12. Find edible wild plants in your area.
13. Cook a preparation from local, edible wild plants and offer to Rāmacandra.
14. Hear about how truthful Lord Rāmacandra was and how He went to the forest so His father would also be truthful. Discuss about why it is an offense to speak a lie in front of the Deities. (Many extended activities bases on truthfulness could be related to this area.)
15. Look at photos of Deities of Kṛṣṇa-Balarāma, Gaura-Nitāi, and Rāma-Lakṣmaṇa. See how many items can be listed from memory.
16. Hear about how Kaikeyī banished Rāma, & discuss why it is an offense to speak harshly in front of the Deities.
17. ॐ Define harsh speech & learn the austerities of speech in Gita 17.15. Analyze discussions to determine if all the aspects of austere speech are included. Make a personal plan to improve one's speech.

ॐ This symbol means there are resources available for this activity.



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2-4 years:

1. ॐ Color or paint a line drawing of Rāma & Sītā. Use glue & glitter to show their jewelry, crowns etc.
2. Gather flowers and decorate an altar with a Deity or picture of Rāmacandra.
3. Make a simple "altar" out of cardboard for a picture of Rāmacandra
4. ॐ Look at pictures of Rāma as king and Rāma in exile and talk about what is the same & different
5. Dress up and pretend to be Sītā, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, and Hanumān (and more monkeys) in the forest. Then dress up in fancier clothes and pretend to be Sītā, Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Hanumān, Bharata, Śatrughna, Vibhīṣaṇa, etc. after the return to Ajodhya.

5-7 years:

1. Make various types of fans to fan a picture of Sītā Rāma (or other children dressed up as Sītā and Rāma). The fans can be made from feathers, grass, paper, large leaves, etc. They can be decorated in various ways.
2. Dress up as Sītā and Rāma with other children "serving" them with food, fans, seats, singing, etc. Discuss how to serve a king and queen.
3. Make & decorate paper or cardboards crowns for Sītā & Rāma. Offer them to a picture of Sītā and Rāma & then wear as prasādam.

8-10 years:

1. ॐ Color or paint pictures of Sītā & Rāma. Glue onto cardboard & make cardboard stands.
2. Make paper "clothes" for the cardboard mounted pictures of Sītā and Rāma
3. Make paper flowers to decorate a home altar or the local temple.
4. Help with arranging real flowers for a home altar or the local temple.

11-13 years:

1. Make bead jewelry for the Deities at home or at the temple
2. Research how many temples, in what places, have Deities of Rāmacandra. Do a report on one temple and the standard of worship.
3. Write a poem or song, or draw a picture about the golden Deity of Sītā that Rāma had after Sītā went to the forest

14-18 years:

1. Help with the festival at the local temple.
2. Design an advertisement for Rāma's appearance festival.
3. Help with making clothes for the Deities—designing, cutting, sewing, decorating, etc.
4. Research an ancient temple where there is a Rāmacandra Deity. Give a report—with a speech, slide show, film, music, or any combination, about this temple to a group. Prepare invitations to the show & arrange for there to be prasādam & kīrtana, as well.

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General ideas:

1. Hear Amala Bhakta dasa reading the Rāmāyaṇa (this will take several days)
2. Watch the ITV video of the Rāmāyaṇa
3. When Lord Rāma was king there was no disease, old age, lamentation, fear, fatigue or distress. Make a jingle, song or rap to help us remember that this material world gives us only trouble unless we are under the protection of Kṛṣṇa or Rāmacandra.
4. On a long roll of paper, construct a time line of the events from Lord Rāma leaving Ayodhyā to when He returns. Draw a simple line drawing (or cut out images) to illustrate each point.
5. List 10 reasons why Lord Rāma was such a great personality/king.
6. ॐ Lord Rāma became king in Tretā-yuga but the atmosphere felt like Satya-yuga. Research the 4 yugas and describe the different conditions of each.
7. Describe in your own words - What is varṇāśrama?
8. Name the 8 components of varṇa and āśrama.
9. Make a chart of the qualities of the four varnas as given in BG 18.42-44. For older children, discuss what some of these qualities mean. Which qualities do you have or would like to develop? Why?
10. ॐ The monkey soldiers fought with primitive weapons like trees, stones and mountain peaks. Rāvaṇa's soldiers fought with modern warfare. Draw a vivid picture of this scene. (The monkeys won because they had Lord Rāma on their side, so remember to put Lord Rāma in your picture)
11. Research various weapons used throughout history. Make a collage of photos or drawings of these.
12. Make a cartoon strip of Hanumān jumping to Laṅkā and setting the city on fire.
13. Research major city fires (like San Francisco 1906) and compare/contrast with Laṅkā fire.
14. Discuss and practice what to do if our clothes catch on fire. (Stop, drop, roll)
15. List the incidents in Rāma's pastimes that show His power as God. List the incidents in Rāma's līlā that are human-like. Compare & contrast the two lists
16. Create a slide show, powerpoint, or other similar media to show Rāma's līlā chronologically.
17. Write a script of any section of Rāma līlā. Perform.
18. Choreograph a dance-drama of any section of Rāma līlā. Perform if possible.
19. Write a list of the 10 parts of Rāma's līlā that you like the most. Choose one and write a poem or song expressing your feelings.
20. Create a model from water and either dirt, sand, or clay of the building of the bridge from India to Laṅkā
21. Listen to various pieces of recorded music & choose which ones would be best for various parts of Rāma līlā (background for dramas, etc.)
22. List the moral lessons from Rāma līlā. Pick one & discuss how to apply at the present. Create a picture, song, or drama to teach that lesson.

ॐ This symbol means there are resources available for this activity.



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2-4 years:

1. After getting dressed up in costumes (or pieces of cloth) and simple make-up, act out parts of the story. The adult can direct each child on the action and words bit by bit.
2. Make “stones” out of crumpled paper and pretend to throw them into a place designated as the “sea”
3. Listen to a part of the story dramatized
4. ॐ Learn a song about the story of Rāmacandra

5-7 years:

1. Tell or draw or dramatize which part of the story is most liked and why
2. Discuss & decide which parts of the story are the most scary, exciting, happy, & so forth
3. Discuss kidnapping and how to stay safe—role play

8-10 years:

1. ॐ Look at pictures of various bridges & discuss the different kinds of bridges. Compare and contrast these various kinds of bridges with the one the monkeys built. Build a bridge from clay, wood, etc.
2. ॐ Compare & contrast how Kṛṣṇa appears in several of His incarnations, such as Kṛṣṇa, Rāmacandra, Varāha, & Nṛsiṃha

11-13 years:

1. ॐ Hear a story of devotees who got captured by demonic people—such as in the former Soviet Union, or by deprogrammers. Make a plan for what to do if captured, & then compare & contrast the plan with what Sītā did
2. List at least 10 devotees who served Rāmacandra to find Sītā & what service they did
3. ॐ Make a Jaṭāyu costume & possibly research about vultures (habitats, food, etc.)

14-18 years:

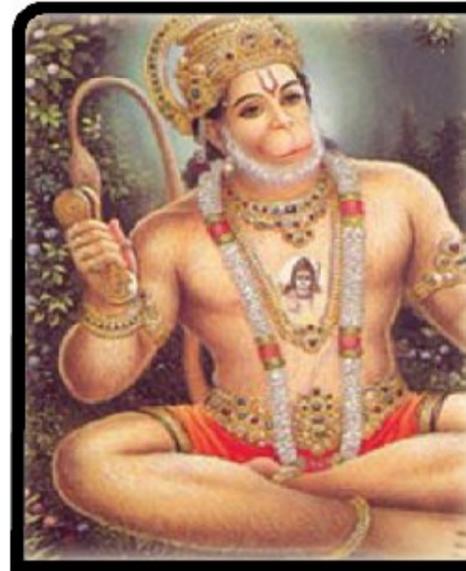
- Activities based on the Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam (see page 56 of this guide):
1. Why did Rāmacandra refer to Rāvaṇa as a dog?
 2. Draw a story map of a scene from the Rāmāyaṇa and give it a title.
 3. Who spoke these words: “By your deeds you have made your body fit to be eaten by vultures and your soul fit to go to hell.” Explain what is meant.
 4. Describe Sītā's condition when Rāma found her.
 5. Why do you think Rāma lamented the position of Bharata?
 6. ॐ Compare Rāma's returning to Ayodhyā with Kṛṣṇa entering Mathurā or Dvārakā. Use a Venn diagram to show similarities and differences.
 7. Should Bharata have ruled the kingdom in Rāma's absence? Give reasons for your answer.
 8. Describe the scene of the return to Ayodhyā of Sītā and Rāma. (The place, the vehicle, the people, the time.)

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General ideas:

1. ॐ Learn a song or bhajan glorifying Lord Rāma & Sitadevi. Discuss the meaning of the words
2. ॐ Listen to several different recording of the same Rāma song & rate for ease to follow, musical quality, recording quality, ease to understand, and style.
3. ॐ When Lord Rāma was king there was no disease, old age, lamentation, fear, fatigue or distress. Srila Prabhupada says that in Kali Yuga, chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa can achieve the same result. Use a flowchart to explain how chanting Hare Kṛṣṇa can solve all our problems.
4. ॐ Draw the word “Rāma” on a poster (or “Sītā Rāma”) in English, Sanskrit, Bengali, or other languages. Make the letters very large. Decorate the name in various styles (older children can refer to Medieval or Islamic illustrated manuscripts for ideas).
5. Write the word “Rāma” in various colours, with different mediums (crayon, paint, ink, pastels, charcoal, etc. and form a design from the names.
6. ॐ Create a graphic to list the activities, mood, form, & qualities of the various incarnations called Rāma—Rāmacandra, Paraśurāma, & Balarāma.
7. ॐ Hear about Vālmiki becoming purified through chanting “mara” that became “rāma.” Write and perform a skit of this pastime.
8. ॐ Learn the Bhagavatam verse about Vāsudeva, Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, & Aniruddha. Discuss how these personalities appear as Rāma, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, and Śatrughna.
9. Learn a new tune for the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra.
10. Try various ways to chant (as in japa) the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra—fast, medium, & slow; sitting & walking; while looking at the Deities & with eyes closed; with others & by oneself; with beads, counting on fingers, & with no counting method, etc. Evaluate each (in groups or individually) in terms of concentration, mood, pronunciation, etc.
11. Survey as to which way people prefer to chant & tabulate the results.
12. Each person takes turns leading the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra in a different tune.
13. Act out the citizens of Ayodhyā calling out Rāma’s names when He left for the forest, & when He returned. Listen to various recordings of the Hare Kṛṣṇa mahā-mantra & pick which recordings suit each time.
14. Focus on the time right after Sītā’s kidnapping, when Rāma & Lakṣmaṇa were calling for Sītā, & Sītā was calling for Rāma. Create a song, poem, drawing, or dance to depict this scene.
15. Act out the golden deer calling, “Rāma! Lakṣmaṇa!” before it dies & Sītā’s anguish. Discuss how we can judge whether or not something is authentic or whether someone is trying to cheat us. Discuss how Kṛṣṇa can tell our motives & desires when we call for Him. Discuss how we can be honest & also avoid being cheated.

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Holy Names



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2-4 years:

1. ॐ Learn and chant “Sītā Rāma” while walking & dancing
2. ॐ Act out Valmika chanting “mara” and how it turned into “Rāma”
3. Talk about how “Rāma” means happiness & enjoyment & what it means to be happy. Draw a picture of happiness.

5-7 years:

1. ॐ Learn a song or mantra about Lord Rāmacandra, along with the meaning & accompanying gestures or mudras (these can be authentic or made up).
2. ॐ Trace, copy, or write Rāma in English, Sanskrit, & Bengali. Write in different colors & styles, with decorations of the letters. Make a pattern from the name Rāma in each language. (For non-writers, have the name in one or more languages photocopied to be cut out & pasted into designs and patterns.)
3. ॐ See how many times you can write the name Rāma (in different languages) in 5 or 10 minutes.

8-10 years:

1. Learn a song, mantra, or scripture verse about Lord Rāmacandra. Chant it for the Deities. Be able to explain the meaning.
2. ॐ Carve the name of Rāma (in one or more languages) in a cut potato or piece of wood and use the stamp to create ink patterns of Rāma’s name on various colors of paper.

11-13 years:

1. ॐ Read about Mayadevi receiving the “Hare Rāma” part of the mahā-mantra from Lord Siva & the “Hare Kṛṣṇa” part from Haridasa Thakura. Discuss the implications for our own chanting.
2. ॐ Compare the different ways Srila Prabhupada explains the “Hare Rāma” part of the mantra. Draw a picture or make a dance for each explanation.
3. Hear how “Rāma” means the greatest pleasure. Make a Venn or double-bubble diagram to compare & contrast material & spiritual happiness (or create your own graphic)

14-18 years:

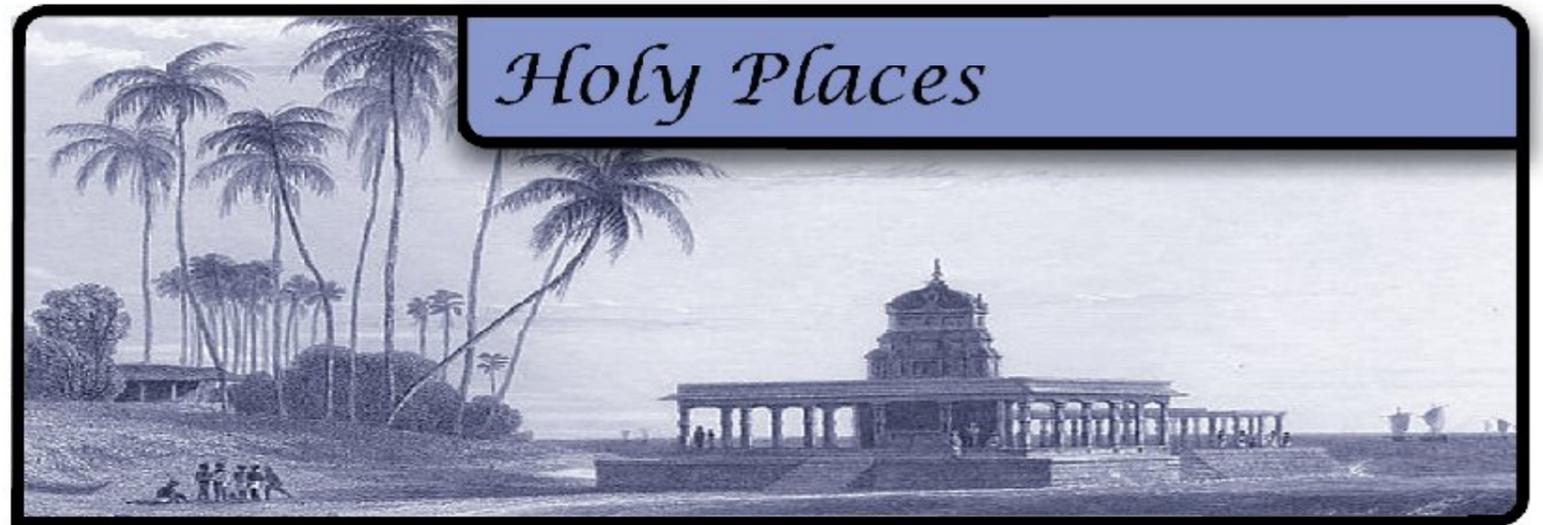
1. ॐ Read where it is explained that “Rāma” in the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra can refer either to Rāmacandra or Balarāma. Research other incarnations or expansions that can be called Rāma (Paraśurāma & Kṛṣṇa as Radha-Raman). Discuss how the same name of God can refer to different expansions depending on the mood & intent of the worshipper. Reflect, in groups or individually, what one’s mood is while chanting. Make a plan to improve one’s mood.
2. ॐ Learn a song, mantra, or scripture verse about Lord Rāmacandra along with the word-for-word meanings.
 - Sing it from memory.
 - Teach it to a younger child.
 - Plan a performance of the song before an audience.
 - Create pictures, slides, or film to accompany the song.
 - Put the English of the song to music.

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General ideas:

1. ॐ On a map of Ancient India find Ayodhyā & Laṅkā then draw lines to show the path Rāma took (i.e. from Ayodhyā to the Daṇḍakāraṇya forest to the shore of the ocean, building a bridge to Laṅkā & returning to Ayodhyā). Using your map, explain the story to a friend.
2. Make a treasure hunt that resembles the path Lord Rāma traveled. For example start at the altar (Ayodhyā). The children must find a message that gives a clue where to go next (outside to a special Daṇḍakāraṇya forest tree) then on to the bath (the ocean) and so on, with a simple reward at the end.
3. Draw a picture of the scene of Laṅkā when the monkey soldiers attacked.
4. ॐ As one person reads SB9.10.35-38 line for line out loud, the rest of the group re-enact the scene welcoming Lord Rāma back to Ayodhyā. Use simple props where possible.
5. Using the internet try to find the approximate distance between South India & Sri Laṅkā then calculate the length of the bridge to Laṅkā.
6. It's an offense to fight in front of the Deity, but Hanumān & the other monkeys used their anger in Rāma's service in a war. Discuss how anger can be used productively to please Kṛṣṇa.
⚙ Make a presentation—song, poster, slide show, film, dance—of the difference between material and spiritual anger
7. ॐ Learn the setu bandha (bridge) haṭha yoga asana. Pretend to be the bridge to Laṅkā.
8. ॐ Compare Lord Caitanya's tour of South India with Lord Rāmacandra's travels.
9. ॐ Compare & contrast Lord Caitanya's pastimes in the ocean with Lord Rāmacandra's crossing of the ocean.
10. Animals in holy places
 - ॐ Compare & contrast Lord Caitanya's relationship with animals (Sivananda Sena's dog, the animals in the forest on the way to Vrindavana), with Lord Rāmacandra's relationship with animals (birds, monkeys, bears, & the creatures in the ocean He crossed).
 - Discuss the position of animals who live in a holy place, & of animals who have direct contact with the Lord.
 - Discuss how we need to see animals as equal souls while at the same time dealing with them according to their body.
 - Look at information from groups that exist to protect animals. Evaluate the materials from the spiritual perspective.
 - Make a plan for giving spiritual benefit to the animals, birds, etc. who live near the home or local temple

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Holy Places

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2-4 years:

- All sit in meditation by someplace designated as “the ocean” until someone playing as Varuna gives permission to cross; then all race to cross—whoever crosses first is Varuna for the next round.
- Make a “hut” out of paper, cardboard, or other similar materials. If it is life-size (child-size) the children can go inside and create mats from paper, make clay cups, etc. They can pretend it is Rāma's hut at Citrakūṭa or Pañcavaṭī.
- Pretend play of being sages about to be eaten by Rākṣasa demons in the forest when Rāma comes & kills the demons with His arrows.

5-7 years:

- Dress up & play killing of Rāvaṇa & then the installation of Vibhīṣaṇa as king of Laṅkā.
- Draw Ayodhyā decorated for the birth of Lord Rāma
- Clean & decorate an area (in the home, school, or temple) that will be Rāma's room in the palace
- Dress up & play the coronation of Sītā & Rāma with play crowns the children make from paper.

8-10 years:

- Make a three-dimensional model of Setu-bandha/Cape Cormorin/Kanyakumari & of Laṅkā
- ॐ Read how Rāma fasted by the shore of the ocean. List the times when fasting is recommended in sastra. Discuss the benefits of fasting. Compare fasting to other austerities

11-13 years:

- Decorate a room or area like the Daṇḍakāraṇya Forest. Put a picture of Sītā, Rāma, & Lakṣmaṇa there & have bhajanas there for Their pleasure
- Using a graphic organizer (Venn diagram, double-bubble map, or other) compare & contrast the descriptions of Ayodhyā, Dvārakā, & Vaikuṅṭha

14-18 years:

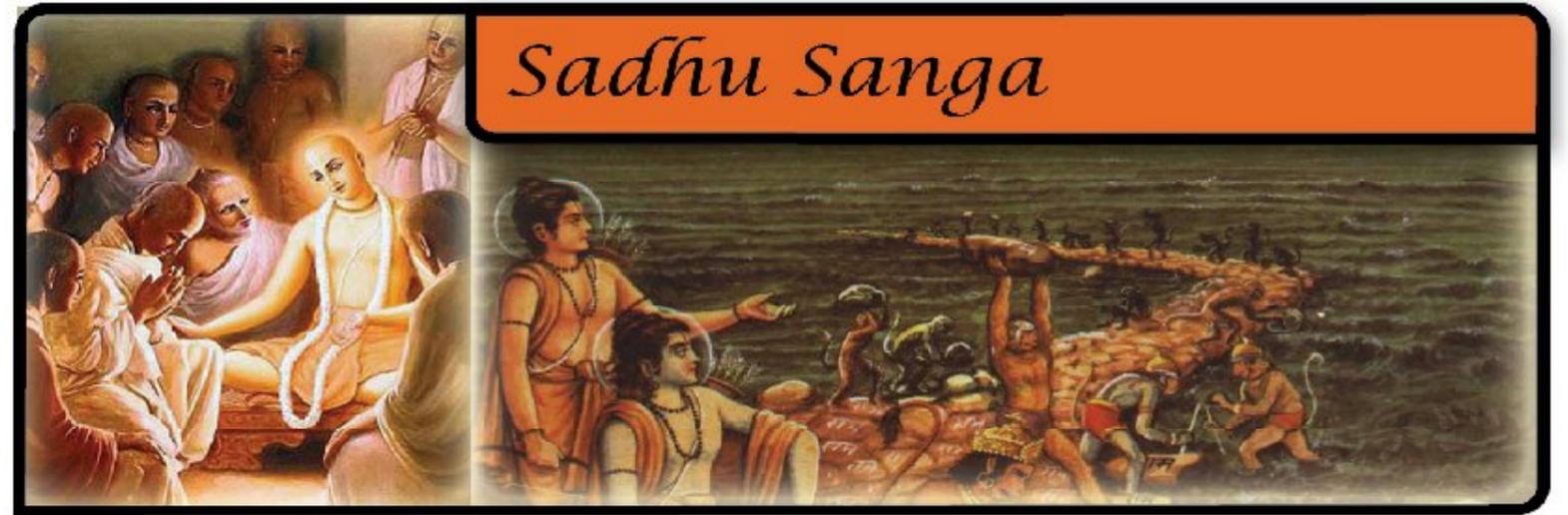
- Our bodies are holy places if we keep ourselves pure.
 - Sītā was very powerful due to her chastity. Discuss what it means to be chaste.
 - Design a plan of how you can have a mood of chastity – in body, mind & words.
 - Research to find the names of the five exalted chaste women mentioned in sastra.
 - ॐ Rāvaṇa was destroyed by his own lust. Read Bhagavad-Gita 3.36-43. Why is lust our enemy & how can we “beat the enemy”?
- Create travel advertisements for people to go to ancient Ayodhyā (posters, brochures, Internet pages, radio spots, TV spots, etc.
- Research & present findings on the controversies, tensions, & fighting that have occurred in present-day Ayodhyā.

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General ideas:

1. Rāvaṇa was destroyed by his desires for another man's wife. What is the proper Vaiṣṇava attitude towards women?
2. When Rāvaṇa killed his wives were no longer protected. How should women always be protected?
3. Write a speech entitled "The quality of a society depends on how its women are treated".
4. Write five questions to ask any or all of the following persons: Hanumān, Rāvaṇa, Vibhīṣaṇa, Lakṣmaṇa, Kaikeyī, Daśaratha.
5. Write a simple song of Hanumān jumping over the ocean.
6. Make a monkey tail (can be done by adults or by the children) out of an old stuffed stocking & a piece of wire through it to attach to the child. Then, while singing a song about Hanumān or Rāma, jump from one place to the next in the garden celebrating having found Sītā.
7. Lord Rāma is glorified for being the perfect leader. Good leaders need good followers. Devise a game of follow the leader where first everyone follows & then everyone does their own thing. How did the leader feel in each situation? What can we learn from that? How did the followers feel?
8. From Rāma's example, list the qualities of good leaders & good followers.
9. Compare qualities of today's government leaders with Lord Rāma's qualities. How would you change today's government policies to make people happy?
10. Rāvaṇa means "one who causes crying for others". Think of a time you caused another person to cry. How did you feel afterwards? What would you do differently next time?
11. List as many demons as possible that Rāma killed. In groups or individually, decide on what attitudes, thoughts, or actions in one's life act like "demons" & how we can conquer them by taking shelter of Lord Rāmacandra.
12. Using the family tree in the Bhagavatam as a guide, make an illustrated family tree of the sun dynasty until Rāma's appearance, or write a song to remember the key names of the people in the sun dynasty leading to Rāma.
13. When Vibhīṣaṇa first came to Rāma, most of Rāma's followers didn't trust him, although Rāma welcomed him. Write a speech, essay, or story about trust & loyalty.
14. Discuss how Sītā stayed loyal to Rāma even though she was surrounded by demons, & didn't know where Rāma was, or when He would save her. Explore how we can overcome the influence of bad association & stay firm in our devotion in difficult circumstances.
15. Act out how Rāma & Lakṣmaṇa first thought Jaṭāyu was a demon who had eaten Sītā. Discuss how we cannot judge devotees by their body or outward appearance (refer to *Nectar of Instruction*, verse 6)

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2-4 years:

1. Dress up as monkeys and go on a treasure hunt to find Sītā (various treasures, including a picture of Sītā, should be hidden in the area)
2. Colour pictures of devotees of Rāma, such as Hanumān, Vibhīṣaṇa, Jaṭāyu, etc. Talk about how they helped Rāma.

5-7 years:

1. Compare & contrast, using a graphic (such as double-bubble or Venn diagram) the relationship between Rāma & Lakṣmaṇa with the relationship between Vibhīṣaṇa & Rāvaṇa. Discuss what it means to be a brother.
2. Dress up & act out Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa insisting they wanted to go to the forest with Rāma. Discuss the differences between palace life and forest life.
3. Discuss how some rakshasis helped Sītā. Explore what it feels like to be scared or lost, & how we can help someone else who is scared.

8-10 years:

1. Split up into teams & go on a treasure hunt to find Sītā (clues should be hidden in various places that lead to a picture of Sītā. The winning team keeps the picture.)
2. Take turns dressing up each other as Sītā or Rāma for their wedding.
3. Hear how Vibhīṣaṇa left Rāvaṇa to take shelter of Rāma. Discuss the effects of good & bad association and how we can have the courage to do the right thing, even if people around us are doing something wrong. Role play various scenarios.

11-13 years:

1. ॐ List the various devotees who helped Rāma. Write what species they were (human, demigod, demon, type of animal, bird, etc.) List what type of service they performed. Take the data and analyze it by percentages (how many humans, etc.)
2. ॐ Hear about how Sugrīva got absorbed in enjoying his newly-regained kingdom so that Lakṣmaṇa had to remind him of his promise to Rāma. Write a fictional fable/story about loyalty & promises.
3. Make a comic, powerpoint, or song about one devotee who helped Rāma or Sītā

14-18 years:

1. Four groups of monkeys searched for Sītā, but only Hanumān's group found her. Similarly, Jaṭāyu fought with Rāvaṇa, but was defeated. Discuss how devotees serving the Lord can have seeming, external "failures" & come up with a definition of "success" that would apply regardless of the external outcome. Support the definition with verses from the Gita.
2. Create a dance & song of the monkeys working together to build the bridge.
3. ॐ Hear or read about the sages in the forest who wanted to marry Rāma & who became gopis in another life. Draw a flowchart showing the progression of devotional service.
4. Write a poem or essay about the beauty of Rāma's promise to have only one wife.
5. ॐ Create a graphic to show the persons in Rāma līlā who made promises, what they promised, whether they kept their promise, & what was the result. Evaluate each as a role model for truthfulness. Discuss times when promises in one's own life (made by oneself or by others) were kept or broken & why. Analyze the spiritual value of making vows.