



Center for Indian Cultural Education

Bal Vihar of St. Louis



Bal Vihar Newsletter

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Bal Vihar Experiences By: Aman Kukal

My experience in Bal Vihar so far has been great. I have been enlightened about my country and my culture. I learned shlokas that I have never heard of. I am reading the Bhagavad Geeta, whereas I had never read it before. It is fun reading it because it guides us through its stories on how to lead our lives. I am glad to be a part of Bal Vihar because I have got to

experience the views and thoughts of others. Sometimes I find the class very hard and difficult to understand because learning the shlokas is tough. At the same time I get to learn a new language, *Sanskrit*.

My experience with my mentors has been fun because they are very jovial and kind. I enjoyed taking part in the field trip to Peoria because it was my first field trip in Bal Vihar and it was fun to visit the Swaminathans' residence. They had a fabulous collection of Lord Ganesha idols. I also enjoyed frying

puris and serving the food at the Kumbhabhishekham—another one of my experiences through Bal Vihar. It was my first, and probably the best, experience at community service. Overall I have enjoyed being part of Bal Vihar and hope to continue to do so.



Trip to Peoria

By: Anjana

My trip to Peoria was actually pretty fun. At first I had been really nervous because I didn't know anyone, but soon that fear had escaped as I realized that everyone was really nice. I had tons of fun and I learned a lot about Bal Vihar, as well as other students.

On the way, there was loud noise. My new friends and I listened to music the whole way. Nearly an hour after that, we were in Peoria and were driving into the parking lot of Embassy Suites. After we checked in, we stayed in the lobby for a while. We were going to a Halloween party/dinner. The house, I discovered, was beautiful and has so many neat knickknacks in it. All of the kids went down into the basement, where we talked, laughed, and had a blast. I felt like there was a connection. We had pizza for dinner, as well as candy and soda. Anyway, we talked some more, played games, and then the party was over. We had received some wonderful goody bags. When we went back to the hotel, we changed into our pajamas and then met in one hotel room

to play some games. We woke up fairly early the next day and then went to our original rooms to wash up for breakfast. We proceeded to breakfast afterwards. We finished eating and got ready since we were going to the Peoria Bal Vihar. When our group reached the temple, we said bhajans and then discussed Bal Vihar. The topics varied from volunteering programs to what we learned in class. Then we went upstairs to perform aarthi, where I noticed that their temple is a lot different from ours. For lunch, which was provided there, was rice, vegetables, and dessert. Regrouping began near the front of the temple after lunch, as we got ready to head back to St. Louis. We left a little past noon, and the ride went by pretty fast with the help of a few movies. I really enjoyed the Peoria Field Trip because it gave me a chance to learn something new and become responsible. It was nice making new friends and seeing how Bal Vihar in a small Indian community functioned. I really liked this trip and hope I will be able to do something like this again.



Diwali: Festival of Lights By: Sachit Bhat

Diwali is a very important celebration to many people and it marks a new year in the Hindu calendar. “Diwali” means “rows of lighted lamps”, thus it is called the festival of lights. On Diwali, we pray to Goddess Laxmi (the goddess of wealth), and the festivities include lighting candles, eating treats, and sharing happiness as a group. We light small diyas—or lamps—and place them around the house.

While Diwali means one thing for people living in India, it means something very different to me. Since I am living in America, I celebrate Diwali feeling very connected to my Indian culture and its traditions. The festival of Diwali acts like a day in which you forget all the bad things going on in your life and to look at all the happiness instead. You are surrounded by a group of people that have the same background, who understand Diwali, and realize the importance of this festival/auspicious day. Bal Vihar has me even more with this since we learn about Indian culture and celebrate the Indian holidays in a fun way. For Diwali, we do a pooja where we gather as a group to pray to Goddess Laxmi, and to be thankful for what the gods/goddesses have given us. When I was younger, I always thought this was just a time to sit around for hours and listen to people talk, but as I have grown older, I have realized the significance of this. Now I know what Diwali really is: the gathering of friends and family, the triumph of good over evil, and a connection with the culture.

Balvihar Survey Summary

By: Birju Patel & Shashank Nedungadi

We conducted a survey within the Y1 group of Balvihar. This survey was based on who our heroes are. There were many similar answers whereas there were many unique answers.

Here is what we found:

Hero	Made an accomplishment	Great Leader	Made a discovery	Personal qualities	Inspires others	Makes a difference
Abraham Lincoln	yes	yes		yes	yes	yes
Adrian Peterson	yes				yes	
Akbar	yes	yes			yes	
Al Gore	yes	yes			yes	yes
Bill Gates	yes	yes	yes		yes	yes
Dwayne Wade	yes				yes	
George Carver	yes	yes	yes		yes	
Jackie Robinson	yes	yes		yes	yes	yes
Jay Sean	yes			yes	yes	
Mahatma Gandhi	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Martin Luther King Jr	yes	yes		yes	yes	yes
Nelson Mandel	yes			yes	yes	yes
Relatives				yes	yes	yes
Steve Jobs	yes	yes	yes		yes	yes
Warren Buffet	yes					yes

As you can see the results varied. There were many people who were repeatedly chosen. The top hero was “Relatives”. This was chosen probably because of the fact that relatives influence people the greatest. There were also hero qualities that were chosen most. Most heroes made an accomplishment. This shows that most people have done something that influenced others: from inventing an item to founding a company.

This tells us many things about ourselves. The decision of who our hero is might be influenced by what we like. For example, the person who said that Dwayne Wade was their hero might have a liking into sports. But suppose someone has a hero in the field of politics and they don’t like politics. This might be saying something else about us. The heroes we choose may have influenced society and the way we live today. These are what we found about the heroes we have.



Janeu (Thread) Ceremony By Chase Young

Brahmins celebrate the coming adulthood of a boy through “Upanayanam Samskara” (sacred thread ceremony). The ceremony generally takes place between the ages of seven and fourteen. If it’s not possible, then it is required to be done before marriage. The purpose of the thread ceremony is to prepare a young man for sharing responsibilities. The thread is twisted in an upward direction to make certain that good overcomes evil. After the ceremony, the boy is allowed to participate in the family events. There are three strands of thread that stand for three different things. These three strings of “Janeu” are known as the Hindu Trinity of Lord Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesh. Others think of them as Mahasarasvati, Mahalaxmi, and Mahakali, or better known as past, present, or future. There are many other things the threads symbolize, but no matter what it means, it’s sanctity will get distributed if not worn properly.

To go to any luxurious ceremony, one should wear “Janeu” hanging from the left shoulder (Upaviti). For going to an informal event, one should wear “Janeu” hanging from the right shoulder (Prachnaviti). While doing daily chores the thread must be raised and its upper part ought to be put behind the ear. If it breaks, one must replace the old or broken thread with a new thread. This ceremony is very symbolic and important in every young man’s life.



Sports and Their Affects On My Life By: Arjun Dundoo

Sports are an important aspect in my life, and without them, my life would drastically change. I enjoy participating in them because they teach me about commitment and competition. The sports that I play are football, basketball, lacrosse, and tennis. Although I play numerous sports, I do not participate in cricket or field hockey, which are more popular in India.

I do not sleep out or stay out too late if I have a game the next morning. I do this to ensure that I receive enough sleep for my game. That would be an example of the commitment aspect of sports. Also, it is just fun to be on the field or court playing a sport because I have a passion for them.

Another reason I love sports so much is because it gives me a good balance between my school and social life. It gives me something to look forward to during the week, since practice is after school. Overall, sports make a huge impact on my life.

Similarities Between American and Indian Sports By: Sidarth Iyer

When a new Indian arrives in America, he is often lost in the complex world of American society. Everything is different to him...except sports.

America's favorite sport is baseball and India's is cricket. It would be pretty easy for an Indian to pick up baseball because baseball is actually a simplified version of cricket. During the colonial era, only the American elite played cricket, a game taught to them by their English counterparts. After the American Revolution, cricket was spread to common-folk in the country. Overwhelmed by the many rules of cricket, the country folk decided to simplify cricket into baseball—the short, easy-to-understand game it is today. In India, only kings and other royalties played cricket. India eventually got independence and the sport was also spread to the many villages of India. However, cricket was never modified in India, due to less time as an independent country than America.

Sports can be considered as an universal language. Organizations, like FIFA, work hard to give the countries of the world something to relate to, Sporting traditions are important and bring the world closer together.

Bhagavad Gita: Basic Facts of This Holy Scripture

By: Nikhil Shekar

The Bhagavad Gita basically tells the reader how to live life and how to make the best decisions. The Bhagavad Gita takes place with Arjuna and Krishna, who are in the middle of the battlefield before the Kurukshetra war. It starts when Arjuna doesn't want to fight because he will be killing his relatives and teachers, since they are on the other side. One major reason he doesn't want to kill them is because they are the people who have guided him to where he is now. Krishna tries to convince him to fight by reminding him of his duties, or *dharma*. Krishna then tells Arjuna to make the best decision. Arjuna, after a series of more exchanging conversations between himself and Krishna, finally agrees to fight. Something that I learned from this would be that you should make the decisions that has the most benefits or has more good than evil. This is what I learned from the Bhagavad Gita and what I think should be applied to life.



How the Ramayana Affects My Daily Life

By: Raj Malhotra

The Ramayana affects me in my daily life in many ways. One way it affected me was when we studied drama in school. The teacher asked if anybody knew what the "Ramayanana" was. I raised my hand and politely told the teacher he had pronounced it incorrectly. I briefly went on to tell the class that it was the story of two brothers, and I told them the whole story. They were fascinated!

The Ramayana has been one of my favorite stories for a long time. When I feel bad, I think about the tales of victory in the Ramayana and how sadness is not escapable in life. This story has helped me to overcome many fears and try new things. If I need to act on something, I think of the Ramayana for its battles and victories! The story also gives me courage.

One of my favorite characters is Hanuman, a general in the monkey army. Hanuman is known for his strength and courage. Another reason I am interested in the Ramayana is because I am Hindu; the Ramayana is about my culture and has characters from my religion, like Ram.

I highly suggest that children of all religions and cultures read the Ramayana as an example of classic Hindu literature. The story lives in my heart forever, and I hope it lives in yours as well.



Why should we be proud of our heritage?

By: Yash Patel and Nikhil Das

Well, why should we not! The unity we have is one of the strongest virtues that we share. We have many differences depending on location such as clothing or the way we eat and live, yet still we are united and stand firm on our ground despite repeated efforts by the outsiders to divide us. They divided us only when we didn't have unity because of the lies they told us, but we still recovered. We are the third most rapidly growing country of the world! We subsequently also have the world's largest democracy. We have high standards within our family, so that ensures that the kids will be responsible future adults. Another unique element of our history is that India is the only country in the world, which gained independence without violence. We are great architects and have built historic monuments such as the Red Fort, or the famous Taj Mahal. We contain Christian, Muslim, and Hindu architecture all in one country. We also value family more than anything. And guess what? Those are only a few of the qualities. There are countless others that I haven't even mentioned.

Balvihar Youth Group Y1

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