

LESSON 5

How did cultures
mix in ancient
Southeast Asia?

Subject	History/Social Studies
Topic	How did cultures mix in Southeast Asia?
Level	Lower secondary
Key idea	The Ramayana provides a good example of cultural influence. It has spread from India throughout Southeast Asia into many languages and locally inspired versions.
Key concepts	Cultural influence Ramayana
No. of periods/lessons	2 periods/1 lesson (1 period is approximately 50 minutes)
Facilities needed	Sources and handouts for distribution Blank paper and coloured pencils
Prerequisite knowledge	Students should gain prerequisite knowledge by completing Handout 1: Pre-reading. This could be done for homework before the activities described below, or in a prior class period.

Learning objectives

By the end of the lesson, the students will be able to:

KNOWLEDGE	SKILLS	ATTITUDES
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe the spread of the Ramayana throughout Southeast Asia. 2. Explain the concept of cultural influence. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Compare artistic representations in order to understand cultural influence. 2. Observe and participate in discussions of historical sources. 3. Discuss how a historical story from one culture – the Ramayana – has been influential throughout other Southeast Asian cultures. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cultivate respect for, and understand the interdependence of, cultures throughout Asia. 2. Appreciate how history impacts their lives today.

Section	Lesson Development	Resources and Notes	Rationale
Introduction [10 minutes]	<p>1. Hook activity: Telephone game</p> <p>1.1 Explain that the class will play a version of the game 'telephone', by whispering a message from one person to the next. Teacher starts by whispering one word into a student's ear. That student will add another word to the sentence and whisper it to the next student, and so on, so that the message gets longer and longer. Finally, the last student can say the message back to the teacher.</p> <p>1.2 Explain or elicit that this game is like the process of ideas mixing and spreading among different cultures. Each person (or culture) interprets or hears an idea in their own way, and adds elements from their own culture. Along the way, the idea changes, grows, and becomes something new, but we can see the influence of each culture.</p> <p>1.3 Write the final message on the board, and the original word the teacher whispered. Ask a few volunteers to state the message that they heard. Elicit how in the same way, an idea will change more and more the farther in time and space it gets from its source.</p>		The telephone game gives students an experiential basis for understanding cultural influence.
Development [40 minutes]	<p>2. Teacher talk (10 mins)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Today we will study the Ramayana, a Hindu poem about King Rama's struggle to free his wife Sita from evil King Ravana, with the help of gods such as Hanuman. • Historians are not sure exactly when the Ramayana was written, but they believe it was written between 500 BCE and 200 CE. It was written in the Sanskrit language, in what is now India. • The story of the Ramayana spread throughout Southeast Asia. Today, there are versions of the Ramayana in the languages of Thailand, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Malaysia. Have you heard stories from the Ramayana? Elicit responses from students. You may want to show the students an image from a local interpretation of the Ramayana. • How do you think the Ramayana spread from what is now India through Southeast Asia? Elicit responses from students. <i>For example, they might say that merchants shared the stories, that travelling troupes of actors performed the stories, or that people shared texts or images from the poem, all of which are accurate.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher's note 	The teacher talk gives students the information they need to complete group work.

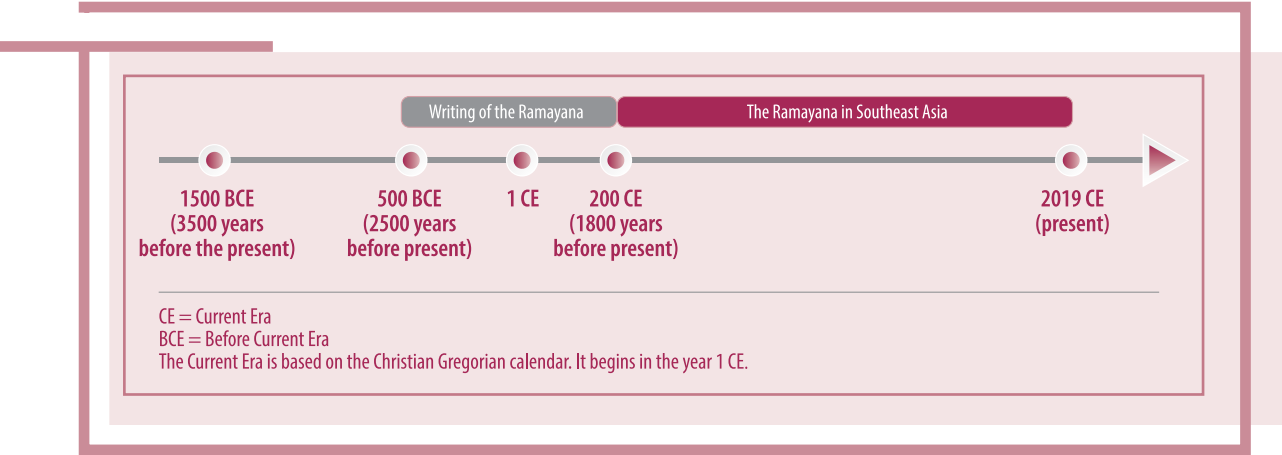
Section	Lesson Development	Resources and Notes	Rationale
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One way that the Ramayana spread was through the Angkor kingdom. This kingdom was founded by the Khmer people and was based in what is now Cambodia. Historians believe this kingdom was active from the ninth century to the fifteenth century. • Indian merchants and rulers visited Angkor, and they brought the Ramayana with them. The Khmer people shared it with others that they ruled or traded with. Each group adapted the stories to their own culture. How do you think they adapted it to their own cultures? Elicit answers from students. <i>For example, they might say that people translated the Ramayana into local languages, portrayed scenes from the Ramayana in local artistic styles, or incorporated ideas from their own cultures or religions into the Ramayana, all of which are accurate.</i> • Today we will examine how the story of the Ramayana diffused throughout Southeast Asia, and we will see how different cultures adapted and changed it. <p>3. Group work (20 mins)</p> <p>3.1 Divide the students into groups of four to six. Distribute Sources 1-3.</p> <p>3.2 Ask the students to complete Handout 2: Comparing the Ramayana.</p> <p>3.3 As the students work, circulate in order to identify a group that is working well together, discussing the concepts with focus and interest, and coming up with interesting answers.</p> <p>4. Fishbowl discussion (10 mins)</p> <p>4.1 Ask the group that you identified in 3.3 to discuss their ideas, as if they are in a ‘fishbowl’, observed by the other students. This means that they are continuing or holding their discussion for everyone to watch and listen to. It is because their discussion was interesting!</p> <p>4.2 Ask the group questions to help them show how and why they answered the way they did.</p> <p>4.3 When they are finished, other students can ask them questions or add comments.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source 1: Text from Ramayana describing the battle of Lanka • Source 2: Image of the battle of Lanka bas-relief from Angkor Wat • Source 3: Mural painting of the battle of Lanka from Wat Phra Kaew • Handout 2: Comparing the Ramayana 	<p>Group work encourages collaborative learning and enables students to piece together a larger picture of the topic.</p> <p>The fishbowl activity allows a large group of students to benefit from a focused and structured discussion undertaken by a smaller group. All students can later join and enrich the discussion.</p>

Section	Lesson Development	Resources and Notes	Rationale
Closure [15 minutes]	<p>5. Sketch</p> <p>5.1 Distribute blank pieces of paper, coloured pencils and ask students to draw a character from the battle of Lanka in their own way. Explain that their drawings will show how the Ramayana is influential in their culture today.</p> <p>5.2 Students can pin their pictures to the wall and look at their classmates' work as they leave the room.</p> <p>5.3 [Optional] Ask which example is the most interesting and why.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blank paper • Coloured pencils 	Completing the sketch will enable students to contribute their own artistic interpretations of the Ramayana, thus furthering the process of cultural influence.
<p>Assessment</p> <p>Teacher can assess whether students have met the lesson objectives by considering their responses to or participation in the fishbowl discussion, and by looking at their answers on the Comparing the Ramayana handout.</p>			

Teacher's notes, sources and handouts

Glossary

- Chariot: a horse-drawn cart for one or two people.
- Cultural influence: the integration of parts of a foreign culture(s) with your own culture.



Teacher's note 1

- Today we will study the Ramayana, a Hindu poem about King Rama's struggle to free his wife Sita from evil King Ravana, with the help of gods such as Hanuman.
- Historians are not sure exactly when the Ramayana was written, but they believe it was written between 500 BCE and 200 CE. It was written in the Sanskrit language, in what is now India.
- The story of the Ramayana spread throughout Southeast Asia. Today, there are versions of the Ramayana in the languages of Thailand, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Malaysia. Have you heard stories from the Ramayana? Elicit responses from students.

You may want to show the students an image from a local interpretation of the Ramayana.

- How do you think the Ramayana spread from what is now India throughout Southeast Asia? Elicit responses from students.

For example, they might say that merchants shared the stories, that travelling troupes of actors performed the stories, or that people shared texts or images from the poem, all of which are accurate.

- One way that the Ramayana spread was through the Angkor kingdom. This kingdom was founded by the Khmer people and was based in what is now Cambodia. Historians believe this kingdom was active from the ninth century to the fifteenth century.
- Indian merchants and rulers visited Angkor, and they brought the Ramayana with them. The Khmer people shared it with others that they ruled or traded with. Each group adapted the stories to their own culture. How do you think they adapted it to their own cultures? Elicit answers from students.

For example, they might say that people translated the Ramayana into local languages, portrayed scenes from the Ramayana in local artistic styles, or incorporated ideas from their own cultures or religions into the Ramayana, all of which are accurate.

- Today we will examine how the story of the Ramayana diffused throughout Southeast Asia, and we will see how different cultures adapted and changed it.

Teacher's note for Source 2

This kind of art is called a 'bas-relief'. In a bas-relief, artists carve pictures into stone so that parts of the image stand out from the background. If you were to run your hand over the bas-relief, you could feel the details with your fingers.

This bas-relief comes from the Angkor Wat temple in Cambodia. Angkor Wat was built in the twelfth century, during the reign of King Suryavarman II, who ruled a kingdom called Angkor. Hindu legends such as the Ramayana influenced the kingdom of Angkor, and people there also practiced Buddhism.

In this bas-relief, you can see Rama with a sword in his hand. He is jumping into Ravana's chariot. The face of Hanuman, the Monkey King, is visible next to Rama. The chariot is drawn by two horses. It is difficult to see Ravana in this image. All around the chariot, Ravana's soldiers are fighting Hanuman's army of monkeys.

Teacher's note for Source 3

This mural painting comes from the Wat Phra Si Rattana Satsadaram, also known as the Temple of the Emerald Buddha or Wat Phra Kaew in Bangkok, Thailand. The temple was built and the mural was created in the late eighteenth century, during the reign of King Rama I. King Rama I supervised the re-writing of the Ramayana as the 'Ramakien', the national epic of Thailand. The Ramakien tells a similar story to the Ramayana, and is also set in the legendary cities of Ayodhya and Lanka.

Because the Siamese kings identified themselves with Rama – and thus Vishnu – the kings' names often included the word 'Rama', and even the old capital of Ayutthaya was named after Rama's Ayodhya.

In this mural painting, you can see the Ramakien's hero, Phra Ram, fighting the King of the Demons, Thotsakan. Hanuman, King of the Monkeys, is helping Phra Ram fight Thotsakan and his army.

Source 1: Text from Ramayana describing the battle of Lanka

Lakshmana, however, approaching him with joined palms, spoke very meaningful words as follows: 'O, noble Brother! Of my own accord, I am able to kill this wretched Ravana [*King of Demons*]. O, Lord! I shall slay him. Permit me to do so.'

The exceedingly powerful and the truly courageous Rama spoke to that Lakshmana as follows: 'Go, Lakshmana and also be strenuous in this duel. Seek out his weak points and guard against your own. Defend yourself vigilantly with your eye and bow.'

Hearing the words of Rama, Lakshmana embraced him, thereafter offering obeisance and bidding him farewell, he entered the battlefield. Lakshmana then saw Ravana with arms as large as the trunks of elephants, who was brandishing his dreadful and fiery bow, covering those monkeys whose bodies he had severed with a close rain of darts. The exceedingly energetic Hanuman [*the monkey god*], born of Maruta the god of wind, beholding this, rushed on Ravana in order to bring that rain of arrows to an end.

Approaching his chariot, the sagacious Hanuman lifted his right arm and spoke the following threatening words to Ravana: 'You have obtained the boon of invulnerability to the celestials, demons, celestial musicians, ogres and semi-divine beings. But monkeys are a danger to you. This five-branched right hand of mine, which I now raise, will rob you of your life that has long been resident in your body.'

Edited paraphrasing of this text:

Lakshmana approaching [Rama] with palms together said, 'O, noble brother! I can kill this terrible Ravana [King of Demons]. O, Lord! I can kill him. Let me do it.'

The very powerful and brave Rama said to Lakshmana, 'Go, Lakshmana and be tireless in this duel. Look for his weakness and protect your own weak points. Defend yourself carefully with your eye and bow.'

Hearing Rama, Lakshmana embraced him, pays his respect and saying his goodbyes, he then went to the battlefield. Lakshmana then saw Ravana with arms as large as elephant trunks, holding his flaming bow and shooting many arrows that covered the bodies of the monkeys he killed. The very energetic Hanuman [*the monkey god*] child of Maruta the god of wind, seeing this, rushed towards Ravana to end the rain of arrows.

Approaching his chariot, the wise Hanuman lifted his right arm and said these words to Ravana, 'You cannot be harmed by magical beings, demons, magical musicians, monsters and semi-divine beings. But monkeys are a danger to you. My raised right hand will kill you.'

Source:

Murthy, K.M.K. 2006. *Valmiki Ramayana* (Translation). Chapter 5. www.valmikiramayan.net/yuddha/sarga59/yuddha_59_prose.htm

Source 2: Image of the battle of Lanka relief from Angkor Wat



Source:

Jarvis, Dennis. 2009. [flic.kr/p/6sfbKu](https://www.flickr.com/photos/dennisjarvis/6548484848/)

Source 3: Mural painting of the battle of Lanka from Wat Phra Kaew



Source:

Thaths. 2007, www.flickr.com/photos/34816987@N00/1392410389/

Handout 1: Pre-reading

The Ramayana is an ancient Hindu poem from India. It tells the story of a legendary prince named Rama, who is said to have lived in the kingdom of Kosala. His father forces him to leave the kingdom, and he travels through India with his brother and his wife, Sita. However, his enemies capture Sita. In order to get her back, Rama has a war with Ravana, the king of the island of Lanka. He wins the battle of Lanka with the help of Hanuman, a god who appears as half-monkey, half-man. The victorious Rama returns to the kingdom of Ayodhya to become king. In Hinduism, Rama is seen as a god.

Historians are not sure exactly when the Ramayana was written, but they believe it was written between 500 BCE and 200 CE. It was written in the Sanskrit language, in what is now India.

The story of the Ramayana spread throughout Southeast Asia. Today, there are versions of the Ramayana in the languages of Thailand, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Malaysia. Rulers throughout Southeast Asia used this poem to symbolize their own greatness.

The Ramayana continues to be an important part of Southeast Asian culture. For example, shadow puppet plays in various Southeast Asian countries feature episodes from the poem.

Southeast Asians have also adapted the Mahabharata, an ancient Indian Hindu text about the battle between good and evil. In modern Java, Indonesia, shadow puppet masters have introduced characters that do not exist in the original Indian text.

Exercise:

Ask your parents, older relatives, or people in your community what they know about the story of the Ramayana. How is the story told in your region or culture?

Handout 2: Comparing the Ramayana

1. Choose a group member to read Source 1 out loud. Other group members should follow along.

2. Look at Source 2. What characters or actions can you find from the story? Label the picture.

3. Now look at Source 3. What characters or actions can you find from the story? Label the picture.

4. How are Source 2 and Source 3 different?

5. How are Source 2 and Source 3 similar?

6. What guesses could you make about the cultures that created Source 2 and Source 3?
