

# ELL teachers create cultural video projects

By Sukhdeep Birdi, Kawaldeep Ghuman, & Harjit Chauhan, Canada

Sukhdeep Birdi, Kawaldeep Ghuman, and Harjit Chauhan are ELL teachers in the Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows school district in British Columbia. After years of teaching ELL students, they noticed one common theme when it came to celebrating calendar holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter. The theme is that their students excitedly shared and made their own cultural connections related to the holidays. The ELL teachers realized that the students felt comfortable sharing their cultural celebrations, festivals, and holiday traditions during small group literacy times, but many students did not know how, or felt too shy to share with their peers. The three teachers began to explore how to create authentic resources highlighting student experiences.

## What is Diwali?

Diwali is known as the festival of lights, and it is celebrated by various ethnic groups around the world, predominantly in India. Houses, shops, and public places such as temples are decorated with small oil lamps called diyas. Diyas are often placed by windows and near front entrances. They are traditionally made from clay, and they can be hand-painted, or they can be purchased pre-made with embellishments from shops. Diyas range in size, shapes, and colors. There are a variety of ways that diyas can be lit. People can fill diyas with oil and use the wick as the light, or people can insert candles or tea lights in them. Diyas are symbols of light and welcome (S. Birdi, personal communication, October 25, 2021).

Before celebrations begin, families go out to shop for new outfits and household items. People dress up in bright colors to enjoy the festivities. Families visit the Gurdwara or temple in the evening to light diyas in and around the temple. People offer prayers for loved ones, wishes for happiness, health, and prosperity. Before leaving the temple, anyone can enjoy vegetarian food in what is called the langar hall. The food is prepared in the kitchen and served by volunteers which is called seva (H. Chauhan, personal communication, October 25, 2021).

People decorate their houses with rangoli. This is a type of traditional art that is used with colored rice and flour, chalk, flowers, and divas to make designs near the door entrance as a sign of welcome. People can be



creative and make designs that are unique to them. Another type of Diwali art that is common is the use of mehndi. Mehndi or henna is applied to the hands and when it dries up, it leaves a beautiful orange/reddish stain which symbolizes good luck and happiness (K. Ghuman, personal communication, October 25, 2021).

To wrap up Diwali celebrations, families will often enjoy bhangra music and dance, light up fireworks and children enjoy sparklers. Each family celebrates Diwali in their own unique way (K. Ghuman, personal communication, October 25, 2021).

## How it started—Diwali

First, the teachers decided to create more resources about a festival that they are familiar with called Diwali. The teachers searched their own schools and community libraries, investigated online resources such as Teachers Pay Teachers, and YouTube videos for inspiration. Even with the variety of resources at their disposal, they felt that they could further amplify their student voices and experiences through a video project.

At the time, with the global pandemic, the teachers had to take precautions with how to create the project, and they decided to put themselves and their families in the video to create an authentic experience. The teachers relied heavily on Zoom meetings to pool their ideas together. First, they wrote a script using simple language to explain Diwali, next they collected and took photos to provide further visual representation. Third, they found a videographer to document the project. Once the project was complete, the Diwali video was shared in District #42. To further supplement the video, the ELL teachers also created and attached a Diwali lesson plan for school teachers to use as a part of their instruction. In essence, from this Diwali video, the Indo-Canadian ELL students were excited to see the representation, and more ELL students were inspired and asked to create another video.

## What is Ramadan and Eid?

For Muslims around the world, Ramadan is an important time of the year. It is celebrated in the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, and it begins on the first sighting of the new moon. Ramadan is a month of good deeds, charity such as sharing with those in need, and a new beginning for many Muslims (S. Abdul Ahad, personal communication, April 15, 2022).

An important part of Ramadan is fasting which is done so people can empathize with those that are less fortunate. When people fast, they are thinking about and are grateful for their own abundance. As Muslims fast, they pray five or more times a day, at home or in a mosque (S. Abdul Ahad, personal communication, April 15, 2022).



At the end of Ramadan, there is a 3-day celebration called Eid Al-Fitr which means the festival of the breaking of the fast. The morning of Eid starts with a prayer and eating dates. Some people dress up, gather to enjoy a feast, treats, and exchange gifts. It is a time for self-reflection of the past month with family and community (S. Abdul Ahad, personal communication, April 15, 2022).

## Another holiday video creation—Ramadan

The following Spring, the ELL teachers released a second student- led video about Ramadan and Eid. Students were interviewed, and they were thrilled to share their personal experiences and knowledge about Ramadan and Eid. The district videographer visited the schools to put the video together. Since it took some time to compose the video, the ELL teachers were very appreciative of the final product. They also asked a colleague from the ELL department to join the video project to share her personal experiences about Ramadan and Eid. The video was shared as a resource to the school district. Families reached out to the teachers to share their gratitude, and express how they felt welcomed, celebrated, and honoured.

## What's next?

Looking into the future, Birdi, Ghuman and Chauhan are excited to collaborate again and create student-led videos that celebrate the diversity found in their schools.

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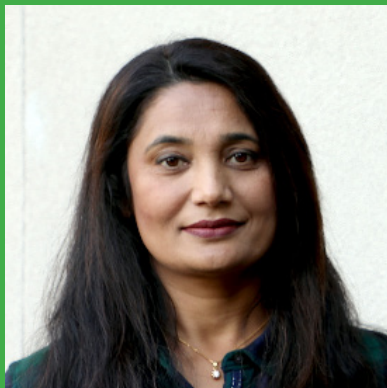
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Author Bios



Sukhdeep Birdi’s teaching career began in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She taught many different grades within the private and public school sector for over 15 years. She began in the English language learning teaching field in 2013 and has been working as an English language learner Specialist since then. From the very beginning, she always had a strong interest in teaching English and supporting newcomer students with their personal and academic areas. Presently, she works at an Elementary school in Maple Ridge, British Columbia.



Kawaldeep Ghuman started her teaching career at a private school and worked with primary students for about five years. During maternity leave, she moved to the Maple Ridge School district and started TTOCing in both elementary and secondary schools. While TTOCing, she found herself interested in the ELL teacher’s job because of the work with students and families with many different backgrounds and cultures. It was natural for her to connect with the ELL students and families because she speaks another language and had been in their shoes. It has been six years of teaching ELL and it remains her passion to continue working with English language learners.



Harjit Chauhan’s teaching career began over seventeen years ago as a teacher on call in both elementary and high schools. During her time teaching overseas in South Korea, she discovered that teaching English was her passion. When she returned, she began to teach in private schools and a few years later, made the transition to the public school system, where she was also able to use her first language Punjabi to work closely with families. She returned to university to obtain a TESL certificate, where she made the exciting leap as a classroom teacher to an English language learner specialist.

