

Ramayana Questions

Scene 1

What proof is there that the Indian Kingdom of Kosala has farming?

How many sons does King Dasharata have?

Scene 2

Why would Rama be the logical one to take over the throne instead of one of the three other brothers?

What three people go to live in exile?

Scene 3

What major geographical feature is referenced?

What part of India is it in?

What Aryan contribution to India is mentioned? (Hint: it has roots in Mesopotamia.)

Scene 4

What part of the caste system (think social pyramid) appears?

Who is Jatayu?

Scene 5

How does Ravana portray the Hindu belief of Karma?

What specific demons does Rama kill?

What specific demon(s) does Lakshmana kill?

The Ramayana (pronounced Rah-MY-yah-nah) is one of India's classic epic poems and was composed by a legendary holy man named Valmiki. The Ramayana is the story of the Hindu God Vishnu, who comes to earth as the human prince Rama. Vishnu is sent to earth to kill an evil demon named Ravana. Scholars believe that the Ramayana was probably written in the third century B.C.E., but that the poem has been changed and added to many times since. The poem consists of seven books and contains about 24,000 rhymed couplets.

The Ramayana is frequently dramatized throughout India and has had a profound influence on Indian literature. The Ramayana has historically been an engaging way for Hindus—particularly Hindu children—to learn about the fundamental beliefs of their religion.

Agni: AG-nee

Bharata: BAH-rah-tah

Brahma: BRAH-muh

Dasharata: Dah-shah-RAH-tah

Hanuman: HAH-noo-mun

Jatayu: Jah-TAH-yoo

Indrajit: Een-DRAH-jeet

Kaikiyi: KY-kay-yee

Kausalya: Cow-SAL-yah

Khara: CAR-ah

Kumbhakarna: KOOM-bah-KAR-nah

Lakshmana: LOCKSH-mah-nah

Rama: RAH-mah

Ravana: RAH-vah-nah

Sita: SEE-ta

Surpanakha: SOOR-pah-nah-kah

Vasishta: Vah-SEE-shta

Vishnu: VISH-noo

Reader's Theater Adaptation of the *Ramayana*, Scene 1

Narrator 1: King Dasharata was the ruler of the ancient Indian kingdom of Kosala and was kind, fair, and brave. His subjects loved him, for he had brought them great prosperity and happiness. However, King Dasharata himself was quite unhappy because he had no heir to his throne. Although he had three wives, he still had no children. In desperation he turned to his trusted holy man, Vasishtha, for advice.

King Dasharata: (*upset*) Why have the Gods been so cruel to me, Vasishtha? I have been a good king. The city's granaries are full. The treasury is overflowing with gold, and the land is at peace. Yet the Gods refuse to bless me with a son who can inherit my throne.

Vasishtha: ~~Your Highness, perhaps you should perform the sacrifice to the Gods asking for a son. Let me prepare a fire, and we will offer prayers. When the Gods gather at the sacrifice to receive your offerings, perhaps they will grant your request for an heir.~~

Narrator 2: Vasishtha prepared the fire, and the Gods gathered for the sacrifice. They realized that this might be their opportunity to rid themselves of the hateful demon king named Ravana. Agni, the God of fire, reminded the other Gods of the disgraceful conduct of this demon.

Agni: (*angrily*) We all know how terrible Ravana is! He torments the people on earth. He is so powerful that he can even humiliate the Gods! The sun does not burn him and the wind will not blow near him. Even the ocean does not stir when he appears. And we can do nothing to stop him because of that foolish wish you granted him, Brahma: that he could never be harmed by a God or a demon.

Brahma: (*apologetically*) But Ravana appeared so sincere when he stopped eating for long periods of time and prayed to me. I felt his devotion deserved some reward. I know I promised him that he could never be harmed by a God or a demon, but I never promised him that he would be safe from a human. Ravana never thought a human could harm him. After all, he has 10 heads and 20 arms. He can aim 10 bows at response to this prompt once and rain arrows down upon any mere mortal.

Agni: Then we must send a human to destroy Ravana. But I am not thinking of an ordinary human to kill him, but a very special one: a man with the powers of a God.

Narrator 1: Just then the great God Vishnu arrived. The Gods asked Vishnu to go to earth as a human, and he agreed.

Vishnu: (*proudly*) I will divide myself into four parts and be born as the four sons of King Dasharata. As the eldest son, Rama, I will become heir to the throne. It is true that I will not remember I am a God once I am human. But with the powers you give me and my courage, I shall still be able to defeat Ravana.

Narrator 2: The Gods were delighted with this plan. They turned their attention again to King Dasharata's sacrifice, which was just-beginning. The holy man, Vasishta, was conducting the ceremony.

Vasishta: Oh Gods, accept this fire and our prayers. Grant our noble king a son who will rule our kingdom with the same sense of duty as his father and bring prosperity to all the people.

Narrator 1: Suddenly, the huge figure of a holy man appeared in the flames. His face was dark, and he was dressed in red. Black hair fluttered behind him. In his hand he carried a bowl of rice pudding. He thrust the bowl toward King Dasharata and told him what he had to do. Vasishta helped the king understand.

Vasishta: King Dasharata, the Gods have heard your prayers and are pleased by your devotion. You must take the pudding and divide it among your wives for them to eat. They will each give you the son you desire.

Narrator 2: King Dasharata took the bowl, and the holy man disappeared.

King Dasharata: (*excitedly*) I must go immediately to my lovely wives. To my first wife I will give half the pudding. My second wife and third wife will split what remains.

Narrator 1: As promised, King Dasharata soon had four sons. The sons all contained the soul of Vishnu. His first wife, Kausalya, gave birth to Rama, the eldest son. The king's second wife blessed the king with twins, one of whom was called Lakshmana. The third wife, Kaikeyi, had a son named Bharata. The Gods were relieved, knowing that someday they would be rid of the evil demon Ravana.

Reader's Theater Adaptation of the *Ramayana*, Scene 2

Narrator: Rama's early years were spent learning the skills he would need to conquer the evil demon, Ravana. He studied the holy scriptures and learned to use magical weapons. When he was a young man, he married a beautiful princess named Sita. Rama's father was so pleased with his son that he decided it was time for the young man to take over the throne.

King Dasharata: I do not want Rama to wait until I die to become king. He is ready to rule now. I shall make immediate arrangements for his crowning ceremony.

Narrator: King Dasharata called his ministers together and announced that his eldest son would become king immediately. The king then informed his wives of his decision. ~~But Queen Kaikeyi, King Dasharata's favorite wife, had already been told of the king's intention by her maid.~~ The maid, who was a vicious woman, suggested that Rama would drive the queen and her son, Bharata, from the palace when he became king. Queen Kaikeyi was frightened and jealous. She asked to see the king.

King Dasharata: You asked to see me? Have you heard the wonderful news? Rama is to become king at once. He will make a fine ruler. But what is the matter? It appears as if you have been crying.

Queen Kaikeyi: (*upset*) My husband, remember many years ago when you were wounded in battle? You were dying, and I helped you to escape. I then took care of you until you were well. At that time, you promised me that you would grant me two wishes. Now I want you to fulfill that promise.

King Dasharata: Of course. A king must always keep his word. What is it you want?

Queen Kaikeyi: First, I want you to make my son, Bharata, king instead of Rama. For my second wish, I want you to send Rama to the forest for 14 years.

Narrator: The king was stunned. He could not understand why Queen Kaikeyi, who had always loved Rama, would ask such a thing. He argued with her.

King Dasharata: If I grant what you ask, I will never see Rama again. What terrible past deed has Rama or I done for this to have occurred?

Narrator: When the queen refused to reconsider, the grief-stricken king asked Rama and other members of the family to come to the throne room.

King Dasharata: (*sadly*) My dear son, Rama, I have something terrible to tell you. I must send you...I cannot speak. Kaikeyi, you must explain.

Queen Kaikeyi: (*angrily*) The king has changed his mind. He will appoint my son, Bharata, to be the king. You will be sent into the forest for 14 years.

Rama: (*confused*) I don't understand. How did I offend my father?

Queen Kaikeyi: Your father is honoring an old promise. A good king realizes it is his duty to keep his word no matter how painful. It would be best if you left at once.

Rama: Of course, I will do as my father orders. Sita, my beloved wife, I shall miss you terribly, but we will be together again someday.

Sita: (*begging*) Rama, please let me come with you into the forest.

Rama: But life is terrible in the forest. It is full of dangers. You would have to sleep on the forest floor and eat only fruits and plant roots.

Sita: I don't care. Life is nothing without you.

Rama: If you are so determined, you may come. Lakshmana, my brother, I shall miss you, but 14 years will pass quickly. Bharata is a good man. He will rule well.

Lakshmana: My brother, allow me to come too. I will protect you and Sita.

Rama: I welcome your company, Lakshmana. And now it is time for me to say good-bye to you, dear mother.

Queen Kausalya: (*upset*) I cannot bear to see you go while I remain here.

Rama: It is the son's duty to obey his father. I can do nothing else.

Queen Kausalya: Then let me also come with you. To be separated from one's child is a terrible fate.

Rama: Father needs you. He will die if you leave. Your place is here.

Queen Kausalya: Yes, that is true. It is right that I remain here.

Narrator: And so Rama, Lakshmana, and Sita left the palace and began their 14 years of exile.

Reader's Theater Adaptation of the *Ramayana*, Scene 3

Narrator: Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana left the palace, crossed the Ganga River, and journeyed deep into the Dandaka forest. Several months passed. One day Lakshmana saw their brother, Bharata, approaching with a large band of men. He called to his brother, Rama.

Lakshmana: (*excitedly*) Rama, it's Bharata coming with an army! He probably plans to kill you in order to make sure you do not return and remove him from the throne.

Rama: I don't believe that. Bharata is not an evil man. There must be some other reason for his journey.

Narrator: ~~When Bharata arrived, he greeted his brothers warmly and began to explain the purpose of his visit.~~

Bharata: Greetings, my brothers. I have sad news. Our father has died, heartbroken over your exile, Rama. You can return now and rule our kingdom. It is your right, and our people desire it.

Rama: No, father gave his word to your mother that I would not return to the kingdom for 14 years. It is my duty to see that his promise is kept.

Narrator: Bharata pleaded with Rama to change his mind, but Rama was determined to see that his exile, ordered by his father, was completed. Realizing that Rama could not be persuaded to return, Bharata held out a pair of golden sandals.

Bharata: Place these sandals upon your feet and then give them back to me. I will place the sandals on the throne as a symbol that you will someday return to the kingdom of Kosala to rule. Until that time, I will live outside the city and rule in your name.

Narrator: Rama did as Bharata asked, and Bharata returned home. Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana continued their life in the forest. One day, Surpanakha, an evil demoness, ~~spotted the three as they sat next to the small hut they had built.~~ Surpanakha was the sister of Ravana, the demon that the Gods had sent Rama to earth to destroy. Surpanakha immediately fell in love with Rama.

Surpanakha: I have never seen such a handsome man. I must marry him. If I change my appearance, perhaps he will have me.

Narrator: Surpanakha took the form of a beautiful woman and approached Rama, who was resting under a tree near the hut.

Surpanakha: Oh, sir, why have you chosen to live in the forest? Such an attractive man as you should enjoy the pleasures of life. Marry me, and together we will be indescribably happy.

Rama: (*sarcastically*) You honor me with your proposal, but, as you can see, I am already married. Perhaps my brother, Lakshmana, would be interested in your offer.

Lakshmana: (*to Surpanakha*) I am but a poor servant and certainly not worthy of you.

Surpanakha: (*furiously*) Is it because of that woman Sita, sitting over there, that you both reject me? I'll take care of that!

Narrator: Surpanakha rushed toward Sita.

Sita: (*terrified*) Help, Ramā! She's a demoness and will eat me.

Rama: (*shouting*) Lakshmana, quick! Stop her!

Narrator: Lakshmana drew his sword and cut off Surpanakha's ears and nose. Surpanakha turned into her true demon form and fled from the forest, screaming threats as she ran.

Surpanakha: You'll pay for this! My brothers will take revenge for the way you have treated me. Just you wait and see. You will be sorry for what you have done!

Narrator: Surpanakha immediately went to her brother Khara. She told him how Rama and his brother Lakshmana had humiliated her. Khara set off with an army to punish Rama.

Sita: (*frightened*) Rama, look! Thousands of demons with chariots are racing toward us. What can we do?

Rama: Lakshmana, take Sita into the cave. I can handle the demons.

Narrator: Lakshmana and Sita ran into the cave as Rama prepared to defend them. When the army neared, Khara shouted to Rama.

Khara: (*furiously*) I will teach you not to treat my sister in such a shameful way! I have come with an army of 14,000 demons. You will pay for insulting Surpanakha. Surely, you do not think you can defeat us by yourself?

Narrator: After a fierce battle, Rama destroyed all the demons sent to kill him. But Surpanakha still demanded revenge. She set out to find her other brother, Ravana, whom she was sure would help her.

Reader's Theater Adaptation of the *Ramayana*, Scene 4

Narrator: Surpanakha journeyed to the kingdom of Lanka where her brother Ravana was ruler. Bursting into his throne room, she shrieked that Rama's brother had disfigured her, and that Rama had killed Khara and destroyed his army. She blamed Sita, and explained that Sita was so beautiful that Rama had rejected Surpanakha's advances. Ravana decided he must have Sita for his own. Ravana asked his demon uncle to help him, and when they arrived at Rama's house, Ravana spoke.

Ravana: How beautiful Sita is! Now uncle, do as we agreed. Turn yourself into a small, lovely deer.

Narrator: The next moment, a golden deer with sad eyes appeared from behind a tree near Sita. ~~Sita was delighted and turned to Rama.~~

Sita: Oh please, Rama, capture that lovely deer for me.

Rama: No, I will not leave you. Besides, that deer is too lovely. I suspect it might be something other than it appears.

Narrator: But Sita insisted, and Rama agreed to try to capture the delicate creature. Before he left, however, he ordered Lakshmana to protect Sita. Rama chased the deer, which leapt deeper and deeper into the forest. Finally, when Rama was close enough to the animal, he raised his bow and shot it through the heart. As the deer was dying, it cried out Sita's and Lakshmana's names in a voice just like Rama's.

Sita: Lakshmana, did you hear that? It was Rama. You must go help him.

Lakshmana: I'm sure Rama is safe. He is strong and clever, and he ordered me to stay here and protect you.

Sita: (*pleading*) Please go! I will be fine, and your brother needs you.

Narrator: ~~Reluctantly, Lakshmana set off to find his brother. Before he left, however, he drew a circle around her.~~

Lakshmana: As long as you are inside the circle, you will be safe. Don't leave it!

Narrator: After Lakshmana left, Ravana, disguised as a holy man called a brahmin, approached Sita.

Ravana: Please do your duty and give a hungry brahmin some food?

Narrator: As Sita stepped out of the magic circle to prepare food for the holy man, Ravana seized her and revealed his true form.

Ravana: I am the 10-headed Ravana, ruler of the kingdom of Lanka. Come with me and be my bride. You will be my queen.

Narrator: Sita protested, but Ravana threw her into his chariot and sped toward his kingdom. Jatayu, king of the vultures, tried to stop the kidnapping. As he swooped toward the chariot, he shouted.

Jatayu: Stop, Ravana. It is wrong to steal another man's wife!

Narrator: But Ravana drew his sword and cut off the bird's wings.

Jatayu: I cannot help you, Sita, but I will tell Rama what has happened.

Narrator: Meanwhile, Rama and Lakshmana had returned to their small hut and found Sita missing. Frantically, the two searched the forest, asking all they met if they had seen Sita. Finally, they came upon Jatayu, who was dying.

Rama: Oh noble bird, have you seen my beloved wife, Sita?

Jatayu: (*weakly*) I tried to help, but Ravana was too powerful. It is he who has taken your wife.

Rama: (*desperately*) Where can I find this evil demon?

Jatayu: (*gasping*) I don't know, but he rules a kingdom called Lanka.

Narrator: Jatayu died in Rama's arms. Rama performed the sacred cremation ritual for the bird, for he believed that each living thing was part of the Supreme God and would be reborn into another life. As the two brothers continued their search, they met Hanuman, a monkey.

Lakshmana: Have you seen a beautiful woman being carried off in a chariot?

Hanuman: No I haven't, but this jewel necklace dropped from the sky. Is it of any help?

Rama: (*excitedly*) That necklace belongs to Sita. She must have dropped it to guide me. Can you help us find her?

Narrator: Hanuman agreed to help Rama search for Sita. Before Hanuman left, Rama gave the monkey his ring.

Rama: Show Sita this ring when you find her. It will prove to her that you are a friend.

Reader's Theater Adaptation of the *Ramayana*, Scene 5

Narrator 1: Hanuman and an army of monkeys and bears began searching for Sita. After a month, they met an old vulture who told them that Sita had been taken to the island kingdom of Lanka. Taking in a great breath, Hanuman flew into the sky, and landed in Lanka's capitol city. Hanuman wandered through the city until he found Sita alone in a grove of trees outside Ravana's palace. Sita was pale and weak, and she had given up hope of ever seeing Rama again. Hanuman dropped down beside her.

Hanuman: Don't be alarmed. I have been sent by Rama. He gave me this ring to give to you so that you will know this is not a trick.

Sita: (*upset*) But why has he not come? Ravana told me that if I do not marry him within a month, he will eat me. But I don't care. It is a wife's duty to be faithful, and besides, I could not live without Rama.

Hanuman: Rama doesn't know where you are, but he will come to rescue you soon. I must go now and tell him that you are here.

Narrator 2: Before Hanuman could escape the palace, however, members of Ravana's army discovered him. Hanuman fought courageously, crushing thousands of soldiers' skulls, but was finally captured and brought before Ravana. Proudly Hanuman delivered a warning.

Hanuman: I, Hanuman, son of the wind God, bring a message from Rama. Free his wife at once, or he will destroy you.

Ravana: (*furiously*) How dare you speak to me that way! I should have you killed, but it is bad luck to kill an enemy's messenger. (*calling out*) Guards! Set the monkey's tail on fire! (*to Hanuman*) I know how important your tail is to you. Your burned tail will disfigure you as my sister Surpanakha was disfigured.

Narrator 1: The guards tied rags soaked in oil around Hanuman's tail and set them on fire. They released the monkey, and Hanuman leapt from the palace and out over the city. Swinging his burning tail rapidly from side to side, he destroyed much of the city. Then he leapt back to the mainland where he reported to Rama that he had found Sita. Rama began preparations to attack Ravana. First, he began building a bridge to Lanka.

Ravana: (*surprised*) What is that I see in the distance? It looks as if a huge army of monkeys is building a bridge toward the island. Is that Rama leading the army? Guards—quick!—Wake my brother, Kumbhakarna. Tell him we will soon be attacked.

Narrator 2: The guards blew trumpets to awaken Kumbhakarna, a giant who slept six months of the year. He stumbled into the room.

Kumbhakarna: (*sleepily*) Why did you wake me? This had better be important.

Ravana: (*desperately*) We're being attacked! Rama has killed thousands of our soldiers. We will be destroyed!

Kumbhakarna: Well, since I don't suppose you would consider giving him back his wife, I guess I'll have to fight. To tell the truth, I'll enjoy drinking their blood after I kill them.

Narrator 1: Kumbhakarna thundered off to the battlefield, swinging his axe wildly through the air. His blows killed thousands of monkeys and bears. Then Rama took aim with his bow. His arrow sailed through the air and cut off the giant's head. When Ravana heard the news, he was grief-stricken and summoned his son, Indrajit.

~~**Ravana:** Indrajit, my brother has been killed. You must save our land.~~

Indrajit: (*boastfully*) I'll defeat Rama! I can become invisible, and I have a magical arrow that never misses its target and always returns to me.

Narrator 2: Indrajit entered the battle and rained arrows down upon Rama and his army. After hours of bitter fighting, Indrajit returned to the palace and announced his victory.

Indrajit: I have defeated the enemy, my father. All are either dead or wounded.

Narrator 1: But Indrajit did not know that Hanuman had healed the wounded with magic herbs. When spies reported that the army had recovered, Ravana ordered his son back to battle. This time Lakshmana shot off Indrajit's head with an arrow. It was now Ravana's turn to meet Rama. He put on his armor and 10 helmets and entered the response to this prompt battle.

Ravana: (*shouting*) Rama, retreat! My 20 arms can hurl 20 spears at you. I will cut you down with my mighty axe.

Narrator 2: But Rama killed Ravana with a single arrow. The Gods were at last free of the demon, and Rama was reunited with his wife Sita. The two returned to Kosala where Rama was crowned king. Their exile was over.