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# Sacred Places

A Multi-Faith Assembly

## About this assembly

A 15-minute KS2 assembly introducing one significant sacred site for each of five major faiths. Best with an image of each site projected. Designed to show that 'sacred place' means something similar across faiths — somewhere where people connect with their religion, their history, and each other.

## Opening — what makes a place special

'I want to ask you something. Have you ever been somewhere that felt special? Somewhere quiet, that mattered to you? Maybe a forest. A garden. A beach. A grandparent's house. Today I want to talk about the most special places in five world religions — places people travel hundreds or thousands of miles to visit. Places that have been important for thousands of years. Listen out for why each one matters.'

## Jerusalem (Judaism, Christianity, Islam)

'Some places are sacred to MORE than one religion. Jerusalem, in Israel, is sacred to three: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For Jewish people, Jerusalem was the home of their great Temple thousands of years ago. The Western Wall is what's left of it — a place where Jewish people pray, sometimes leaving small notes in the cracks of the stones. For Christians, Jerusalem is where Jesus was crucified and rose again. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre stands where Christians believe his tomb was. For Muslims, Jerusalem is the third-holiest city in Islam, after Makkah and Madinah. The Dome of the Rock is built where Muslims believe the Prophet Muhammad — peace be upon him — ascended to heaven. Three religions, one city, deeply important to all.' [If projecting: a wide shot of Jerusalem's old city.]

## Makkah (Islam)



'In the desert of Saudi Arabia stands the city of Makkah (also spelled Mecca). At its centre is a square stone building called the Kaaba — the holiest site in Islam. Muslims around the world face the Kaaba when they pray, five times every day. Once in their lives, if they are able, every Muslim is supposed to make a pilgrimage to Makkah. This pilgrimage is called Hajj. Around 2 million Muslims arrive each year, all wearing the same simple white clothing — to remind everyone that, before God, all people are equal. The pilgrimage is one of the largest gatherings of humans on Earth.' [If projecting: aerial view of Hajj.]

## **Bodh Gaya (Buddhism)**

'In northern India there is a small town called Bodh Gaya. There is a tree there — actually a descendant of an older tree — called the Bodhi Tree. About 2,500 years ago, a man called Siddhartha Gautama sat under that tree to think about how to end suffering. After 49 days, he had his great insight and became the Buddha. The exact spot where he sat has been a holy place for Buddhists ever since. Pilgrims come from across Asia to sit quietly there themselves, in the same place. Beside it stands a great temple, the Mahabodhi Temple, over 1,500 years old.' [If projecting: the Bodhi Tree at Bodh Gaya.]

## **Varanasi (Hinduism)**

'In northern India, on the banks of a great river called the Ganges, sits the ancient city of Varanasi. For Hindus, the Ganges is sacred — they believe its water is purifying. Varanasi is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, over 3,000 years old. Hindus come here to bathe in the river at sunrise. Many also come to be cremated when they die — Hindus believe being cremated by the Ganges helps free their soul from the cycle of rebirth. The city is full of temples — over a thousand of them. It is one of the holiest sites for around 1.2 billion Hindus worldwide.' [If projecting: the ghats at Varanasi at sunrise.]

## **Amritsar (Sikhism)**

'In northern India, in a place called Amritsar, sits one of the most beautiful temples in the world — the Harmandir Sahib, also known as the Golden Temple. Its top half is covered in gold. It sits on a small island in the middle of a sacred lake. It was built by the fifth Sikh Guru about 400 years ago. What makes it special isn't just the gold or the beauty. It is that ANYONE — Sikh or not, rich or poor, any religion or none — can come in. Doors face four directions, to welcome people from every corner of the world. The kitchen serves a free meal to anyone who arrives — over 100,000 people every day. It shows what Sikhism teaches: all people are equal.' [If projecting: the Golden Temple.]

## **Closing — what makes a place sacred**



'Different religions. Different stories. But notice — sacred places are usually places where something important happened. Where a great teacher lived. Where a community has prayed for thousands of years. Where ordinary people travel to feel close to something bigger than themselves. You don't have to be religious to understand that some places feel special. The forest you walked in. The grandparent's house you remember. The classroom you grew up in. We are all moved by certain places. That is part of being human. Whatever your tradition — respect the sacred places of others. They mean to those people what your special place means to you.'

