



## Global Education – Learning Emphases

- Interdependence and globalisation
- Identity and cultural diversity
- Social justice and human rights
- Sustainable futures

# LOY KRATHONG: A water festival in Thailand

A Stage 2 & 3 resource by Di Dunlop

### The story of Loy Krathong

The full moon day of the 12th lunar month (usually mid November) is the celebration of Loy Krathong, one of Thailand's most popular annual festivals.

The rainy season has ended and the rivers and canals are full to overflowing. For farmers the strenuous labour of ploughing and planting rice for the previous three months from dawn to dusk is now over. They have only a few short weeks to wait for the harvest and the time is filled with feasts and festivals, the main one being Loy Krathong. "Loy" means to float, and "Krathong" is a leaf cup usually made with a banana leaf. This floating leaf cup is decorated with flowers, incense, candles and often a small coin.

In Thai folklore four goddesses personify the elements of nature: Mae Pra Toranee (Mother Earth), Mae Pra Pai (Goddess of the wind), Mae Pra Plerng (Goddess of fire) and Mae Kong Ka (Mother Water). The festival of Loy Krathong gives thanks to Mae Kong Ka for her bounty in "providing water not only for drinking and washing, but also for the essential means of livelihood of most Thais: agriculture, fishing and transport. At the same time Loy Krathong is a request for Mae Kong Ka's forgiveness for having used and polluted the water. Many people believe that as their krathong floats away they have been forgiven by the Goddess of Water and that they have symbolically washed away their sins of the past year.

Loy Krathong is inseparable in Thai people's minds from the legend of a lady of the Sukhothai court some 700 years ago called Nang Nopamas (Lady Nopamas)

who created a very beautiful krathong in the shape of a lotus flower and presented it to King Pra Ruang (1238 AD) in honour of the three day royal ceremonies held to observe the festival. The king was so impressed with the exquisite beauty of this krathong that he praised Nang Nopamas profusely and ordered that on future occasions the lotus shaped krathong be made after the fashion of Nang Nopamas' handiwork.

In the evening, when the full moon begins to rise, people carry their krathongs to the banks of the waterways. After the candles and incense sticks have been lit, the krathong is gently pushed away onto the



Water fountain depicting Mae Pra Toranee. Source: Wikimedia Commons



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surface of the water. It is a magical time as the rivers and canals in Thailand glitter with the tiny candles of the colourful krathongs.

In the past, it was called Loi Krathong as Chong Pa Rieng – floating lantern of royal ceremony. It is a Brahman festival to worship Gods – Siva, Vishnu, and Brahma. When Thai people adopted Buddhism, they adapted this ceremony to honor the Buddhas cremated bone – the original Buddha at the second heaven ruler. They floated lanterns to worship the footprint of the Buddha on Nammathanati River beach in India.

## Loy Krathong – A personal story

My name is Ging and I am a girl of twelve. I live in Bangkok, the capital of Thailand, with my parents and my brother Gam, who is ten. Today Garn and I have come home with very little homework to do. Our teachers know we don't have much time since it is Loy Krathong Day.

Loy Krathong is my favourite festival. It takes place on the full moon night of the twelfth lunar month, which generally falls in the second half of November. Loy means 'to float\*' and krathong means leaf cups'. So this is the festival of floating leaf cups with lighted candles in them on rivers and canals.

Garn's favourite festival is Songkran, the water festival, which is gay and a lot of fun. But I prefer Loy Krathong because it is so much gentler and prettier, with the beautiful moon in the sky and hundreds of lights in the water.

You may wonder what the meaning of Loy Krathong is. To tell the truth, we are not very sure ourselves why we celebrate it. Some people believe that it is to ask



*Boy with offering. Source: Wikimedia Commons*

the pardon of the goddess of the water for having made the rivers and canals dirty throughout the year. Others say that it is an act of worshipping Buddhas footprint, which he left on the shores of the Nammada River. But one thing we do know is that it is an old festival, six or seven hundred years old, and it has been a joyful celebration for everyone for as long as that.

Anyway, the origins aren't really important to me. The important thing is to have a nice krathong of my own. So here I am, sitting with my old nanny, with lots of banana leaves and other things needed for making krathong. My old nanny, who up to this year has always made a krathong for me, says that I must now make one myself. So I will try to make a krathong you have first to cut two round pieces out of a banana leaf. My hands are not very steady with a knife and I have wasted several leaves before cutting two perfectly round pieces. With the two circles one on top of the other, I make a five-cornered cup, fastening each seam with a sharp bamboo pin. I am quite pleased with my cup really, but Nanny takes one look at it, sighs, and says that it will never float properly since it is lopsided. So she gives in and makes me another cup, decorating the edgess with strips of banana leaf sewn on with needle and cotton. She lets me stick jasmine and everlasting flowers along the edges, and then we stuff the centre of the krathong with small pieces of banana trunk. We cover these with a piece of leaf, and in the middle we put incense sticks, one slim candle and three gardenias, which smell heavenly!

My krathong is now finished but as we still have lots of banana leaves left over, Nanny says she will quickly make some simple cups for the cook to put steamed fish soufflé in. I want her to make some tiny square ones for



*Making a Loi Krathong. Source: Wikimedia Commons*

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*Families floating krathong rafts during the Loi Krathong festival in Chiang Mai, Thailand Source: Wikimedia Commons*

the delicious nut pudding, but she says firmly that she has quite enough to do!

Now Garn comes bouncing in with an enormous krathong made of bright green tissue paper in the shape of a house. He has just bought it from the corner shop and is so pleased with it. But I am sure it will catch fire as soon as he lights the candles in it. As usual he's got a large supply of fireworks and some bangers which I hate. But, as Nanny says, boys will be boys, I suppose.

Soon our friends and relations come. As our house is on a canal, we invite our cousins and friends to come and float their krathong with us. With so many guests tonight, dinner is filled with lively conversation.

After dinner we go out to our *sala*, the little wooden house built on the edge of the canal. The table in the *sala* is covered with krathongs of all shaped and sizes. I see some traditional krathong like my own, but many people, like Garn, want to be different. Nid, my friend from across the street, has a beautiful white lotus made of lily leaves. Garn's best friend has carved a barge out of a banana tree and decorated it with flags and tassels. But the sweetest one of all is a simple boat made from a piece of coconut husk belonging to

Oy, our cook's two-year-old daughter. She can hardly talk yet, but she knows the Loy Krathong song: 'Loy, loy! krathong! Loy, loy krathong! Let's all come, loy krathong...'

While we all join Oy in the singing, the moon has risen in the clear, cloudless sky. Now it is time to float our krathong. Garn runs to the bank and sets his on the water. I make a wish as I carefully set mine on the water. My dear Aunt Charu, who has been studying in Europe for over a year, come home soon! It is said that if the light in your krathong lasts until the krathong disappears, your wish will come true. So I keep my eyes on my krathong, which drifts further and further, its little light still shimmering, until it disappears from view. 'Oh! My wish will come true! Aunt Charu will come home soon!'

While I am still dreaming of Aunt Charu, a sudden 'Bang, bang' startles me. Garn and his friends have started the fireworks. We are lucky this year to have a lot of 'falling rain', a special kind of firework which comes in earthen-ware pots from Chiang Mai, our northern capital. When all the fireworks are lit at once the whole garden looks like a fairyland. But soon the boys' supply runs out and the place becomes dark and peaceful again.



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The moon is now high, just over the pointed roof of our sala, which casts a beautiful silhouette on the lawn. The water on the canal looks silvery, dotted with little flickering lights. Music is heard, faintly, from afar. I stand up and walk towards the house. I think I will write to Aunt Charu tonight to tell her all about Loy Krathong this year.

## Activities

Read the Fact Sheet and the Personal Story and answer the following questions.

- What is Loy Krathong ?
- When is it held? Why?
- On a map mark in and name the countries in which it is celebrated. Mark in the cities mentioned in this unit.
- What is Songkrau and what is its purpose?
- What is done with the Krathong? Why?
- Read the personal story and play the wonderword.

- Go to [www.thaibis.com](http://www.thaibis.com) and make a krathong.
- Investigate DIWALI (see Asia Journal Vol 42, No.4 Diwali in India) and complete a compare/contrast table with LOY KRATHONG.
- Make a Loy Krathong Lantern using the instructions on the following worksheet.
- What is the purpose of incense?
- Explain why you think people build houses on canals.
- Investigate the ways people make their living on a canal.
- When do you make wishes in your culture?
- Research the origin and uses of fireworks.
- Discuss the impact on the canals and rivers when Loy Krathong are made from Styrofoam and not banana leaves.
- Research the beliefs of Buddhism in Thailand.
- Imagine you were in Thailand when Loy Krathong was celebrated. Write a letter to a friend explaining what you saw and how it affected you.



*The morning after the Loy Krathong festival, Thailand. Source: Wikimedia Commons*

## LOY KRATHONG: A water festival in Thailand

### Worksheet one – Loy Krathong wonderword

Y	B	A	N	A	N	A	N	O
E	U	D	N	E	I	R	F	G
A	D	S	P	R	I	V	E	R
R	D	I	N	C	E	N	S	E
C	H	R	Q	O	P	K	T	E
B	A	N	G	K	O	K	I	N
O	O	N	T	U	W	M	V	N
A	X	Y	D	V	L	E	A	F
T	L	O	Y	L	S	A	L	A
S	K	R	O	W	E	R	I	F

**Bangkok**  
**Festival**  
**River**  
**Buddha**  
**Leaf**  
**Boat**

**Banana**  
**Incense**  
**Candle**  
**Green**  
**Fireworks**  
**Friend**

**Moon**  
**Sala**  
**Year**  
**Loy**  
**Boy**  
**Kin**



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## Worksheet two – How to make a Loy Krathong lantern

To build your own Loy Krathong lantern, follow these steps:

### Supplies:

- 1 piece of 42cm x 15cm tissue or rice paper
- 2 strips of cardboard 42cm x 3cm
- 1 piece of string, about 30cm long
- 1 wooden craft stick, about 30cm long
- Glitter and cutouts for decoration
- Glue, Scissors and Stapler

### Instructions:

1. Decorate one 42cm x 15cm piece of tissue or rice paper with glitter, cutouts, drawings or verses of your choice.
2. Glue the two strips of cardboard to the tissue paper – one at the bottom and one at the top.
3. Form the tissue paper into a cylinder and staple along the seam.
4. Tie the string to the wooden stick, leaving about 15cm of string on either side.
5. Staple both ends of the string to opposite ends of the top of the cylinder.
6. Hang and enjoy!



Source: <http://www.wmu.com/index.php?q=blog/children/misc/loy-krathong-lantern>



*Fire lanterns rise skyward during the Loy Krathong festival Thailand. Source: Wikimedia Commons*