



## Donkeys in Religion & Culture

**Donkeys feature in the history of many religions, including Islam, Christianity and Hinduism.**

### STUDENT INTRODUCTION

- ▶ What can you discover about how donkeys feature in these religions? How have they featured in cultures around the world?
- ▶ When you've read the texts, fill in the table on page 2.

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roads. To carry lots of things a team of donkeys were tied together, with the owner leading the first one. It was helpful that the donkey walked at about the same speed as a human.

The donkeys were also used to carry people, both rich and the poor. For example Mary rode a donkey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a distance of 110 kilometres or 70 miles. Royalty rode donkeys when they wanted to show that their activities were peaceful. This was because horses could be used in war and this connected them to fighting. There was a prophecy that a king would come to Jerusalem and the people would recognise him because he would arrive in peace and humility.

### Donkeys in the Hindu Religion

Donkeys are referred to many times in the writings and imagery of the Hindu religion. In Hinduism, the goddess Kaalaaatri's Vahan (vehicle) is a donkey. Donkeys also appear multiple times in Indian folklore as the subject of stories in both the Hitopadesh and the Panchatantra.

### Donkeys in the Quran

The word 'donkey' appears four times in four verses in the Quran (Mohsin Khan translation). Donkeys are shown as supporting man as transport and as 'adornment'. They are shown to bear great burdens, but it is also suggested that they are lacking in intelligence. Donkeys are also shown as 'wild' and 'frightened.'

### Donkeys in Other Cultures

Donkeys are referred to in myth and folklore around the world; a donkey was the symbol of the Egyptian Sun god Ra as well as the Greek god Dionysus. Donkeys (or asses) are mentioned often in the Bible, throughout both Old and New Testaments, and became a part of Judeo-Christian tradition. Donkeys are often portrayed as work animals, used for farming purposes. Donkeys are found in the works of Homer, Aesop and Apuleius, where they are often presented as stupid and stubborn, and often representing the lower class. They are often contrasted with horses which are seen as powerful and beautiful. Horses were represented in the context of war, ridden by cavalry or pulling chariots.

Owners were protected by law from losses caused by death of or injury to their donkey - this shows they were very valuable. Turning points in Bible stories are often shown by using donkeys - leading, saddling, or mounting/dismounting a donkey show a changing focus or a decision being made.

Around 1400 AD, one doctor listed riding backwards on a donkey as a cure for scorpion stings!

Using the Information on page 1, complete the table!

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Religion/Culture?	How are they described?	What are they used for?	Are they seen positively or negatively?	Other interesting things?
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**Research Task!**

- ✓ Find a picture on the internet that shows donkeys at work and explain what it shows.
- ✓ Stick the picture below and annotate it with your ideas.



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**Extension Question:** Can you work out which story is shown in the picture on page 1?

