Bhutan
Land of the Thunder Dragon
from
Mystic Lands Series

catalog # 2035
Mystic Lands, a 13-part documentary series, takes the viewers on an incomparable journey of discovery to some of the world’s most unique spiritual places. From the cloud-shrouded majesty of Peru’s Machu Picchu to the pagoda-studded plains of Myanmar’s Bagan, and from the architectural grandeur of India’s Taj Mahal to the simplicity of a rural Haitian village’s vodou hounfor (temple), Mystic Lands explores the allure of these sacred spaces and vividly documents their continued powerful influence on the daily lives of countless believers. The Mystic Lands series, in its artistic blending of the past and present, details the legends, mysteries, history, and facts that surround these great spirit lands of the world. Intended for grades 9-12, the series highlights the “living faith” embodied in the architecture, expressive arts, contemporary spiritual practices, lifestyle, people, and cultures that surround these spiritual sites today.

Through worldwide, on-location, live-action video, original illustrations, maps, excerpts and translations of sacred writings and oral traditions, as well as interview footage, Mystic Lands acquaints the viewers with the world’s “sacred geography,” identifying the mystical sites, temples, holy cities, places of pilgrimage, prophets, gods and beliefs that have molded the world’s diverse spiritual traditions. Mystic Lands is narrated by acclaimed actor Edward James Olmos and features original music by international recording artist Chris Spheeris.

Programs in this series are ideal for use in multi-cultural studies. Viewers will gain an appreciation for cultural diversity and become more globally conscious through learning about religious differences, how other societies relate to the natural world, and lifestyles totally different than their own.
Titles in the series include:

**Anasazi - The Ancient Ones**
The mysteries of the Anasazi culture from America’s southwest desert unfold through their myths and legends. Sunbaked ruins, broken pottery sherds, elaborate road systems, ceremonial great houses and kivas weave an amazing tale of the spiritual life of this great Native-American culture.

**Australia - Dreamtime**
The legends, ceremonies, songs, dances, sacred beliefs, and aspects of everyday life of Australia’s indigenous Aboriginal Anangu and Tiwi tribes are explored. These native people see the landscape as a living embodiment of the myths and stories of their creation—an age of legendary heroes called “the Dreamtime.”

**Bali - Island Of A Thousand Temples**
On the magical island paradise of Bali, religion and spirits blend themselves into all aspects of Balinese life. The Balinese spiritual beliefs are richly expressed through their arts. Delicate weavings, intricate carvings, vivid paintings and imaginative dances are an integral part of Balinese life.

**Bhutan - Land Of The Thunder Dragon**
In this secluded Himalayan Kingdom, Buddhism is not just a religion; it is a way of life. From fluttering prayer flags to the rhythmic spin of prayer wheels, worship to Lord Buddha permeates every aspect of life in Bhutan.

**Burma - Triumph Of The Spirit**
Burma (Myanmar) is a devout Buddhist nation struggling to find its way in today’s post-industrial world. This reclusive country, graced by golden pagodas and teak temples, is considered one of the last magical destinations in the Orient. The spiritual life of Burma is explored through its historic religious sites.

**Egypt - Cycle Of Life**
Rising from the windswept desert sands along the banks of the life-giving Nile, the great pyramids of Egypt rise to the heavens—eternal monuments in stone to the pharaohs’ quest for immortality. This program delves into the complex culture of Ancient Egypt and its rich spiritual traditions.
Greece - Isle Of Revelation
From the majestic Athenian Acropolis to the cloud-shrouded top of Mount Olympus, Greek ruins dot an epic landscape. Greece was once home to a powerful pantheon of gods, but a new religion, a legacy of the historic visits of the Christian disciples John and Paul, shattered the old myths and still shapes the faith of Greece today.

Haiti - Dance Of The Spirit
Dispelling the myths and preconceptions that surround the practice of Vodou, this provocative episode dramatically explores the truth and beauty of mystical Haitian Vodou spirituality through fantastic dance and fire ceremonies.

Jerusalem - Mosaic Of Faith
Claimed by three living religions, Jerusalem is perhaps the most spiritually charged city in the world. The historic and mystic roots of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism unfold in an exploration of this ancient city of faith.

Maya - Messages In Stone
The mysterious cities of the Maya–Tikal, Chichen Itza, and Palenque–are explored, focusing on the legends, history and facts derived from the “rock records” left by the ancient Maya. Human sacrifice is explained through Maya religious beliefs.

Peru - Kingdom In The Clouds
Considered to be the most significant archaeological site on the South American continent, Machu Picchu was built and then abandoned by the Inca after only 100 years. The influence of the Inca spiritual beliefs on their lifestyle, architecture and astronomical achievements will be explored in the ruins of Machu Picchu and the spiritual centers of Peru’s Sacred Valley, including Ollantaytambo and Pisac.

Taj Mahal - Heaven On Earth
Located in Agra, India, the Taj Mahal is a complex of gardens, mosques, and minarets constructed as a tribute to Shah Jahan’s wife, Mumtaz Mahal, after her death. In his grief, Shah Jahan vowed to build the most beautiful tomb that ever existed. The spiritual motivations behind the building of the Taj Mahal and the ghost city of Fatehpur Sikri will be highlighted.
Varanasi - City Of Light
Located on the banks of India’s great river Ganges, Varanasi is considered by Hindus to be the holiest place on earth. The eternal city of Varanasi has been a center of enlightenment and civilization for more than 2,000 years. The spiritual and cultural aspects of the Hindu faith continue to define this sacred city. Rituals and beliefs surrounding death by cremation and the end of the cycle of reincarnation are explored.

Each program in the Mystic Lands series includes one video, the average length is approximately 25 minutes; a Teacher’s Guide with lesson plans, suggested student activities, Internet listings, and script; and a set of reproducible blackline masters for classroom use.

INSTRUCTIONAL NOTES
It is suggested that you preview the video and review this teacher’s guide before involving your students in the lesson activities. In this way you will become familiar with the materials and be better prepared to adapt them to the needs of your students. You may find it necessary to make some changes, deletions or additions to fit the specific needs of your class. We encourage you to do so, for only by tailoring this program to your students will they obtain the maximum benefits afforded by the materials.

It is also suggested that the video presentation take place before the entire group under your supervision. The lesson activities grow out of the content of the video; therefore, the presentation should be a common experience for all students.
Bhutan - Land of the Thunder Dragon  
from the Mystic Lands Series  
Viewing Time: 26 minutes  
Grades 9-12

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM

Hiding in the shadows of the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayan Mountains lies the tiny Buddhist Kingdom of Bhutan. Nestled between India and China, Bhutan is a country that has chosen not to keep pace with the industrialized world. Rather, Bhutan has maintained its cultural and spiritual heritage. It is a land where the people are fiercely independent and proud of their traditions.

Surrounded by nations beset with economic and social problems, Bhutan, in contrast, is a privileged land that many compare to the mystical Shangri-la. Agriculture and livestock are the backbone of Bhutan’s economy. The Bhutanese people labor hard in the fields and there is little or no help from modern equipment to ease their chores. Religious festivals and pilgrimages fuel the spirits of the Bhutanese people and provide time for both rest and celebration. The Lamaist form of Mahayana Buddhism is the official state religion, but for the people of this secluded Himalayan kingdom, Buddhism is more than a religion, it’s a way of life. The landscape is dotted with a menagerie of spiritual symbols. Chortens (commemorative monuments) rise from the hillsides, prayer flags flutter in the breeze, and prayer wheels, turned by the rushing waters of mountain streams, stand like sentinels at the entrance of most monasteries. Worship to Lord Buddha permeates every aspect of life in Bhutan.

In this program, shot on location in Bhutan, Bhutan’s otherworldly beauty and sacred culture are highlighted. Bhutan’s history, culture, and the spiritual nature of its people are explored through its ancient legends, expressive rituals and ceremonies, dramatic dances, elaborate festivals, impressive monasteries, and intricate works of art.
PROGRAM GOALS

The overall goals of this program are to…

• Provide an introduction to Bhutanese Buddhism, highlighting the unique nature of its legends, rituals, festivals, dances, and monasteries.

• Document how spiritual beliefs and practices influence every aspect of Bhutanese daily life.

USES OF THE PROGRAM

This program can be used in a variety of ways and in different courses of study. The lesson activities focus on the following:

Cultural Studies
Religion
Geography
History

A thematic approach is suggested, but not required, in order to achieve the student objectives and thereby accomplish the program goals.

STUDENT OBJECTIVES

After viewing *Bhutan - Land of the Thunder Dragon* and participating in the lesson activities, the students should be able to…

• Explain the role of spirituality in the daily lives of the Bhutanese.

• Discuss the role and importance of Guru Rinpoche in Bhutan’s history.

• Describe monastic life and the role monks play in the everyday life of the Bhutanese people.

• Describe the Tshechu festivals and the significance of their sacred dances.

• Give examples of some of the basic beliefs of Tantric Buddhism as practiced in Bhutan.
INTRODUCING THE VIDEO/BLACKLINE MASTERS

• Map Activity: On a large wall map point out the Himalayan Mountains and Bhutan’s location between India and China. Note its proximity to Tibet.

Explain that Bhutan is a small, secluded, and mountainous country that has deliberately chosen to move slowly into the future to insure the survival of its rich spiritual culture. As recently as 1961 there were no telephones, no post offices, no newspapers, no village schools, no hospitals, no movie theaters, and no airports in Bhutan. The country’s first paved road was not completed until 1962. Even today, Western style businesses are almost non-existent outside of Thimphu, the capital city which has a modest population of just 25,000.

• To spark interest, ask a few leading questions. For example...

1. What do you already know about Bhutan—its history, religion, creative arts, culture, and/or the lifestyle of its people?

2. What issues do you feel the Bhutanese face as they try to hold onto their age-old culture and move their country toward economic development?

3. How might learning about a society’s spiritual beliefs and practices make a difference in developing an understanding of its culture?

4. What ideas do you have about the religion of Buddhism?

• Provide a brief summary of key Buddhist beliefs:

According to tradition, the founder of Buddhism was Siddhartha Gautama, a prince, then ascetic, who lived approximately from 563 to 483 B.C. There are two distinct types of Buddhism—Theravada and Mahayana—which come from a common root. The Theravada or “doctrine of the elders” school holds that to achieve nirvana, the spiritual state of enlightenment that is the aim of every Buddhist, you must “work out your own salvation with diligence.”

The Mahayana, or “large vehicle” school holds that individuals should renounce the experience of nirvana until all humankind is ready for
salvation. The Mahayana goal is to become a bodhisattva, one who has almost reached nirvana but who foregoes it in order to help others attain it.

- **Key Concepts:**
  Three pillars or main concerns: Wisdom—grasping the Four Noble Truths and resolving to observe them; Morality—expressed in the Five Ethical Principles; Meditation—liberation, mind control and the cessation of sense experience.

Three characteristics (marks) of all reality: Dhukkha, suffering; Anicca, impermanence; Anatta, insubstantiality (the idea of a permanent, unchanging ego as the basis of individual personality is a myth).

Four Noble Truths: All life is suffering. The cause of suffering is desire. Removing desire removes suffering. The way to remove desire is to follow the Noble Eightfold Path.

Five Ethical Principles: Not to kill, lie, steal, be unchaste, take intoxicants.

Eightfold Path: Right speech, right action, right livelihood, right exertion, right attentiveness, right concentration, right thought, and right understanding.

For the Bhutanese Buddhist, the path to nirvana is an individualistic journey from suffering and sorrow to enlightenment. The consequences of one’s thoughts and actions (karma) exert a powerful influence as an individual moves through the cyclical process of birth, death, and rebirth. Right living and acts of merit may mitigate karmic fate. Only by reaching a state of complete enlightenment and non-desire can one reach true happiness. To achieve enlightenment, an individual must turn inward and master one’s own mind through meditation.

- Distribute Blackline Master 1, *Vocabulary Guide*. This will help acquaint viewers with some of the unusual terminology used in the videotape presentation. It is suggested that this list be duplicated and distributed before viewing the program.

- Distribute Blackline Master 2, *Viewer's Guide*. It is recommended that you duplicate and distribute this before viewing the program. Some questions may require additional reading. Have viewers answer the questions, either while watching the video, or shortly after the video
presentation. You may want to divide the group into smaller units, assign each group certain questions, and share answers with the entire group.

• Present the video. The viewing time is 26 minutes.

• Blackline Master 3, Word Match, allows students to use some of the terms introduced in the video. It can be used as an in-class activity or as a take-home assignment.

• Blackline Master 4, Quiz. This quiz may be taken immediately following the video, or at a later date after viewers have participated in other follow-up activities. The quiz is a brief check on what the viewers have retained from this lesson.

FOLLOW-UP DISCUSSION

Immediately after viewing the video, ask for questions and comments about the content of the video.

• Use Blackline Master 2, Viewer's Guide, as a basis for a discussion of the information presented in the video. If the discussion leads to details that were not covered in the video, you may want to have the students or groups of students research the subject and report back to the class. An answer key for the Viewer's Guide is provided beginning on page 12 of this guide.

Some additional suggested discussion questions are:

1. How do you think the spiritual beliefs of the Bhutanese are reflected in the dramatic dances performed at the Tshechus?
   Answer: Answers will vary. Emphasize that the Bhutanese still believe in the ancient spirits and that the powerful forces of good and evil are locked in continual battle. The masked jesters at the dance festivals remind spectators that demons can appear in many forms. The jester’s mystical power is said to guard against evil and destruction. The dramatic dances tell the tales of demons and deities and honor the spirit of Guru Rinpoche. Many of the dances tell of the victory of Buddhism over the demons and evil spirits. The ritual music of the dances invites the gods into this world. The Dance of the Judgment of the Dead depicts the story of the day of judgment and the reward for those who have faithfully followed Buddhist doctrine.
2. What is nirvana? How do Buddhists believe it can be achieved?
Answer: Nirvana is the attainment of final enlightenment and freedom from the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth called reincarnation. To break the cycle, one must work to achieve enlightenment.

3. What do you think might happen to the culture of Bhutan as the country is exposed to more and more visitors/tourists and other outside influences?
Answers will vary.

4. Do you agree with the statement, "In Bhutan, Buddhism is not just a religion, but a way of life"? Why or why not?
Answers will vary. Emphasize that Bhutan is a country unified by its faith. Chortens and prayer flags dot the landscape. Prayer wheels at sacred temples are spun continuously. For centuries, one person from every Bhutanese family devoted their life to Buddhism by becoming a monk or nun. Thousands gather at the tschechu festivals. The monks play a central role in community life. Each home has at least an altar set with offerings to the gods. Each major life event is celebrated by a religious ceremony.

5. Can you think of any other cultures that use dance as a means of storytelling and reinforcing their spiritual beliefs and traditions?
Answers will vary. Some examples include Bali, Australian Aborigine, Native American and African tribal communities.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES AND PROJECTS

1. You may choose to assign individuals or groups to research and prepare written or oral reports on the following topics:

- Symbolism of cosmic mandalas
- Buddhist cosmology
- Jigme Singye Wangchuck, became king in 1974
- Dzongs and monastic life
- Prayer flags and prayer wheels
- Guru Rinpoche
- Bhutanese music and musical instruments
- Thangkas
- Siddharta Gautama (c. 563-c.483 B.C.) founder of Buddhism

Work with the school librarian. Have her pull books and other resource materials related to different aspects of the culture, history, religion, and/or customs of Bhutan. If possible, have the materials avail-
able in your classroom. Distribute a list of materials available through the school library/media center.

2. Have the students create their own interpretations of Bhutanese dance masks. Display finished masks in the classroom or special display case.

3. Have the students draw their own version of a mandala and then describe its symbolism to the class. Display finished artwork in the classroom.

4. Break the group into smaller units and have each group prepare an oral presentation and visual display on a different aspect of Bhutanese creative arts, such as dance and drama, painting, thangkas, weaving, tormas, and sculpture.

**EXTENDED LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

You may choose to assign individuals or groups to research and prepare written or oral reports on the following topics:

- Trace the movement of Buddhism from India and Tibet to Bhutan noting any evolution and cultural personalization as it passes from country to country.
- Symbolism and significance of the sacred dances. This can be broken down to individual dances, the masks, and/or costumes.
- The Bhutanese sacred dance-dramas teach the lore and the values of Himalayan Buddhism. Compare and contrast them to the sacred dances of another culture, such as any specific Native American, African, or Australian Aboriginal native group.
- Rituals, holidays and scriptures of Tibetan Buddhism.

**INTERNET ACTIVITIES**


This website lists facts about the country's geography, people, government, economy, transportation, communication, defense forces, and a map. Discuss the differences between this country and others around the world. How do the country’s features contribute to its position within the world economy? Given the background that was in the video, how does the country's spirituality contribute to its overall character?
2. Check out the homepage of **Thunder Dragon Kingdom of Bhutan** at
http://www.wellmet.or.jp/~mi_koba/index_e.html
This site offers a fascinating study of modern Bhutan culture, which is
very carefully guarded by the government of His Majesty the King of
Bhutan. This website showcases many beautiful photographs (follow
the link to Bhutan) and can be viewed in Japanese or English. Use the
facts presented here to explore the effects of controlling a population's
access to global technology and immigration. What are the cultural
differences between a country like Bhutan and one like the United
States, which allows widespread immigration and infiltration of tech-
nologies?

**ANSWER KEY**

Blackline Master 2, Viewer's Guide
1. What religion is practiced by the majority of the Bhutanese people?
   Answer: Buddhism. More specifically, Tantric Buddhism, a sect of Buddhism
   which is less orthodox and blends traditional Buddhism with folklore and magic.

2. Who is Guru Rinpoche? What legends are associated with him?
   Answer: He was a monk and Buddhist missionary from India. According to
   legend, Guru Rinpoche, the reincarnation of Buddha, came to Bhutan from
   India on the back of a flying tiger. He meditated in a mountain cave for three
   months. The cave is now surrounded by the Tiger’s Nest monastery and is
   one of the most revered sites in the Buddhist world. He is credited with intro-
   ducing Tantric Buddhism to Bhutan. The Bhutanese also believe that he per-
   formed miracles in subduing the forces of evil.

3. What are some beliefs associated with Bhutanese Tantric Buddhism?
   Answer: They believe in reincarnation, the endless cycle of birth, death, and
   rebirth. They believe in demons and evil spirits. They believe that all aspects
   of life are meaningful but that meditation enhances the quest toward enlight-
   enment. They believe that the turning of prayer wheels sends out appeals to
   the Buddha on behalf of those who are ill, deceased or suffering from misfor-
   tune. They believe that prayer flags have strong ritual power—each flutter of
   the flag in the wind sends forth a prayer. They believe that chortens help ward
   off evil demons.

4. What are the origins of the name Druk Yul for the country of Bhutan?
   Answer: When a Tibetan monastery was being dedicated in the 12th century,
   thunder was heard rolling off the mountains. The people believed that the
   thunder was druk, the voice of the dragon. The monastery became known as
   Druk and its religious school Drukpa. By the 17th century, when the Drukpas
   had united the country, they called it Druk Yul, Land of the Thunder Dragon.
5. In Buddhist tradition how does one break the cycle of reincarnation?
   Answer: Buddhists believe that to break the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth one must work to achieve enlightenment.

6. How are prayer wheels and mantras used?
   Answer: They are used to help focus meditation. Spinning the prayer wheel is seen as an act of piety.

7. What is the role of monks in Bhutanese society? What is their life like?
   Answer: The monks carry out daily and seasonal rituals. They perform ceremonies to mark events in the lives of people such as birth, marriage and death. The monks lead a life of devotion, humility, abstinence, and continuous study. They take a vow of celibacy at 14 and are ordained at 20. They are free to renounce their vows at any time to start a family. Many families have at least one member who becomes a monk or nun. Parents feel good about having a monk in the family for they know that there is someone who can be relied on to pray and perform ceremonies on their behalf.

8. Why is the Bhutanese landscape blanketed with prayer flags and chortens?
   Answer: It is a tangible demonstration of the all encompassing nature of their faith life. The Bhutanese believe that as the prayer flags move in the wind, they carry prayers directly to the ancient deities. They also believe that the chortens help ward off evil demons that still haunt the land.

9. What are tshechus? How are they celebrated? What do they commemorate?
   Answer: They are monthly festivals held at various dzongs. They are celebrated with music, sacred dances, food, and fun. Tormas, sacred sacrificial cakes, are made and offered to the spirits. Ancient silk thangkas are unveiled.

10. What is the purpose of the dances performed during the tshechus?
    Answer: Each dance tells a story. Some teach a moral lesson; some are performed to purify and protect a place from evil demons.

Blackline Master 3, Word Match
1. B  6. A
2. J  7. G
3. E  8. H
4. F  9. D
5. C  10. I
Blackline Master 4, Quiz
1. To help focus meditation.
2. Tiger's Nest or Taktsang Monastery
3. (Tantric) Buddhism
4. Torma
5. Chorten
6. Dzong
7. They believe that they must work to achieve enlightenment.
8. They are very important religious celebrations—a chance to refuel their spirits and prove their religious fervor. They also provide a needed break from the rigors of daily existence and offer an opportunity to gather and have fun. The dances are very popular and dramatically and expressively portray important spiritual themes while reinforcing key beliefs.
9. Guru Rinpoche
10. To make sure that "progress" does not destroy its age-old culture and rich spiritual traditions.
LIST OF RESOURCES/SUGGESTED READINGS


Hidden in the eastern reaches of the mighty Himalayas is an ancient world of magic and mystery. The land itself is sacred.

For centuries, spirits and demons ruled over treacherous peaks, impenetrable canyons. Hauntingly powerful, they controlled wind, rain, forest and mountain.

When Buddhism arrived in the 7th century, it forever changed the tiny Kingdom of Bhutan, Land of the Thunder Dragon.

Until the mid-1960’s, few westerners had ever visited Bhutan, and those who had described this remote land as the mythical Shangri-la. For many, it’s an image that remains today.

Ninety five percent of the roughly one point two million Bhutanese live in rural areas, separated by rugged, nearly impassable, mountains.

Roughly the size of Switzerland, Bhutan is wedged between the world’s two most populous nations, China and India.

Even today, Bhutan is nearly untouched by the modern age. The country’s first paved road wasn’t completed until 1962, and houses are still built with the help of family and friends.

From tamping mud walls to planing the edges of a hand-cut board, the people have developed a communal approach to the needs of daily life.

Barter is still common, and western-style businesses are nearly impossible to find outside the capital city of Thimphu.

By most standards, Thimphu is little more than a village with fewer than twenty-five thousand residents and no traffic lights.

Despite the difficult terrain and scattered population, the Kingdom of Bhutan is unified by faith.

Here, Buddhism is more than a religion, it’s a lifestyle.
Many believe Buddhism first arrived in Bhutan in the 7th century, brought here by a Tibetan king. But the strength of Buddhism today rests on a single event almost a hundred years later.

According to legend, Guru Rinpoche, the reincarnation of the Buddha, came to Bhutan from India on the back of a flying tiger.

His journey took him to a mountain cave thousands of feet above the valley floor where he meditated for three months.

One of the most revered sites in the Buddhist world, the cave is now surrounded by Tiger’s Nest Monastery.

The origins of Buddhism date back to roughly 600 B.C. Twelve hundred years later, when Guru Rinpoche emerged from Tiger’s Nest, he introduced Bhutan to a sect known today as Tantric Buddhism. Considered less orthodox, it relies on a blending of traditional Buddhism with folklore and magic.

Ancient spirits are still celebrated, even worshipped, and the powerful forces of good and evil are locked in continual battle.

While consecrating a Tibetan monastery toward the end of the 12th century, the followers of the second Buddha, Guru Rinpoche, heard thunder rolling off the mountains. It was druk, the voice of the dragon.

The monastery became known as Druk, and the religious school that followed was called Drukpa.

By the 17th century, the Drukpas had unified the people of this tiny kingdom. They called it Druk Yul. Today, it is known as Bhutan.

Among the greatest legacies of the Drukpas is the formidable Drukyel Monastery.

Built in the shadow of the sacred Mt. Jhomolhari in 1647, Drukyel protected Bhutan from invasion for nearly 300 years. A fire ignited by a small butter lamp destroyed it in 1951.

Today, Drukyel lies in ruin, but similar monasteries still dominate the landscape. Called dzongs, these fortress-like structures are the center of local government and religion.
Dzongs are cloaked in mystery. Because public access is limited and cameras are not allowed inside, the world may never know the ancient treasures that lie within.

Throughout Bhutan, Buddhism is celebrated at various dzongs during monthly festivals called tshechus.

Loud and colorful, the tschechu attracts thousands of people from the surrounding countryside. They witness sacred dances and enjoy food and fun.

Masked jesters roam each festival, making fun of the more serious dramas. Their mystical powers are said to guard against evil and destruction. By mocking the pagentry, they also remind spectators that demons can appear in many different forms.

But at the heart of each tschechu is belief in Guru Rinpoche and the quest for spiritual enlightenment—the journey toward the blissful state of consciousness called nirvana.

Buddhists believe in the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth called reincarnation. To break the cycle, one must work to achieve enlightenment.

Many Bhutanese believe the work is as important as the achievement. All aspects of daily life are meaningful. But meditation, which is often characterized by ritual, enhances the quest.

Among the most common daily rituals is the turning of prayer wheels. At sacred temples, large wheels are spun continuously as an individual act of piety.

During meditation, they’re kept in constant motion. Some believe the turning wheels send out appeals to the Buddha on behalf of those who are ill, deceased, or suffering from misfortune.

Somewhat like a prayer, a mantra is a series of sacred syllables that devout Buddhists chant to focus their meditation.

Because mantras can be repeated in multiples of 100, many people count prayer beads to keep track of the number of mantras they’re reciting.

Though there’s little written history of Bhutan, the national library in Thimphu has preserved centuries of silk-wrapped Buddhist scriptures.
containing mantras. Inscribed in ink made from gold dust, these ancient texts date back several hundred years.

The practice of Tantric Buddhism is demanding, especially for monks. Ritual and meditation can last for days at a time as they pursue the study of mind over body on the path toward nirvana.

As part of spiritual life in Bhutan, monks carry out daily and seasonal rituals within and around the monastery. Theirs is a life of devotion, humility, and abstinence. Called Gelong, ordained monks are easily recognizable by their simple red robes and shaved heads.

Monks perform ceremonies for ordinary citizens to mark events such as birth, marriage, and death—the passage into the next life.

For centuries, one person from nearly every Bhutanese family has devoted their life to Buddhism by becoming a monk or a nun.

Monks take a vow of celibacy at age 14 and are fully ordained at 20. But they’re free to renounce their vows at any time to start a family.

Monastic life includes years of study and memorizing prayers. Until recently, all teaching in Bhutan was done at monasteries. Today, there are a few public schools that include academic and spiritual study.

The Painting School in Thimphu is dedicated solely to teaching Buddhist art. Silk murals, called thangkas, are painted by hand. Each is created anonymously as an act of devotion. They depict images of Guru Rinpoche, ancient deities, and cosmic diagrams called mandalas.

In a world ruled by faith in Guru Rinpoche, all knowledge and craft is sacred.

The Buddhist influence is nearly universal. It even affects the look of the landscape. Outside most homes, small clusters of prayer flags dance perpetually in the Himalayan wind.

Prayer flags have strong ritual power. Many are imprinted with mantras, some include the name and description of a family member who is sick or has died. Like the individual turns of a prayer wheel, each flutter sends forth a prayer carried by the wind directly to ancient deities.

Once raised, each flag is left to nature’s course and eventually shredded by wind and rain.
Prayer flags also surround the thousands of sacred shrines called chortens that dot the countryside. Most chortens are solid structures that house sacred relics. It’s believed they help ward off the evil demons that still haunt the land.

The origin of most monasteries and temples is equally mystical. According to legend, many were built to pin down a malicious “she-devil” whose evil blanketed the Himalayas.

But it was the power of Guru Rinpoche that truly harnessed the ancient spirits. The miracles he performed in subduing evil are celebrated at the annual Tshechu festival at the Paro Monastery.

As the full moon rises each April, thousands gather to witness dramatic dances—tales of deities and demons—a grand ballet honoring the spirit of Guru Rinpoche.

With the first light of a cool April morning, farmers, merchants, and laborers lay aside their daily tasks to celebrate Guru Rinpoche, the precious master.

They prepare for Tshechu in many ways. Some make the torma, a sacrificial cake created with rice dough and yak butter. The shape and color often symbolize a particular god.

The completed torma is an offering to the spirits called forth at Tshechu. It takes the place of human and animal sacrifices made in ancient times.

During the five days of Tshechu, ritual music invites the gods into this world. The festival begins under the watchful eye of the high lama, spiritual leader of the Paro Monastery.

According to legend, many of the festival dances were composed by Guru Rinpoche and other Buddhist saints more than a thousand years ago. Each dance tells a story. Some are dramas intended to teach a moral lesson. Some are performed to purify and protect a place from evil demons.

It can take hours to perform each drama, and dancers are often worked into a trance by the methodical rhythms of the music.

Tshechu can be a passionate, almost hypnotic, experience for spectators. Among the most affecting performances is the Dance of the Judgment of the Dead.
The mythical Lord of Death is carried forth to pass judgment. Those who have lived Buddhist doctrine are allowed to pass into paradise, ending their cycle of reincarnation and achieving nirvana.

It’s the end of Paro Tschechu. Just after midnight, thousands of devout Bhutanese gather to witness the unveiling of a sacred treasure.

Once unfolded, the ancient silk thangka is large enough to cover the entire monastery wall. It’s believed that all spectators will be released from the cycle of reincarnation.

The ritual takes hours, but must be completed before the sun crests the mountain at dawn.

Hand embroidered with golden thread, the mural depicts Guru Rinpoche in various manifestations.

For the first time in the festival, an eerie silence prevails. The spirit of Guru Rinpoche has triumphed. The festival ends without pagentry and life goes on.

People renew their daily activities, their communion with distant neighbors, their pursuit of enlightenment.

The spirit of the Buddha lives each day in the people of this ancient mountain kingdom—Bhutan—Land of the Thunder Dragon.
BHUTAN-Land of the Thunder Dragon
from the Mystic Lands Series

VOCABULARY GUIDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>chorten</td>
<td>Religious monument, square or dome-shaped in a variety of sizes, often containing relics of a holy man or religious scripts and objects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Druk Yul</td>
<td>Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon; Bhutan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drukyel Dzong</td>
<td>Dzong located at the northwest end of the Paro Valley. It was built to commemorate a military victory over the Tibetan army in 1647. Hence its name, which means &quot;Dzong of victorious Drukpa.&quot; It was destroyed in 1951 by a fire started by a butter lamp.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dzong</td>
<td>Himalayan monastery-fortress; in Bhutan, the headquarters of a dzonhag (administrative district), a center of local government and religion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gelong</td>
<td>An ordained monk, easily recognized by their shaved heads and red robes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guru Rinpoche</td>
<td>Also known as Guru Padma Sambhava (8th century A.D.), Buddhist monk and missionary from India who came to Bhutan; called &quot;Precious Teacher&quot;; known as the Second Buddha. He is credited with introducing Tantric Buddhism to Bhutan. He is a great spiritual force in Bhutan, celebrated in legends, honored at festivals, and venerated in temples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mandala</td>
<td>A diagrammatic circular picture used as an aid in meditation or ritual; sometimes a symbol of the universe or a representation of a deed of merit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mantra</td>
<td>A Sanskrit term used in both Buddhism and Hinduism signifying a sacred word, verse or syllable which embodies in sound some specific deity or supernatural power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>merit</td>
<td>A Buddhist term used in conjunction with the performance of good deeds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nirvana</td>
<td>The attainment of final enlightenment; freedom from rebirth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prayer wheel</td>
<td>A device used for daily rituals. Inside each cylinder are rolled long sheets of paper on which the same prayer is written thousands of times. As wheels are turned, always in a clockwise direction, the prayer wheels recite a single prayer thousands of times. This act wins merit and helps to obtain a good reincarnation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thangka</td>
<td>One of the most characteristic forms of Bhutanese art, it is a scroll, generally painted on cotton cloth and framed by bands of brocade. Also painted on silk. They depict images of Guru Rinpoche, ancient deities and mandalas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiger's Nest</td>
<td>Also known as the Taktsang Monastery; cliffside monastery built more than 2,500 feet above the Paro Valley floor. Bhutanese mythology says that when Guru Rinpoche flew to Bhutan from Tibet on the back of a miraculous tiger, he landed at Taktsang (Tiger's Nest).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>torma</td>
<td>A ritual cake used in all religious ceremonies in Bhutan. Made from a mixture of butter and flour, it is given different forms and colors depending on the divinities for which it is intended.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tshechu</td>
<td>Major festival of the monastery dzongs, literally &quot;the tenth day of the month,&quot; which is the day the Guru was born and on which he subsequently carried out his most famous deeds in his eight manifestations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VIEWER'S GUIDE

Directions: Answer the following questions immediately after viewing the video, or as instructed by your teacher. Use the back of this sheet if necessary.

1. What religion is practiced by the majority of the Bhutanese people?

2. Who is Guru Rinpoche? What legends are associated with him?

3. What are some beliefs associated with Tantric Buddhism?

4. What are the origins of the name Druk Yul for the country of Bhutan?

5. In Buddhist tradition how does one break the cycle of reincarnation?

6. How are prayer wheels and mantras used?

7. What is the role of monks in Bhutanese society? What is their life like?

8. Why is the Bhutanese landscape blanketed with prayer flags and chortens?

9. What are tshechus? How are they celebrated? What do they commemorate?

10. What is the purpose of the dances performed during the tshechus?
**WORD MATCH**

**Directions:** Match each term in Column A with its correct definition in Column B.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column A</th>
<th>Column B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. ____ nirvana</td>
<td>A. An ordained monk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. ____ thangka</td>
<td>B. The attainment of final enlightenment; freedom from rebirth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. ____ chorten</td>
<td>C. Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon; Bhutan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. ____ Tiger’s Nest</td>
<td>D. A ritual cake made from butter and flour used in all religious ceremonies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. ____ Druk Yul</td>
<td>E. Religious monument often containing relics of a holy man or religious scripts and objects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. ____ Gelong</td>
<td>F. Cliffside monastery built more than 2500 feet above the Paro Valley floor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. ____ Guru Rinpoche</td>
<td>G. Buddhist monk and missionary from India who came to Bhutan; known as the Second Buddha. He is credited with introducing Tantric Buddhism to Bhutan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. ____ dzong</td>
<td>H. A fortress-like structure which is the center of local government and religion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. ____ torma</td>
<td>I. Monthly festivals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. ____ tshechu</td>
<td>J. A scroll generally painted on cotton cloth framed by bands of brocade; one of the most characteristic forms of Bhutanese art.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BHUTAN-Land of the Thunder Dragon
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QUIZ

Directions: Answer the following questions. Use the back of this sheet if necessary.

1. The Bhutanese use prayer wheels and mantras for what purpose?

2. This monastery is built around the site where, according to legend, Guru Rinpoche arrived in Bhutan on a flying tiger.

3. The majority of Bhutanese follow the practices of what religion?

4. This is a ritual cake made of butter and flour and used at all religious ceremonies in Bhutan.

5. This religious monument often contains relics of a holy man or religious scripts and objects. The Bhutanese believe that it wards off evil spirits.

6. This is a Himalayan monastery-fortress. In Bhutan they are the center of local government and religious activity.

7. How does a Buddhist believe that he can break the cycle of reincarnation?

8. Why are the tshechu festivals important to the people?

9. A monk and missionary, he is considered by many to be a reincarnation of Buddha. He is honored at festivals, venerated in temples, and celebrated in legends.

10. Why is the government of Bhutan moving very slowly as it considers economic development possibilities for its country?