



# Kaur Foundation

We envision a society that promotes cultural awareness and inclusiveness for all. We strive to bring communities together through educational initiatives that encourage dialogue and foster cultural inclusion.

As our communities grow ever more diverse, it is critical to our democracy that we appreciate and understand the different backgrounds of our neighbors, colleagues, students, and friends. Kaur Foundation seeks to cultivate awareness about Sikh Americans and the Sikh identity in the classroom and the community. We believe we must go beyond simply providing information about diversity; our resources and trainings inspire students to think critically about how to engage with cultural differences and how to foster inclusion for all. Working with stakeholders at all levels, from elementary students to university faculty, our educational materials and trainings are designed increase understanding of Sikh Americans and the Sikh tradition and to promote broad cultural and religious literacy in all sectors of society.

## The Problem

- Despite being the fifth largest organized religion in the world, **most Americans know almost nothing about Sikhi** (the Punjabi word for the Sikh religion, which Sikhs prefer to use rather than Sikhism). Even as Sikhs have become more vocal and visible in their communities and in the media, the number of anti-Sikh hate crimes continues to rise.
- Because Sikhism is rarely taught about in the curriculum, much of **the burden of educating teachers and school administrators about Sikhi often falls on the shoulders of Sikh students and their parents**. The Sikh community is a valuable partner in educating teachers and administrators, but this should not be the responsibility of individual families, who have the right to expect that their children can attend schools that encourage pluralism and celebrate all aspects of students' identities, including religious identities.
- **Over 50% of Sikh students report experiencing bullying and harassment from peers and teachers because of their Sikh identity**. This has consequences for the social-emotional well-being of students, community cohesion, and academic success of students. Teachers are rarely trained to recognize religiously-based bullying and often lack knowledge about Sikhism that would help them support their Sikh students and educate other students.
- **Some Sikh practices, such as wearing a turban to cover uncut hair (kes), make Sikhs very visible as religious minorities**. However, the majority of Americans know almost nothing about Sikhism and often assume that observant Sikhs are Muslim when, in fact, 99% of people who wear turbans in the U.S. are Sikhs. This perpetuates stereotypes about both Sikhs and Muslims and hinders opportunities to learn about religious pluralism and foster communities grounded in compassion and inclusivity.



An NCSS 2019 attendee snaps a photo of himself in a Sikh turban tied by one of the KF volunteers.

## Our Response

The heart of Kaur Foundation’s work is the development and dissemination of educational resources, in the form of curricular materials and workshops and trainings for students, educators, and community members.

Our **curricular resources** are designed to teach about Sikhi as it is lived and experienced in communities across the U.S. and around the world. Aligned with national and state standards, these materials, including lesson plans, case studies, reading guides and videos, are easily integrated in existing coursework. We are always developing new resources in response to feedback from educators and students.

Kaur Foundation **workshops and trainings** introduce participants to the fundamental beliefs and practices of Sikhism, and, more importantly, shed light on the experiences of Sikh Americans. We regularly hear from past workshop participants that they had never met a Sikh or known anything about Sikhi prior to that training. Kaur Foundation workshops are opportunities for both students and educators to examine assumptions, increase knowledge, and build skills critical for active citizenship in a religiously plural world.

Our work and **collaboration with public school districts, national professional organizations, and other non-profits** has enabled us to reach many different stakeholders.

**“Knowledge about religions is not only a characteristic of an educated person but is necessary for effective and engaged citizenship in a diverse nation and world. Religious literacy dispels stereotypes, promotes cross-cultural understanding, and encourages respect for the rights of others to religious liberty.”**

—National Council for the Social Studies, 2014



Students and educators participate in **Langar**, sitting on the floor together and being served a vegetarian meal from the community kitchen, at the 2017 NCSS President’s Reception at the San Jose Gurdwara. Langar is a representation of the Sikh values of equality and service.

### Tips for Supporting Sikh Students:

**Preventing Bullying:** Over 50% of Sikh students report experiencing bullying or harassment because of their Sikh identity. **Teach students and staff about Sikhi to help dispel common stereotypes and misconceptions that are often at the root of bullying.**

**Social and Emotional Learning:** Sikh students can feel marginalized or isolated when their religious identity is misunderstood or ignored. **Educate yourself about Sikhi and integrate lessons and materials into your classroom to help all students deepen their understanding of and appreciation for the diverse identities that make up your school community.**

**Religious Liberty:** The First Amendment protects Sikh students’ right to wear their articles of faith, such as the turban or kirpan, at school and during athletic activities. **Make sure all students, teachers, and staff are familiar with First Amendment principles and understand their responsibility to protect the religious freedom rights for students from all faith traditions.**

## A 30-Second Introduction to Sikhi

Sikhism (*sik-izm*) is the world's 5<sup>th</sup> largest organized religion; there are more than 25 million Sikhs worldwide and over 500,000 Sikhs in the United States. Founded in the Punjab region of India in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Sikhism is a monotheistic religion; there is one Creator, considered formless and eternal. Guru Nanak (1469-1539 CE), the founder of Sikhism, taught equality of all people, honesty, hard work, and service to others. An emphasis on egalitarianism and active engagement with the world distinguished the new Sikh religion from the Hindu and Muslim traditions active in the Punjab region at the time.

Sikhs first came to the U.S. in the 1890s, initially settling on the West Coast. Today, Sikh communities are found across the country. Throughout their history in the US, Sikh Americans have been active in fighting for immigration and citizenship rights for minority communities, as well as involved in all aspects of American life, including entertainment, law-enforcement, the arts, academia, and politics.

### Key Terms

**Gurdwara** - A Sikh house of worship and place of community gathering.

**Kaur** - Middle or last name often used by Sikh women, signifying equality.

**Langar** - A free community meal prepared and served by volunteers at a gurdwara.

**Sikhi** - Punjabi word for the Sikh religion, which Sikhs prefer to use rather than "Sikhism."

**Singh** - Middle or last name often used by Sikh men, signifying equality.

**Sri Guru Granth Sahib** - The sacred scripture of the Sikhs.

**Turban** - Worn by Sikh men and some Sikh women, covers uncut hair, and is a symbol of honor and dignity.



### Khanda

A symbol of Sikhi representing an eternal Creator and the temporal and spiritual worlds and the balance between them.



### Ik Onkar

Symbol representing the key Sikh tenet that there is one Creator.

## Ways to Work with Kaur Foundation

### Workshops for Faculty, Staff, and Administrators

— Changing the conversation about religious and cultural diversity must start with campus leaders and faculty. Workshops with faculty, staff, and administrators increase knowledge about Sikhism and introduce frameworks for thinking about how religious identities are recognized or overlooked in the classroom and the curriculum.

**Workshops for In-Service Teachers** — Teachers need to be able to both support Sikh students and teach about Sikhism in the curriculum.

Workshops for in-service teachers can address broad principles of recognizing religious and cultural diversity and understanding the Sikh identity or can focus on specific teaching tools and strategies for integrating study about Sikhism into the curriculum.

**Workshops for Pre-Service Teachers** — Pre-service teacher training dispels stereotypes and misconceptions and helps teachers be ready to foster cultural inclusion and encourage dialogue from the first day of school.

**Classroom Visits** — Students of all ages are curious about religious diversity. Classroom visits by KF volunteers introduce students to Sikhism and promote religious literacy skills. Knowledge about religions and frameworks for asking questions about religion can help students be more comfortable with difference and reduce religiously-based bullying or harassment.

**Gurdwara Visits** — Experiential learning can be a very powerful when learning about religion. We can help arrange a visit to a local gurdwara for students, teachers, administrators and other community members to help you learn more about Sikhi first-hand.

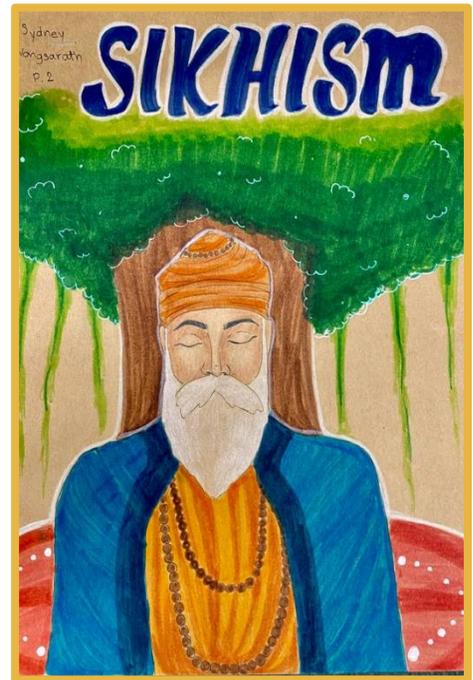
## Kaur Foundation Resources:

**Cultural Safari** — A 17-minute video about Sikhs along with a teacher resources guide lesson plan. Extensive research was conducted with educators and administrators at a national level to create these resources. The Cultural Safari video is specially scripted to answer questions raised by educators about Sikh Americans.

**Kaur Foundation Youth Voices** — This series of 12 interviews with young Sikh Americans from across the U.S. showcases diverse perspectives across their personal journeys. The videos are a valuable addition to K-16 classroom conversations about diversity and the Sikh American experience.

**Unit and Lesson Plans** — We have a growing library of lessons, primary source sets, and unit plans about Sikhism for middle and high school classrooms. All materials are aligned with the NCSS C3 Framework and the CCSS.

**Reading Lists and Book Guides** — Bring stories about Sikhs into your classroom library with a curated set of children's books and young adult literature about Sikhism. Curriculum material to accompany selected books are also available.



Artwork on Sikhism by Sydney, a student in Sherry McIntyre's World Religions class (Modesto, CA). Sherry is a member of the Kaur Foundation Advisory Council of Educators.

**Religious illiteracy “fuels prejudice and antagonism, thereby hindering efforts aimed at promoting respect for diversity, peaceful coexistence, and cooperative endeavors in local, national, and global arenas...[however] it is possible to diminish religious illiteracy by teaching about religion from an academic, non-devotional perspective in primary, middle, and secondary schools.”**

*—American Academy of Religion, Guidelines for Teaching about Religion, 2010*

## About Kaur Foundation

Kaur Foundation was established in 2002 by a group of Sikh parents in response to the lack of public awareness about Sikh identity in America and the lack of education about Sikhism in public schools. Since its founding, the Kaur Foundation has become a leader in raising awareness about Sikh Americans by bringing K-12 education about Sikhs into the American school system through carefully developed educational resources and trainings for educators.



Find more Kaur Foundation resources at [www.kaurfoundation.org](http://www.kaurfoundation.org) and follow us @KaurFoundation

