



An Educator's Quick Guide to Sikhism

Sikhism is the world's 5th largest religion; there are more than 25 million Sikhs worldwide and approximately 500,000 Sikhs in the US. However, Sikh students report that their teachers and classmates often know very little about Sikhism. This guide provides a brief introduction to Sikhism, issues faced by Sikh students, and highlights resources to enhance your understanding of Sikhism.



Founded in the Punjab region of India about 500 years ago, Sikhism is a monotheistic religion. Guru Nanak (1469-1539), the founder of the Sikh religion, taught equality for all people, honesty, hard work, and service to others. Sikhs first came to the U.S. in 1899 and played a significant role in building railroads, developing agriculture in the west, and fighting for immigration and citizenship legislation for minority communities. The first gurdwara in the US is the Gurdwara Sahib Stockton, built in 1912 in Stockton, CA. Today there are over 200 gurdwaras in the U.S. The contributions of Sikh-Americans who have lived out these values in communities across the United States serve as inspiration as students develop as globally competent citizens.

Recognizing and 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 Sikhism 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 Sikhism and integrate lessons 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.**

Kaur Foundation Resources Available Online:

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.

Identity Explorer – This activity helps students beginning thinking about issues related to visible and invisible identities and diverse communities.

Courageous Conversations – Explore the experiences everyday Sikh Americans and engage students in conversation about discrimination and bias.

Unit and Lesson Plans – Lessons and Unit plans about Sikhism for middle and high school classrooms. Aligned with C3 and CCSS.

Some Key Vocabulary:

Adi Granth – The sacred scripture of the Sikhs, also known as the Guru Granth Sahib. The last living Guru, Gobind Singh, transferred the title of Guru to this text shortly before his death in 1708, making it the living authority for spiritual and temporal matters for the Sikh community.

Gurdwara – A Sikh temple. Gurdwaras are places of worship and centers of community life.

Guru Nanak – 1469-1539, the founder of Sikhism and the first of the 10 living gurus.

Khanda – An emblem of Sikhism composed of a double edged sword symbol representing divine knowledge, a chakar (circle) representing the perfection of an eternal God, and two kirpans (single edged swords) representing the temporal and spiritual worlds and the balance between them.



Kaur – Last name taken by Sikh women, signifying equality and divine sovereignty.

5 Ks – Five articles of faith: kesh (uncut hair), kanga (small wooden comb), kara (steel bracelet), kirpan (small knife), kachera (shorts worn as an undergarment). These are worn at all times by initiated Sikhs.

Langar – The free community meal prepared and served by volunteers. The langar is open to all people, regardless of religion, gender, race, age, or any other social status. The vegetarian meal demonstrates central Sikh principles of hospitality, equality among all people, and community.

Patka – Head covering worn by Sikh boys.

Singh - Last name taken by Sikh men, signifying equality and divine sovereignty.

Turban – A long piece of cloth tied over uncut hair. Both men and women may wear turbans, although they are most often worn by men.

Vaisakhi – Festival celebrated on April 14th commemorating the formation of the Khalsa, the body of fully initiated Sikhs, and celebrating the spring harvest.

Learn More about Sikhism

1. **Schedule an educator training with the Kaur Foundation** – Increase faculty and staff knowledge of Sikhism with an in-person professional development session.
2. **Visit a Local Gurdwara** – Your local Sikh community would love to welcome you to visit their gurdwara and learn more about the Sikh tradition first-hand.
3. **Recommended books** on the Kaur Foundation website: <https://www.kaurfoundation.org/kf-library.html>
4. **Further Reading about Teaching about Religion in Public Schools**
 - Haynes, C. C., & Thomas, O. S. (2011). Finding common ground: A guide to religious liberty in public schools. Nashville, TN: First Amendment Center. Retrieved from http://www.religiousfreedomcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/rfc_publications_findingcommonground.pdf
 - Moore, D. L. (2010). Guidelines for teaching about religion in K-12 public schools in the United States. Atlanta: American Academy of Religion. Retrieved from http://www.aarweb.org/Publications/Online_Publications/Curriculum_Guidelines/AARK-12CurriculumGuidelines.pdf
 - Supplement: Religious studies companion document for the C3 Framework. In The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS), The college, career, and civic life (C3) framework for social studies state standards: Guidance for enhancing the rigor of K-12 civics, economics, geography, and history (pp. 92–101). Silver Spring, MD: National Council for the Social Studies. Retrieved from <https://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/2017/Jun/c3-framework-for-social-studies-rev0617.pdf>