California Celebrates Sikh Awareness and Appreciation Month

Public Library Toolkit

The California State Legislature has declared November as Sikh Awareness and Appreciation Month. The Sikh Coalition, in collaboration with the California Sikh community, is encouraging Californians across the state to celebrate this month by coordinating a project with their local library. This public library toolkit includes a sample letter to help you get started and suggestions for projects/events that your library can host in November. The Sikh Coalition has also developed free educational resources to explain Sikhism.

This toolkit contains the following information:

- Sample letter to your Librarian
- Ideas for Library Projects/Events to Celebrate Sikh Americans
  - Window or Table Display
  - Afterschool Book Readings & Kids’ Activities
  - Film Screenings & Discussion
  - Feature local Sikhs on a Panel
  - Artist Night featuring Sikh singers, musicians, and artists
- Additional Resources:
  - Media Outreach Tips

Want to know which libraries are in your area? Visit the California library directory to find your closest library. If you have any questions or need help organizing an event, please email us at community@sikhcoalition.org or give us a call at 212.655.3065.
Sample Letter to Librarian – Available as a Word Doc at bit.ly/calibraryletter

[Date]

[Library Address]

Dear [Librarian’s Name],

My name is [Name], and I very briefly describe yourself and any way in which you are connected to the community – either by simply being a library patron, a parent of a child in the local school district, or some deeper interaction with the community. I would like to meet with you to discuss how [library name] can celebrate Sikh Americans this November.

As I’m sure you’re aware, our state legislature has declared November as Sikh Awareness and Appreciation Month. In addition, this year marks the 550th gurpurab (birth anniversary) of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. Sikhism is the fifth-largest world religion, and Sikhs first immigrated to California over 125 years ago. We have had notable achievements as farmers, soldiers, entrepreneurs, congressmen, scientists, actors, and more, and we have made significant contributions to this country’s rich history.

Unfortunately, many Americans know little information about Sikhs or Sikhism, and therefore face bias-based harassment, bullying, and even hate crimes. I’m sure you will agree that we can stop the cycle of ignorance and hate by spreading awareness about diversity and encouraging respect for everyone in our local communities.

I understand that your library is very busy with various community events that are already on the calendar. However, I kindly ask that we work together to find something that [library name] can do to celebrate this month. The Sikh Coalition, the largest Sikh civil rights organization in the country, has developed a list of projects and ideas that I have included below:

- Window or Table Display
- Afterschool Book Readings & Kids’ Activities
- Film Screenings & Discussion
- Feature local Sikhs on a Panel
- Artist Night featuring Sikh singers, musicians, and artists

Through these types of events, we can all celebrate diversity and encourage respect for one another’s beliefs and customs. I would appreciate it if we could discuss this opportunity for collaboration further. My phone number is [XXX] and my email address is [XXX]. I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards,

[Name]
[Signature]
Ideas for Library Projects/Events to Celebrate Sikh Americans

Window or Table Display
Oftentimes, libraries will create a window or table display around a particular theme or holiday. To celebrate California’s Sikh Awareness and Appreciation month, we suggest displaying the following items in the lobby at your library:

- Handouts
  - Who are the Sikhs postcards*
  - The Sikhs’ Brochures*

- Books about Sikhs or that feature Sikh characters:
  - Books for children:
    - A Lion’s Mane by Navjot Kaur (Saffron Press).
    - Dear Takuya by Jessi Kaur.
    - Super Satya Saves the Day by Raakhee Mirchandani (Bharat Babies).
    - Ajooni the Kaurageous, Amarpreet Kaur Dhami.
    - Jasmin’s Summer Wish by Elizabeth Glines (Wilderness House Press).
    - The Boy With Long Hair by Pushpinder Kaur (Tej Publishing).
    - The Many Colors of Harpreet Singh by Supriya Kelkar (Sterling Children’s Books).
  - Books for Adults:
    - Sikhism: A Guide for the Perplexed by Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair
    - Teachings of the Sikh Gurus by Arvind-Pal Singh Mandair and Christopher Shackle
    - Sikhism: A Very Short Introduction by Eleanor Nesbitt
    - Guru Nanak by Eleanor Nesbitt and Gopinder Kaur
    - The Sikhs by Patwant Singh
    - The Encyclopedia of Sikhism by Harbans Singh
    - The Name of My Beloved: Verses of the Sikh Gurus by Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh
    - Sikhism: An Introduction by Nikky-Guninder Kaur Singh

*To order these items, please send an email to education@sikhcoalition.org. These materials will be printed and shipped to you, free of charge.
After School Book Readings & Kids’ Activities
We recommend reading any of the following books in a group setting with elementary school children. After the reading, we encourage you to have a discussion or do an activity with them. We have included suggested extension activities below:

The Boy with Long Hair
Pushpinder Singh
- Appropriate for grades K-3
- Can be ordered online here

A Lion’s Mane
Navjot Kaur
- Appropriate for grades 3-5
- Can be ordered online here
- Lesson plans can be found here

Dear Takuya
Jessi Kaur
- Appropriate for grades 4-6
- Can be ordered online here
- Lesson plans for grades K-2
- Lesson plans for grades 4-6
Screenings & Discussions
You can also host a screening at the library. At the conclusion of the video, we encourage you to host a discussion with the audience. We recommend the following:

- CNN’s “United Shades of America with W. Kamau Bell” 60-minute episode on the Sikh community. A discussion guide can be found here. The episode can be accessed on the CNN app, Xfinity DVR, or Hulu streaming services.

Feature local Sikhs on a Panel
Invite local Sikhs who are community leaders, educators, professionals, elected officials, etc. to sit on a panel to discuss their experiences as Sikh Americans. The panel can focus on how important it is for local communities to learn about and foster a respect for the diversity in their city. Ask a local media personality to moderate the panel.

Artist Night
There are many talented Sikh artists in California. Invite Sikh artists and musicians to perform at an artist night at the library. If you need help contacting any artists, please send an email to education@sikhcoalition.org, and we would be happy to put you in touch with some local artists.
Media Outreach Tips

As soon as you have determined the date and believe the event will be well-attended, please feel free to contact your local media to cover the event, as long as you believe media coverage will not interfere with the event or building relationships. The following are some talking points to keep in mind when engaging with media:

- The California State legislature designated November as Sikh Awareness and Appreciation Month this year.
- The Sikh religion is the fifth-largest world religion after Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.
- Unfortunately, Sikh Americans continue to experience hate crimes, job discrimination, school bullying, and racial profiling.
- There are more than 25 million Sikhs throughout the world and approximately 500,000 Sikhs live in the United States. Nearly half of the U.S Sikh population lives in California.
- Sikh men are religiously required to wear dastaars (Sikh turbans) and maintain unshorn hair (including facial hair). Sikh women are also religiously required to maintain uncut hair. Some Sikh women also choose to wear turbans.
- Sikhs have been living in California for over 125 years. Sikh Americans are part of the American fabric, from coast to coast, working in every profession, serving in our armed forces, holding important positions in American political and civic life, and even leading efforts to promote civil rights for all Americans. For example, the Sikh community of California led a successful effort to pass AB1964, which provides workers in California the nation’s strongest protections against religious discrimination.
- Sikhs share basic values with Americans: the importance of equality, religious pluralism, and justice for all.
- We are conducting outreach efforts across the state of California to raise awareness about the Sikh community. These efforts include encouraging teachers to deliver lessons on Sikh Americans, organizing community events/projects at California gurdwaras (Sikh houses of worship), and delivering presentations in schools.

***