Sikh Celebrations!
Lessons & Activities for Inclusive Classrooms

THE SIKH COALITION
# Table of Contents

Welcome to the Sikh Coalition’s Sikh Celebrations Resource ........................................ 3
How to use this resource .................................................................................................. 4

VAISAKHI ........................................................................................................ 5-10
- Background, Greeting Card ([linked](#)), Presentation ([linked](#)) .......................... 6
- Classroom Activity ................................................................................................... 7
  - Discussion (after the presentation) ........................................................................ 7
  - Arts & Crafts Activity: My Truest Self ................................................................... 8-10

BANDI CHHOR DIVAS ................................................................................ 11-14
- Background, Greeting Card ([linked](#)), Presentation ([linked](#)) ......................... 12
- Classroom Activity ................................................................................................... 13-14
  - Discussion (after the presentation) ........................................................................ 13
  - Arts & Crafts Activity: Spreading Light in Our Community .................................... 13-15

GURU NANAK DEVI’S GURPURAB ................................................ 16-21
- Background, Greeting Card ([linked](#)), Presentation ([linked](#)) ......................... 17
- Classroom Activity ................................................................................................... 18-21
  - Discussion (after the presentation) ........................................................................ 18
  - Arts & Crafts Activity: Fairness, Equality & Equity ................................................ 18-21

GURU GOBIND SINGH DEVI’S GURPURAB ...................................... 22-26
- Background, Greeting Card ([linked](#)), Presentation ([linked](#)) ......................... 23
- Classroom Activity ................................................................................................... 24-26
  - Discussion (after the presentation) ........................................................................ 24
  - Arts & Crafts Activity: I’m an Upstander Superhero .............................................. 25-26

Glossary ...................................................................................................................... 28-29
Additional Resources .................................................................................................. 30
Welcome to the Sikh Coalition’s Sikh Celebrations!

This resource provides simple and fun ways to create Sikh awareness in elementary school classrooms through sharing about holidays. Whether you are a student, parent or teacher, this guide includes something for you!

For practicing Sikhs, Sikhism is a way of life. They believe that the values taught by the religion should be put into action every day. As such, there are no specific days which are regarded as ‘holier’ than another. However, there are occasions throughout the year when Sikhs will either celebrate or commemorate the Gurus (the founders and spiritual leaders of Sikhism), or remember significant historical events related to the Gurus’ lives. While we recognize that no day is holier than another, we will refer to these days as “holidays” throughout this resource for the purposes of relating these days to children without further delving into the nuances of Sikh observances.

We have chosen four major holidays to share in this resource. Please note that the date on which these occasions are celebrated can vary due to different methods of determination.

- **Vaisakhi** (April).
- **Bandi Chhor Divas** (October/November).
- **Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s Gurpurab** (some Sikh communities celebrate this in November, and others celebrate it in April, the same time as Vaisakhi).
- **Guru Gobind Singh Ji’s Gurpurab** (December/January).

If you are a parent and wish to reach out to your child’s school to create an opportunity to share one of these holidays in your child’s classroom, you can use this email template.

We hope you, your family and school community will enjoy engaging with this resource and learning about Sikh holidays. Please contact education@sikhcoalition.org if you have any questions or require any support in using these materials. We would love to hear your feedback and see any photos of your experiences using this resource, if you would like to share!
How to use this resource:

Each celebration section in this resource includes **three components** that you can use based on how much time you have to share about this celebration, and whether you are working with lower or upper elementary students. All of these components can be shared virtually or in person.

- **A greeting card** for students to share with their peers.
  - *This is a quick, easy way to share more about Sikh celebrations with friends and peers*
  - *Choose between emailing the electronic version to the class, or printing the printable version double-sided and sharing in person with each classmate*

- **A customizable slide presentation** for parents or teachers to present in classrooms which:
  - *Introduces Sikhism*
  - *Explains the significance of the holiday*
  - *Includes two sets of talking points for facilitators which can be used for either lower elementary or upper elementary accordingly*
  - *Includes additional notes for more context and potential discussion questions*
  - *Provides an optional opportunity for Sikh students to share how their family celebrates that particular occasion*
  - *Refers to a **Glossary** (included in this document) which helps explain new words and guides pronunciation*

- **A classroom activity** you can do with the class **after the presentation**.
  - Activity sections include...
    - *Discussion and recap questions for the class*
    - *Materials and instructions for either an arts and crafts activity or a worksheet activity*
    - *Recommendations for relevant age groups for each section*
Vaisakhi
Background

- **Vaisakhi** is a harvest festival celebrated in April across South Asia and especially in the Punjab region.
- **Vaisakhi** is a significant occasion for Sikhs because on Vaisakhi of 1699, the 10th Guru (spiritual leader) of the Sikhs, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, started the Khalsa Panth, the community of all initiated Sikhs, and gave Sikhs their unique identity.
- Every year Sikhs all over the world celebrate this important day with great pride and enthusiasm in the community.

Greeting Card

Use this greeting card to share more with your classmates about Vaisakhi!

- **Electronic version** to email with a personal note
- **Printable version** to personalize

Presentation

Use this [powerpoint presentation](#), complete with talking points and a slide which can be personalized to share more about your family’s celebrations.
Theme: Celebrating what makes us unique through the things we wear

Discussion questions for the class (after the presentation)

- What are some things that you learned about Vaisakhi?
- What are some things that make Sikhs unique?

**Facilitator’s note:** Answers can and should vary. Try to guide answers to Sikh articles of faith.

Recap for students: “Sikhs have articles of faith that they wear which are like their uniform.”

For Sikhs, this uniform:

- Creates a sense of belonging to the Sikh community
- Has a practical use
- Helps Sikhs to be recognized
- Reminds them about important Sikh beliefs – to remember God, to treat everyone equally, to work honestly, to share with others and to help those in need

- What we wear can often tell a story about who we are.
  - What are some things you wear that are special to you, and what do they say about you?
  - What are some things that you always have with you? What do those say about you?

**Facilitator’s note:** Make sure to have some examples ready, and be ready to model the answer yourself.

Some examples...
- I like to wear sneakers because I like to run, and sneakers help me run as fast as I can.
- I wear yellow often because yellow is my favorite color and it makes me happy.
- I like to wear sports jerseys. They show that I am a fan of a specific team and help me support them.
- I wear this piece of jewelry everyday because it is significant or sentimental to me.
- I usually carry a notebook with me everywhere because I love to write.
- I wear purple glasses everyday because I love them and they make me feel good while seeing better.

- **Take home message:** We may all wear different things, and that’s awesome because they show how special and unique we all are. The things that make you you make you special, and make the world more interesting.
Arts & Crafts Activity: My Truest Self

Materials:

- Coloring supplies: Make sure to have a lot of colors, including multiple options for skin tone colors.
- “My Truest Self” printable handout.

Instructions:

If your class is in person, consider making a bulletin board featuring all “truest self” portraits from the class

- Make a list of the things you wear that are special to you (on handout).
- Make a list of some things that you always carry with you that are important to you (on handout).
- Draw a self portrait using the handout as your truest, most happy self. Include all the things you like to wear and carry with you.
- Share your portraits with the class!
Name: ____________________________

My Truest Self

*Learning about Vaisakhi*

Instructions:
1. Fill out the sections below.
2. On the next page of this handout, draw a self portrait as your truest, most happy self.
   - Include all the things you like to wear and carry with you.
   - Use colors and designs that you love.

Some things I wear that are special to me....

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

Some things I always carry that are special to me....

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________

__________________________________________
My Truest Self

Learning about Vaisakhi

Name: ________________________________
Bandi Chhor Divas

ਦੀੜੀ ਇੱਕ ਸ੍ਰੇਸ਼ਠ

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Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji was the sixth Guru (spiritual leader) of the Sikhs (1595-1644).

On Bandi Chhor Divas Sikhs celebrate to remember the day when Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji was released from prison in 1619 after he had been wrongly imprisoned by the authorities.

When he was released, Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji insisted that the 52 Princes who were also wrongly imprisoned should be freed as well.

The Emperor agreed that when Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji left, only those who could hold onto the Guru’s cloak would be freed.

Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji had a special robe made for his departure with 52 tassels so that everyone could go free.

The occasion is known as Bandi Chhor Divas— which means the day of liberation, and it is often celebrated by the lighting of candles.

Use this greeting card to share more with your classmates about Bandi Chhor Divas!

- Electronic version to email with a personal note
- Printable version to personalize

Use this powerpoint presentation, complete with talking points and a slide which can be personalized to share more about your family’s celebrations.
Theme: Spreading light in your community!

Discussion questions for the class (after the presentation)

• Does anyone remember what justice means?
• What does it mean to spread light in the face of darkness?
• What are things we can do to spread light in our community and everyday lives?

Some example answers...

• Acts of kindness
• Standing up for what you believe in
• Helping others
• Recycling
• Volunteering
• Reaching out to a friend or someone new

Arts & Crafts Activity: Spreading Light in our Community

Materials:

• Piece of paper to make a collage

  • If your class is in person, consider doing all collages on one larger poster or bulletin board for the whole class, titled “Spreading Light in our Community”

  • If your class is virtual, make individual collages on separate pieces of paper

• A number of yellow or light orange pieces of paper cut into small squares (enough for each student)
• A number of light grey pieces of paper cut into small squares (enough for each student)
• “Deeva” printable handout for each student
Instructions:

• **Make a list** of some of the bad or not so nice things that you see in the world.
  - **Write each of these on one of the gray pieces of paper you have.**
• **Make a list** of some of the things you will do to spread light in response to those bad things you see.
  - **Think about the list we made together earlier!**
  - **Write each of these on one of the yellow pieces of paper you have.**
• Color in your **Deeva** (the Punjabi word for candle) with your favorite colors.
  - **The flame in the candle represents courage! It takes courage to spread light in your community, so be proud as you color your flame in.**
• Cut out your **Deeva** as best as you can, and glue it onto the main collage paper.
• Glue your yellow pieces of paper all around your deeva. **This is the light that you are spreading!**
• Glue all the gray pieces of paper around that light, to the edges of the paper. **This is the darkness that you are challenging with your light.**
Instructions:

• Color in your Deeva *(the punjabi word for candle)* with your favorite colors.

• Get creative and add some designs onto the candle!

• *The flame in the candle represents courage!* It takes courage to spread light in your community, so be proud as you color your flame in yellow or orange.

• *When you’re done coloring, cut the Deeva out and add it to your collage.*
Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s Gurpurab
Background

- A Gurpurab is a significant day relating to the Sikh Gurus (spiritual leaders of the Sikhs).
- **Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s Gurpurab** is a special occasion for Sikhs. Every year Sikhs all over the world celebrate this important day with great enthusiasm.
- **Guru Nanak Dev Ji** was the first Guru of the Sikhs (1469-1539) and founder of Sikhism, or Sikhi.
- This Gurpurab is a celebration of when Guru Nanak Dev Ji came into the world.
- On this Gurpurab, we remember Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s teachings that all of humanity is one, everyone is equal, we should share with others, live honestly & truthfully, and that we should fight for social justice.

Greetings Card

Use this greeting card to share more with your classmates about Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s Gurpurab!

- [Electronic version](#) to email with a personal note
- [Printable version](#) to personalize

Presentation

Use this [powerpoint presentation](#), complete with talking points and a slide which can be personalized to share more about your family’s celebrations.
**Theme:** Social justice, equality, & equity

**Discussion questions** for the class *(after the presentation)*

- Does anyone remember what equality means?
- Why is equality important?
- How can we make sure everyone is treated fairly and equally?

Some example answers...

- Treating everyone the same way regardless of who they are or where they come from
- Having respect for all
- Making sure everyone has equal rights
- Making sure everyone has equal opportunities
- Telling an adult if something isn’t fair or equal at school or at home
- Speaking to the person who is doing something unfair or makings things unequal and telling them what you see as unfair
- Helping someone have their voice heard when they aren’t being treated fairly

**Activity: Fairness, Equality & Equity**

**Materials:**

- Coloring supplies: *Make sure to have a lot of colors, including multiple options for skin tone colors.*
- “**Fairness, Equality & Equity**” printable handout.

**Instructions:**

- After discussing equality with the class, have students work on the handout independently. Give time for both filling out the worksheet and drawing.
- Share some of your signs as a class if time permits.
Name: ____________________________

**Fairness, Equality & Equity**
*Learning about Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s Gurpurab*

- **Equality** means that everyone is treated fairly and equally.

- **Equity** means that everyone is treated with justice, and that everyone has *access* to what they need.

- To have *access* to something means to have an easy way to get something when you need it.

What does an equal classroom look like to you?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
These kids care about equality and equity. What do you think everyone should have in each of these situations? Fill in the blank....

Everyone should have ___________ when they are sick!

Everyone should have ___________ when they are thirsty!

Everyone should have ___________ when they need help.

Everyone should have ___________ when they are hungry!

Everyone should have ___________ when they are sad.

Everyone should have ___________ when they want to learn.

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Now it’s your turn. What do you think about equality and equity? What do you think everyone should have? Make your own sign, and draw yourself holding it to show everyone what you believe!
Guru Gobind Singh Ji’s Gurpurab
A Gurpurab is a significant day relating to the Sikh Gurus (spiritual leaders of the Sikhs).

Guru Gobind Singh Ji’s Gurpurab is a special occasion for Sikhs. Every year Sikhs all over the world celebrate this important day with great enthusiasm.

Guru Gobind Singh Ji was the tenth Guru of the Sikhs (1666-1708) and is responsible for formalizing the Sikh identity (see Vaisakhi section...)

This Gurpurab is a celebration of when Guru Gobind Singh Ji came into the world.

On this Gurpurab, we remember Guru Gobind Singh Ji’s teachings that all of humanity is equal, and that we should fight for equality however we can.

Background

Use this greeting card to share more with your classmates about Guru Gobind Singh Ji’s Gurpurab!

- Electronic version to email with a personal note
- Printable version to personalize

Greeting Card

Presentation

Use this powerpoint presentation, complete with talking points and a slide which can be personalized to share more about your family’s celebrations.
Theme: Standing up for others; what it means to be an upstander

Discussion questions for the class (after the presentation)

• Does anyone know what a bystander is?
  • A bystander is a person who sees someone being mean to someone else, and then does not do anything about it.
  • This is a person who watches something become a problem, and does not try to fix it.

• Does anyone know what an upstander is?
  • An upstander is a person who sees someone being mean to someone else, or sees someone getting hurt, and then tries to help.
  • They try to safely help others and stand up for them.

• Why is it important that we stand up for others?

• What are some ways we can stand up for others...
  • At school?
  • At home?
  • With our friends?

• What are some qualities or tools we need to stand up for others?

  Some example answers...
  • Courage or bravery
  • Help from friends or an adult
  • Knowing what to say to a bully
  • Confidence to speak up
Arts & Crafts Activity: I’m an Upstander Superhero

Materials:
- Coloring supplies: *Make sure to have a lot of colors, including multiple options for skin tone colors.*
- Any decorating or arts & crafts supplies you may have.
- “I’m an Upstander Superhero” printable handout.

Instructions:
*If your class is in person,* consider making a bulletin board featuring each of the upstander superheroes from the whole class.
- After having the discussion as a class, think about why you stand up for others and what qualities you have that make you an upstander.
- Follow the instructions on the worksheet, and draw yourself as an upstander superhero.
- Share your upstander superhero selves with the class!
Name: ____________________

I’m an Upstander Superhero
Learning about Guru Gobind Singh Ji’s Gurpurab

I stand up for others because

Write in a quality
you have that you need
to stand up for others.

_____________________
_____________________

Write in a quality
you have that you need
to stand up for others.

_____________________
_____________________

_____________________
_____________________

Draw yourself as an upstander superhero!
Use colors and designs that you like, and be creative!

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Glossary

- **Baaj:** *falcon.* Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the 10th Guru, is popularly depicted as having a falcon.
- **Bandi Chhor Divas:** a Sikh celebration; literally means ‘day of liberation’
- **Caste:** a social construct of class prevalent in South Asia
- **Daal:** *lentil soup*
- **Dastaar:** a turban worn by Sikhs to cover their uncut hair; one of the Sikh articles of faith
- **Gurdwara:** *Sikh house of worship;* literally means ‘the home of the Guru’
- **Guru:** a spiritual leader of the Sikhs; literally means a ‘teacher’ who takes someone from spiritual darkness into spiritual light
- **Gurpurab:** a day relating to the Sikh Gurus; can refer to either a commemoration or celebration
- **Guru Granth Sahib Ji:** the Sikh sacred scripture; revered as a living Guru, not just a scripture
- **Ik Oankar:** *one God, the Creator.* These are the opening words of the Sikh sacred scripture. The Sikh understanding of ‘God’ is that of a formless, genderless divine energy that permeates through all beings.
- **Ji:** word used at the end of a name as a sign of respect
- **Kara:** *a steel/iron bracelet;* one of the Sikh articles of faith
- **Kaur:** last name given to all female-identifying Sikhs on Vaisakhi, meaning ‘princess’ *(but not the Disney kind!)*; signifies independence and nobility; denotes equality and castelessness
- **Kesh:** *uncut hair;* one of the Sikh articles of faith
- **Khalsa Panth:** the community of initiated Sikhs
- **Khanda:** a commonly recognized emblem relating to Sikhism; The circle *(chakar)* in the center represents the oneness of ‘God,’ and the two swords represent spiritual and political power, which together guide the pursuit of social justice, helping others, and standing against oppression.
- **Langar:** Sikh tradition of serving free food to all
- **Nagar Kirtan:** a community procession led by the Guru Granth Sahib Ji normally including Kirtan *(the singing of hymns from the Guru Granth Sahib Ji)*; Nagar Kirtans are common when celebrating Vaisakhi and are similar to parades.
Neela Ghora: blue horse. Guru Gobind Singh Ji, the tenth Guru is popularly depicted as having a Blue Horse.

Nishaan Sahib: orange flag with the Sikh emblem of a Khanda; A Nishaan Sahib is always hoisted outside a Gurdwara – this indicates that it is a Sikh institution, offering welcome to all; a beacon of hospitality and hope.

Patka: a small turban usually worn by Sikh children to cover their uncut hair; one of the Sikh articles of faith

Punjab: a geographic area in South Asia which is now split between India and Pakistan since the partition of India in 1947; most Sikhs in South Asia live on the India side of Punjab.

Rabab: a stringed instrument; Guru Nanak Dev Ji had a childhood friend named Bhai Mardana Ji who travelled extensively with Guru Nanak Dev Ji and played the rabab. Many of Guru Nanak Dev Ji’s teachings were sung and accompanied by the rabab.

Raja: prince

Roti: a type of flatbread; sometimes called a chapati

Sahib: a word denoting a leader or authority and used as a sign of respect

Seva: selfless service

Sikh: a follower of the Sikh religion and the Sikh Gurus’ teachings; literally translates to ‘a learner’

Sikhi: the term Sikhs use to refer to their religion

Sikhism: the term used to represent the Sikh faith globally; the world’s 5th largest religion

Singh: last name given to all male-identifying Sikhs on Vaisakhi, meaning lion; signifies bravery and leadership; denotes equality and castelessness

Vaisakh: the second month of the Sikh calendar; the time of the harvest

Vaisakhi: a significant celebration for Sikhs, also a harvest festival in Punjab, South Asia

If you have any questions, email education@sikhcoalition.org!
The Sikh Coalition is leading efforts to promote Sikh awareness and prevent bullying in our nation’s public schools. Turbaned-Sikh children face bullying at a rate of twice the national average. Moreover, despite being the world’s fifth largest religion and there being over 500,000 Sikhs across the United States, teaching about Sikhism is often excluded from classrooms and learning resources. The Sikh Coalition continues to partner with policymakers, school officials, curriculum developers and educators to systematically address these issues and ensure safer and more inclusive classrooms for all students.

If you have any questions about our work, please email education@sikhcoalition.org