

Understanding Sikhs and Sikh American History

INTENDED FOR:

Grades 8 – 12

Length: Lesson plan designed for 90-135 minutes, but can be adapted to 45 minutes

Presentation: Use [this](#) powerpoint presentation to supplement your lesson plan.

LESSON SUMMARY

In this lesson, students will explore the history and experiences of Sikhs in the United States. Through media and historical archives, students will study how the community has been impacted by anti-Sikh hate incidents from the early 1900s to the present day. More importantly, however, students will analyze how the Sikh community responded to these incidents.

LESSON FLOW

OPENING (10 minutes)

1. Opening question/activity: What role does the media play in the portrayal of identities?
 - a. Have various recent examples about the role of media

BODY (25 minutes)

1. "Sikhs allowed to Land" – the importance of terminology
 - a. Review the Key Vocabulary and emphasize the correct pronunciation of Sikh
2. 1907 Bellingham, Washington Riots
 - a. Show headline and ask who has heard about it
 - b. Provide history (Cahn)
 - c. Mention various attacks across the West Coast (Steger)
3. Establishment of Stockton Gurdwara
 - a. Provide brief history (Bainiwal), (YouTube)
 - b. Activity: Give each group specific thing about Stockton Gurdwara that they learn and then share with other groups
 - i. Feeling of belonging in foreign nation
 - ii. "Hungry American" – helping broader society
 - iii. 1914 delegation – Sikh American advocacy
 - iv. "Mother India" by Katherine Mayo (1927) and Saund's "My Mother India" – reclaiming the narrative
4. Post 9/11 America
 - a. Series of news articles and headlines with images – analyze images and news coverage (Gohil and Sidhu), (Singh), (Sikh Coalition), (Ahluwalia)
 - i. Discuss impact of 9/11 and misconceptions
 - b. Religious identity - Turban Myths (Sikh Coalition and Daily Show)
 - i. History of the turban and how its been viewed throughout the years
5. Oak Creek
 - a. Provide history and collectively read/analyze Harpreet Singh Saini's testimony (Saini)
 - b. Activity: ask students to research different ways to how the Sikh community has responded post-Oak Creek
 - i. Sample Response: Pardeep Kaleka and former white supremacist – Interfaith and solidarity work

CLOSING (10 minutes)

1. Review how Sikh principles and perspectives have guided Sikh Americans to show resilience over the past century.
 - a. Submit reflection as exit assignment

KEY VOCABULARY

SIKHI (SIKHISM) An independent world religion founded in the Punjab region of South Asia. Based on the teachings of Guru Nanak, it emphasizes the equality of all human beings and belief in one God.

SIKH A follower of the Sikh faith; the term “Sikh” derives from sikhna, or to learn; therefore, “Sikh” directly translates to “learner.”

TURBAN Historically worn by royalty in South Asia, the Gurus adopted this practice as a way of asserting the sovereignty and equality of all people. For a Sikh, wearing a turban asserts a public commitment to maintaining the values and ethics of the tradition, including service, compassion, and honesty.

PUNJAB An area in Northern India that has been partitioned since 1947 between India and Pakistan, causing Sikhs to migrate to the portion located in India. This has stripped Sikhs of access to hundreds of historically significant sites located in Pakistan.

GURDWARA Represent the religious identity of the Sikhs and are associated intimately with their spiritual and social practices. They are the very nucleus of the Sikh community and serve as a multipurpose institution.

CHARDI KALA A worldview that embraces resilience and boundless optimism.

EXTENSIONS

1. [The Sikh Turban: Post-911 Challenges to this Article of Faith](#) (Rutgers Journal of Law and Religion).
2. [1907 Bellingham, Washington Riots](#)
3. [Stockton Gurdwara: A Brief History](#) (YouTube Video, 3min)
4. ["The Accidental Activist"](#) (Amardeep Singh, Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts, 2011).
5. Harpreet Singh Saini's [testimony](#)
6. [Daily Show with Trevor Noah and Sikhs](#)
7. [Sikhism in the United States Survey](#) by National Sikh Campaign
8. [Sikhs in the United States Report](#) by National Sikh Campaign
9. Sikh Coalition [Post-9/11 Fact Sheet](#)
10. ["Holding my Breath"](#) by Muninder Kaur Ahluwalia
11. PBS ["Sikh Americans Push for Greater Visibility"](#)