

# **California's Diversity: Past and Present Lessons for the Fair Education Act of 2011**

## **Lesson 3: Religious Diversity in California**

### **Overview**

In this lesson, students focus on one specific facet of California's diversity: religious diversity. First, they engage in a focus discussion of the meaning of freedom of religion. Then they read a profile of religious diversity in California, focusing on a few examples of the variety of religious expression in the state. Finally, students learn about deliberation as a form of discussion and take part in a deliberation on the issue of whether schools should allow *kirpans* (symbolic blades sacred to Sikhs) in school as part of religious freedom.

### **Time**

One to two class periods.

### **Objectives**

Students will be able to:

- Explain the difference between *establishment of religion* and *free exercise of religion* in the First Amendment.
- Explain reasons for religious diversity in California.
- Deliberate about a controversial issue of religious freedom on a school campus.
- Present reasons either for or against a school policy that affects religious freedom.

### **Compliance With the Fair Education Act**

This lesson is designed to comply with requirements under California Senate Bill 48 ("SB 48"), signed into law as the Fair Education Act in 2011. The act amended California Education Code Section 51204.5 to read as follows:

Instruction in social sciences shall include the early history of California and a study of the role and contributions of both men and women, Native Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, European Americans, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender Americans, persons with disabilities, and members of other ethnic and cultural groups, to the economic, political, and social development of California and the United States of America, with particular emphasis on portraying the role of these groups in contemporary society.

The act also amended California Education Code Section 60040 to direct governing boards to "include only instructional materials which, in their determination, accurately portray the cultural and racial diversity of our society...."

## Common Core State Standards Addressed

**SL.8.1.** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 8 topics, texts, and issues*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

**RH.6-8.1.** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

**RH.6-8.4.** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

## Materials and Preparation

- Handout A: Religious Diversity in California (one for each student)
- Handout B: Should Knives Ever Be Allowed at School? (one for each student)
- Handout C: Deliberation Steps (one for each student)

## Procedure

### A. Reading and Discussion: Religious Diversity in California

1. Focus Discussion. Ask students: What does it mean to have freedom of religion?

*Accept reasoned responses. Look for: Freedom of religion means the freedom to believe what you want and to respect others' beliefs at the same time. It could also mean the freedom to have faith in something (e.g., a higher power) and to respect others' faith, even if they are different from your own.*

2. Tell students that today they will be reading about freedom of religion in California. Assuming they have already done Lessons 1 and 2 from this series, they will know about cultural diversity in California. Religious diversity is a part of cultural diversity. There are many religions represented in California. There are also those who are non-religious.

3. Distribute **Religious Diversity in California**. Explain that it describes examples of diverse religions in the state and also conflicts that had to be solved in courts of law. The reading should take approximately 10 minutes.

4. After they finish reading, hold a discussion using the **For Discussion and Writing** questions:

- What is the difference between the words about "establishment" and the words about "free exercise" in the First Amendment? Why do you think it is necessary to have both? *The words about "establishment" mean that the government cannot create an official religion. The words about "free exercise" mean that the government cannot interfere with each of our religious beliefs. It is necessary to have both to protect individual rights of citizens from intrusions by the government.*
- What are some of the reasons for religious diversity in California? *Diverse migrations of people have come to California from Asia, Latin*

- Do you think these legal cases described in the reading deal with free exercise or with establishment? Why?
- ***Gabrielli v. Knickerbocker.***  
*Accept reasoned responses. Gabrielli claimed her right to free exercise was infringed.*
- ***Lyng v. Northwest Indian Cemetery.***  
*Accept reasoned responses. The Native Americans claimed their right to free exercise was infringed.*

5. Tell the students:

Now that we have looked at different examples of religious diversity and conflict, we are going to take a look at one conflict that happened at a school.

## **B. Activity: Deliberation: Should Knives Ever Be Allowed at School?**

1. IMPORTANT NOTE BEFORE BEGINNING: In this deliberation activity, students will learn a little about Sikhism and about kirpans. The kirpan is a bladed instrument and a sacred symbol in the Sikh faith. A Sikh student may be sensitive to having the kirpan referred to as a “knife” or a “weapon.” It may be necessary in your class to remind students beforehand that in this deliberation the kirpan is only referred to as a “knife” because that is what the principal thought it was. No offense is intended. (See Mayled, John. *Sikhism*. Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 2002. Print.)

2. Remind students of their Focus Discussion. Ask: What is a discussion?

*Look for: A discussion is when a group of people talk and share ideas.*

Write the term *deliberation* on the board. Explain that today students will do a special kind of discussion called deliberation. Explain that a deliberation is a discussion that leads students to make a decision in answering a yes-or-no question. It is not a debate with winners or losers. It is a way for everyone to understand different sides to an issue.

3. Organize the students into groups of four, with each group divided into two pairs.

4. It will be helpful to have the following steps written on a poster or projected large enough for the whole class to see throughout the activity. NOTE: The steps here are a simplified version of “Deliberation Procedures” available at *Deliberating in a Democracy in the Americas* ([dda.deliberating.org](http://dda.deliberating.org)).

### **Deliberation Steps**

1. Learn about the topic.
2. Form “Yes” and “No” groups.
3. Share and listen.
4. Switch.
5. What do you think?

5. Review the steps before starting the deliberation.

1) Learn about the topic.

Students should read the text carefully and underline interesting facts or ideas.

2) Form "Yes" and "No" groups.

Working with a partner, students should discuss the reading and make sure they understand it. Together, each pair will list the reasons to answer the Question for Deliberation either "yes" or "no," depending on how they were assigned. They will put a check next to their best (most compelling) reasons.

3) Share and listen.

Starting with the Yes Groups, each pair will take turns explaining to the opposing side their best reasons. While the Yes Group speaks, the No Group listens carefully. There is space on the Deliberation Steps Handout Step #4 ("Switch") to take notes while listening.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Remind students this is not a debate. Therefore, they are not trying to win an argument, but just to understand both sides of an issue.

4) Switch.

Again starting with the Yes Groups, each pair will take turns explaining the best reasons of the opposing side that they heard. This will show that they were listening and understanding.

5) What do you think?

In this step, each group of four tries to reach an agreement. Students may express what they really think the answer to the Question for Deliberation should be, even if it is different from what they were assigned to do before. It is okay if a group cannot reach a final agreement on the answer to the question, as long as everyone in each group has a chance to express their own reasons.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Students may draw from the information in the reading as well as their own prior knowledge to do this step.

6. Follow Steps 1 – 5 above, beginning by distributing **Handout A: Should Knives Ever Be Allowed At School?** and having students read it (5 minutes). Check for understanding, especially of the Question for Deliberation: *Should the principal allow Rajinder to wear his kirpan?*

7. Follow the remainder of the steps, giving students about 2 – 3 minutes each to complete Steps 2, 3, and 4.

8. Allow students 5 minutes to complete Step 5.

### C. Debrief

1. Debrief the activity. This may be done with students sitting in their groups of four. Another effective way to do this is to have the whole class rearrange their seats into a large circle. Questions to ask:
  - What was the issue that had to be solved at Rajinder Singh's school? (His last name is pronounced the same as the word "sing.")  
*Rajinder's religion is Sikhism. One requirement for Sikh males is to carry a symbolic dagger called a "kirpan" with them at all times. Rajinder had a short, round-edged kirpan on campus, but the school policy was: No weapons allowed at school.*
  - Did any groups reach an agreement? If so, what was your agreement?  
*Accept reasoned responses.*
  - Did any groups find it hard to reach agreement? Why or why not?  
*Accept reasoned responses.*
  - Were there any reasons you heard in your deliberation that sounded particularly persuasive to you?  
*Accept reasoned responses.*
2. Inform students that this comes from an actual case in California from 1994. The court ruled that Rajinder had the right to wear the kirpan, provided it did not endanger anyone at school. In other cases, school districts have allowed students to wear kirpans to school. One school district insisted that the kirpan be put in its jacket so that it couldn't be removed. Many kirpans are stitched tightly into closed cases and have dull edges, to show schools that they are only ceremonial blades, not weapons.

## **Religious Diversity in California**

The first words of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution protect our religious freedom. Those words are:

Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof....

What do these words mean? The words about “establishment” mean that the government cannot create an official religion. The words about “free exercise” mean that the government cannot interfere with each of our religious beliefs.

These words originally only applied to the federal government. Like equal protection and due process, they now apply to state governments, too. California and all the other states must respect the First Amendment.

Today, one-third of California’s believers are Roman Catholic. Many others are Protestant Christian, Buddhist, Jewish, Mormon, Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim. One-fifth of Californians have no religion at all. How did the state come to be so religiously diverse?

### **Early Religious History**

From north to south, some of California’s religious buildings give clues to this past. Diverse people have come and settled, bringing their cultures and religious traditions.



In Trinity County you can find the Joss House, the oldest Taoist temple in the state. Taoism is a traditional Chinese faith in “The Way,” or Tao. Chinese immigrants came to work on the railroads and settled in northern California in the 1800s. They built the temple in 1874.

The Joss House is located in Weaverville in Northern California. (National Park Service.)

Further south in Stockton you can find Temple Israel, the state’s oldest Jewish congregation. It was built in 1854. Many Jews immigrated to the state during the Gold Rush, including Levi Strauss, the creator of Levi’s blue jeans. They formed Jewish communities and built places of worship.

Even further south, you can find the Mission Basilica San Diego de Alcalá, the oldest Spanish Catholic mission. It was first built in 1769. San Diego County gets its name from this mission. Missionaries from Spain built 21 missions in California. The last one was built in 1823 in Sonoma County.

Diverse migrations of people came in the 20<sup>th</sup> century from Asia, Latin America, and Europe. They came from elsewhere within the U.S., too. That is why today different religious cultures live side-by-side.

### Challenges to Religious Freedom

Sometimes the rights of California religious groups conflict with each other. Minority groups' rights to practice their religions have been challenged. There were several examples of this in the twentieth century.

In 1933, male students at the University of California had to take part in military training. It was called the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC). A group of male students requested not to participate in ROTC. They were members of a Christian church called the Methodist Episcopal Church. That church opposed all war.

The university denied their request. The students sued the university. Eventually, the U.S. Supreme Court heard their case. In the case of *Hamilton v. Regents of University of California* the young men argued that they were conscientious objectors (people who object to war on moral grounds). In 1934, however, the U.S. Supreme Court decided that the university did not have to exempt these students from ROTC training.

Two years later, a girl named from Sacramento refused to say the Pledge of Allegiance with her elementary school class. Her name was Charlotte Gabrielli. She belonged to the Jehovah's Witnesses, a Christian religion. Jehovah's Witnesses believed saluting the flag was a form of idolatry (worship of idols).

Her school suspended her because she refused to say the Pledge. Her parents sued the school and won at trial. In the 1938 decision in *Gabrielli v.*

*Knickerbocker*, however, the California Supreme Court upheld the mandatory



The Mission San Diego de Alcala is a National Historic Landmark.



Children saying the Pledge of Allegiance in a San Francisco school in 1942. (National Archives.)

flag salute. The court decided that the “training of school children in good citizenship, patriotism, and loyalty to state and nation” were too important to allow exceptions to reciting the Pledge. Therefore, the school could suspend Charlotte.

Many suspensions of Jehovah’s Witnesses occurred in California. In 1943, the U.S. Supreme Court held that Jehovah’s Witnesses did not have to go against their religion and say the Pledge in school.

Decades later, another California case affected religious freedom. In 1982, the U.S. Forest Service planned to build a logging road in Northern California. A six-mile paved road would cut through land that Native Americans used for religious rituals. Karuk, Yurok, and other tribes believed this land was sacred.

Native American individuals and groups sued the Forest Service. The case made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court as *Lyng v. Northwest Indian Cemetery*. The court held that the paved road through sacred land did not harm the religious freedom of the tribes.

Even today, minority and majority religious groups find ways to live together. Often, their conflicts lead to changes in the law. In all cases, however, laws must comply with the First Amendment. Each person’s freedom depends on it.

### **For Discussion and Writing**

1. What is the difference between the words about “establishment” and the words about “free exercise” in the First Amendment? Why do you think it is necessary to have both?
2. What are some of the reasons for such religious diversity in California?
3. Do you think these legal cases described in the reading deal with free exercise or with establishment? Why?
  - *Gabrielli v. Knickerbocker*.
  - *Lyng v. Northwest Indian Cemetery*.



## Should Knives Ever Be Allowed at School?

Fifth grader Rajinder Singh Cheema was playing basketball on the school playground. He had the ball and jumped up toward the hoop. His shirt lifted briefly. Under his shirt was a small “knife” strapped to his chest in its case. The school in California had a rule that said: **No weapons allowed at school.**

When the principal asked him why he brought the knife to school, Rajinder explained that it was not really a knife. It was a part of his religion.

Rajinder is a Sikh. Sikhism is a religion founded in India about 500 years ago. There are about 200,000 Sikhs in the United States. The knife (called a *kirpan*) symbolizes the religious duty to help people in need. It's a sacred symbol. In the Sikh religion, males wear the kirpan and are expected only to use it in a life or death matter. To Sikhs, wearing the kirpan at all times is very important. Here are some of the things that the kirpan stands for:

- coming to the aid of a person who needs help.
- preventing violence from being done to a defenseless person.
- the power of truth.

Rajinder's kirpan had a curved, rounded edge. He wore it in a case. It hung around Rajinder's neck under his clothing.

At Rajinder's school there was a very strict rule about weapons. No weapons of any kind were allowed at school. The principal was in charge of enforcing this rule. The purpose of the rule was to keep the students safe. Rajinder was not allowed to come to school with his kirpan because:

- no student can have any kind of knife, even a toy knife, at school.
- all of the students should feel safe while they are at school.
- students and parents need to feel sure that there are never any weapons on the school grounds.

**Question for Deliberation:** Should the principal allow Rajinder to wear his kirpan?

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## Deliberation Steps



Handout C

### 1. Learn about the topic.

Carefully read everything your teacher gave you to learn about the topic.

Write the Question for Deliberation here: \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Form “Yes” groups and “No” groups.

Now you will get to work with a partner.  
You and your partner will be a “Yes” Group  
or you will be a “No” Group:

*Yes Group* – Make a list of all the reasons  
the answer to the question should be YES.

*No Group* – Make a list of all the reasons  
the answer to the question should be NO.

Make your list here:

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✓ *Put a check next to your very best reasons.*

### 3. Share and listen.

The Yes Group will share its best reasons first. The No Group will listen.  
Then the No group will share its best reasons, and the Yes group will listen.

### 4. Switch.

*Yes Group* — Write down the best reasons you heard from the No Group:

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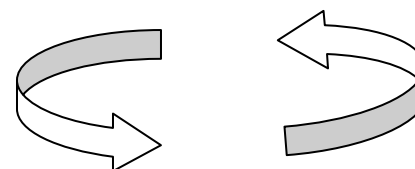
*No Group* — Write down the best reasons you heard from the Yes Group:

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Yes Group: Tell the students in the No Group what their best reasons were.

No Group: Tell the students in the Yes Group what their best reasons were.



### 5. What do you think?

Look at the best points in Step 4.

What do you think about the question?

You may answer “Yes” or “No” as you wish.

Share your own reasons.