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— Navjot Kaur, author



Tale of a Visible Identity

When author and teacher Navjot Kaur's 18-month-old son was diagnosed with hearing loss, she was confronted with a challenging new reality that eventually inspired her to write the book *A Lion's Mane*. After her son was fast asleep, Kaur would put her thoughts down in a notebook. "I would write anything and everything that came to mind," says Kaur. "It was a kind of healing therapy, helping to ease my mind and spirit. These notes evolved into *A Lion's Mane*, telling the story of a boy's celebration of his visible identity by connecting to cultures from around the world."

The book follows its young character, who wears a *dastaar*, as he grows to appreciate the cultural significance of his visible Sikh identity and to forge a positive self-image.

Kaur hopes *A Lion's Mane*, published by Saffron Press, will serve as "a starting point to think about being different and being happy with that. I hope it will help promote dialogue around issues of self-identity so that all children can feel safe and sure of who they are despite their appearance. If we are to give our children the tools to think about what they see and hear before passing judgment on another person, then it is important we take the time to talk to them and allow them to ask us questions."

Just as Kaur "embraces the opportunity to promote diversity initiatives" within her classroom to tackle stereotypes and bias, she envisioned that the book would be a medium for encouraging discussion about prejudice. It is important not to underestimate the influential role that children's literature can play, says Kaur. "A picture book can sometimes become a powerful tool in classrooms and beyond."

Jaspreet Sandhu, *Mane's* illustrator, was drawn to the unifying message at the

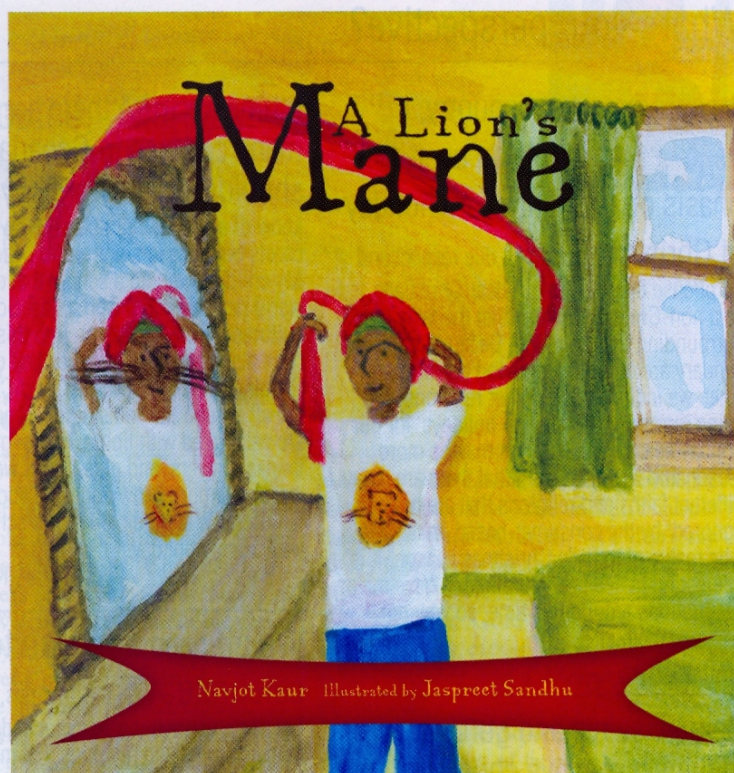
heart of the story.

Sandhu says she is proud to be a part of what she feels is a unique children's story that takes young readers through complex ideas and places. "Everyone growing up, and even as adults, faces difference. And we don't necessarily know how to deal with these differences. It's hard to not have a personal connection to this story."

After running into a childhood friend who used to wear a *patka* in school but cut his hair as an adult, Sandhu was left wondering whether his decision was the result of the teasing he'd experienced while growing up. Having seen someone alter his visible identity, she can vouch for the need to empower kids to take pride in their personal and cultural identity.

"Everyone knows someone who has radically changed who they are to 'fit in,'" says Sandhu. "When you step back, you realize that is tragic and unfortunate."

Given how *A Lion's Mane* not only raises awareness of Sikh culture but also addresses issues of equity and inclusion, it makes an ideal addition to the elementary-school curriculum, and Kaur is working on lesson plans to help teachers use the book with ease. For the moment, parents and teachers can engage with



By Alisha Randhawa

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related educational materials on publisher Saffron Press's site.

Simran Kaur, marketing director of Saffron Press, says focusing on titles that help to address issues related to visible identities is a hallmark of the company's approach to publishing, and *A Lion's Mane* was a perfect fit. Saffron Press, which was founded by a Sikh couple, is particularly interested in children's literature because it can play a pivotal role in ensuring that kids "gain a better understanding of the global community," says Simran Kaur.

Reflecting Navjot Kaur's commitment to the values of the Sikh religion, particularly the concepts of *seva* and *sarbat da bhalla*, part of the proceeds from the sale of the book will be donated to Seva Canada, an organization that allows children access to medical aid to help prevent childhood blindness. Also in line with Kaur's global citizenry, *A Lion's Mane* itself is printed on 100 per cent recycled paper and, in a partnership with Eco-Libris, 625 trees will be planted to offset the first hardcover edition.

Navjot Kaur is encouraged by the overwhelmingly positive feedback *A Lion's Mane* has already received. She attributes the response to the fact that the book speaks universally to all kids, and even adults. "It is a global story that has garnered interest from Sikh and non-Sikh audiences equally." □

For more information on *A Lion's Mane* visit
www.saffronpress.com.