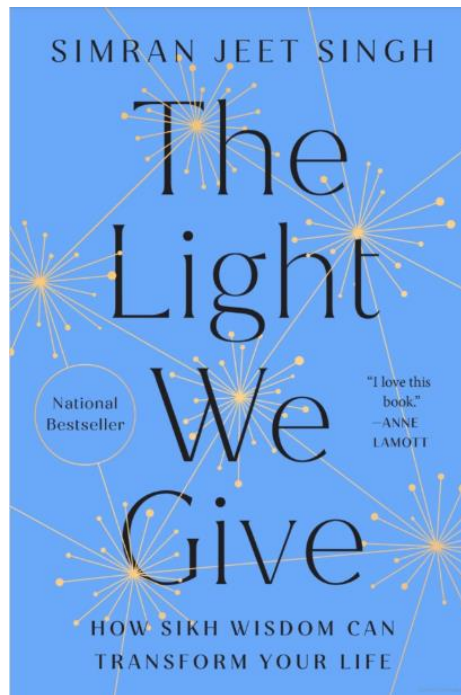


Otterbein Common Book 2024

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About the Common Book Author



Otterbein's Common Book Program, one of the University's signature programs, offers a shared reading experience for all incoming first-year students, and for faculty, staff, and other members of the Otterbein community.

The 2024 Common Book, *The Light We Give: How Sikh Wisdom Can Transform Your Life* is Simran Jeet Singh's story of growing up in San Antonio, Texas as a Sikh—a believer and practitioner of Sikhism, the fifth largest religion in the world. Singh was seventeen years old when the events of September 11th, 2001, occurred. Singh's book confronts

readers with experiences that belong to the immediate aftermath of that event and to the decades that followed it. These experiences collide with the ideal of an America committed to pluralism and freedom of religious expression.

The Light We Give, however, is ultimately an optimistic book. In his book, Singh marshals Sikh teachings (and the affinities these teachings have with the ethical insights of other faith traditions) to chart a way out of the logics of hatred, anger, and revenge.

Common Book Assignment

Respond to this prompt in a thesis-driven essay consisting of multiple paragraphs:

The Light We Give relays a series of experiences in which Singh (or other Sikhs) is the object of fear, misunderstanding, derision, or even violence. Focusing on at least **two specific experiences** relayed in the book, describe what it is that Singh is trying to illustrate or deepen our understanding of. What makes the two experiences you selected so memorable or striking or illustrative? After describing each specific experience, address the way Singh reflects on—and tries to work through—what happened. How, specifically, does Singh apply or enact the maxims of his own faith tradition, Sikhism?

Criteria for Success

A well-written essay will contain the following:

1. An introductory paragraph that effectively identifies and contextualizes the book and engages the reader.
2. A thesis statement that presents the main idea of the essay and that is phrased using the last name of the author.
3. Supporting paragraphs that engage in "close reading" in order to introduce evidence that supports the essay's thesis. Supporting paragraphs that engage in "close reading" rely on paraphrase and direct quotation to show a command of the book's details. Too, supporting paragraphs do not just introduce evidence; they *analyze, take apart, and elaborate on* the evidence that's been introduced, tying it back to the essay's thesis. The best rule of thumb for supporting paragraphs is to make "at least two moves to illustration"—i.e., to have at least two direct quotations per supporting paragraph.
4. Quotations from the book that are chosen carefully and judiciously. Quotations can be complete sentences from the book, or they can be just phrases or even single words. When they are complete sentences, they should be appropriately introduced and punctuated, and correctly cited according to MLA guidelines.
5. A Work Cited page that is complete and correct.
6. Sentences that are varied in length and structure and that demonstrate the author's mastery of Academic English syntax.
7. Evidence that the paper has been proofread for typos and grammatical miscues.
8. Proper first page formatting (see next page), consistent double-spacing, and the presence of page numbers.

Document Design

Essays submitted to your professors should be written according to a standard format: font, spacing, margins, headings, page numbering, and documentation style are all prescribed. See the following page for an example that illustrates these features according to one style of documentation, the MLA 9th edition.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How long should the essay be?

A: The essay should be about 750-1000 words, which will typically be three or four printed double-spaced pages.

Q: What if I don't take my FYS until spring?

A: You still need to complete the essay before you come to Otterbein. Your essay will be collected at First Flight and given to your FYS instructor, even if your FYS course isn't until the Spring semester.

Q: Who reads my essay?

A: Your FYS instructor, who might grade your essay, use your writing to begin discussion of the book, or simply offer comments.

Q: What supplemental materials are available?

A: The Otterbein University library, Courtright Memorial Library, creates and curates a LibGuide dedicated to each year's Common Book.

<https://otterbein.libguides.com/CommonBookOU/singh>

Q: Who can I contact with questions?

A: If you have other questions or concerns, please contact Colette Masterson, Associate Director for New Student Transitions in the Office of Student Success & Career Development at cmasterson@otterbein.edu.

Important Dates to Remember, Fall 2024

Your essay will be the first writing that you submit to your FYS instructor. Bring a **printed copy** of your essay to First Flight. The printed copy of your assignment will be collected and discussed during your **FYS course meetings**:

- First Flight – August 21-25, 2024
- FYS Meeting 1 – August 22, 2024
- FYS Meeting 2 – August 23, 2024
- Classes begin Monday, August 26, 2024.

The Common Book Convocation ceremony will be held on Tuesday, October 22. There will be additional visits with Simran Jeet Singh on October 21 and 22.

Your Name

Professor's Last Name

FYS #####

22 August 2024

Sample Essay

Academic writing follows certain conventions. These rules are typically dictated by a style manual, such as the one published by the Modern Languages Association and commonly cited as the MLA Style Manual or simply MLA. These rules dictate form to ensure that essays are clear and readable as well as professional.

Typical rules for font choices will dictate not only the typeface to use, but also its size, spacing, and indenting. A common standard is 12-point Times New Roman font, double spaced, with one-inch margins on all sides. That style is demonstrated here. Notice how everything is consistently double-spaced. There are no extra line spaces, for example, between the date and the title of your essay, or between the title and the first line.

Another fundamental concern when writing on a book is the incorporation and proper introduction and attribution of textual material. Quotations are the most common and demonstrable way of showing your knowledge of the text. Quotations are used to back up claims, to *show* what an author is saying as opposed only to making assertions about what an author is saying. Here is an example: In the aftermath of the Oak Creek Massacre, Singh struggles to process his emotions. He writes, "It had been weeks since the massacre. I had developed some clarity and coping mechanisms by this point. Yet I still felt myself sinking into negativity and wasn't sure how to pull myself out of it" (89). See how, in this example, a claim is made, and then a citation is introduced to show *Singh's own words* to support the claim? Note,

too, here, how a signal phrase (or phrase of attribution) is used before the citation. Signal phrases such as Singh writes, or Singh contends, or Singh insists or As Singh puts it are followed by commas. Sometimes you will cite only a phrase or single word from the text. These do not require signal phrases; they can just be folded directly into the sentences you are writing. Like this: Singh defends his decision to display such a visible sign of his Sikh identity, suggesting that "courageous vulnerability" (79) is part of what his faith requires.

Regardless of the plurality of ways to incorporate direct citations, your ideas and your analyses of the author's words are the most important part of the essay. Introduce all attributions to make it clear they are the author's words or ideas, and then connect them to your own arguments. Even when paraphrasing, it is not uncommon to indicate page numbers in parentheses. Too, what's important is that, after introducing evidence, you *link the evidence back to your thesis*. This is what it means to analyze evidence—i.e., to articulate how the evidence is working in support of a larger idea you are advancing (or see Singh advancing). You might say: "When Singh thinks about trying to change his appearance, he focuses on his turban and the long hair that it conceals (66-67). Here, too, however, he emphasizes how doing such things makes him the one who must solve the problem of the discrimination he experiences. The idea that the recipients of prejudice should have to take the steps to remove the prejudice is precisely what *The Light We Give* seeks to critique." Note how evidence is introduced here by means of paraphrase and then is linked explicitly back to a larger argument.

Work Cited

Singh, Simrat Jeet. *The Light We Give: How Sikh Wisdom Can Transform Your Life*. Riverhead, 2022.

Active & Attentive Reading

Reading at the college level can be demanding. This is true of *The Light We Give*, which refers to historical events and introduces concepts from a faith tradition that may be unfamiliar to you.

As a college student, you can expect **more** reading, reading that **challenges** your thinking, reading that **broadens** your view of the world, reading that **transforms** you. Your professors in college are going to expect you to have done more than just run your eyes over the readings they assign in their courses. If you are going to read effectively at the college level, you cannot read passively; you must be an **active** and **attentive** reader. This means interacting with your text in ways you might not have before. To help you begin to cultivate the habits of such a reader, we recommend this strategy:

Locate: Choose a time when and a place where you are alert and focused. The conditions for active and attentive reading are ones in which your attention is not divided.

Survey: Look at chapter titles, section headings, intros, topic sentences, words in bold type, graphics, and footnotes or endnotes.

Question: Note the question(s) you have been asked to address about this text. Be on the lookout for textual moments that you see as connected to the questions you have been asked.

Read: Armed with a view of the layout of the text and with questions you're reading to answer, read in chunks of 10 pages. Try to read 100 pages at a sitting. Your readings will be more efficient if you chunk the assignment into these more manageable parts.

Write: As you read, write—annotate the text, taking notes in the margin. This is your book to keep, so make the most of it! Use a pen or pencil, not a highlighter; ask questions, circle unfamiliar words, connect with prior knowledge or other parts of the text, list names, underline key passages, and make marks to remind you of the importance of a part of the text. Annotations work in the present, to help you engage with the text, and in the future, when you review the reading for a test or collect information for a paper. Some of the observations you make when reading will be very helpful when you sit down to write your essay.

Outline or Summarize: Outlining as you read helps you situate what you are reading into a larger context of information. Summarizing after you read a chapter, using your own words, is a good measure of your understanding of the text.

Journal: Keep a reading journal in which you note observations, reflections, and questions as you read. Pause to write every so often—using your reading journal as your ten-page break is a good start. Keep your outlines and summaries, as well as images, patterns, connections, significant people, and new ideas here. The journal will help you interact with the information in the text as well as serve as a record of your reading. This can be helpful for class discussions, assignments, and program events during the author's visit. The reading journal also consolidates your ideas into one place for your reference when you write your First Flight essay.