

Making Assumptions

Sibi is an Indian student at your college. He's just told you he's upset about an incident that happened during a campus club meeting.

Club members were working to decorate their community bulletin boards on campus for the upcoming winter holiday season. In an effort to be inclusive, the organization had planned for each board to represent a different religious and/or cultural holiday taking place during that time of year, such as Chanukah in Judaism, Christmas in Christianity and Catholicism, and Kwanzaa among those with African heritage.

Sibi's upset that he was assigned to the board for Diwali, a Hindu festival, with two other Indian students. Sibi's not Hindu and does not celebrate Diwali; he's Christian and had been hoping to work on the Christmas board, and he resents the fact that this error was made about his background.

Sibi tells you he spoke about this situation to the club president, who was surprised to find out Sibi is Christian, admitting the club's leaders had assumed he was Hindu and celebrated Diwali like the other Indian members of the club. "But at least you're Indian, so hopefully you'll still know more about it than any of us would," the president said. He added that the Christmas group was already too large for Sibi to join, anyway.

For Discussion:

- Do you feel it was culturally incompetent of club leaders and meeting organizers to assign Sibi the way they did? Why or why not?
- What are your feelings about how the club president responded to Sibi?
- Can you understand how Sibi feels? How would you feel in a situation like this, if asked to work on a project related to a culture and/or religion different from your own?
- Should Sibi stay in his assigned group and take the opportunity to learn more about this tradition while providing a valuable service for other students? Or should he decline because the assignment was based on an incorrect assumption about him? Explain your thinking.
- Can you think of a more inclusive way for this campus organization to decorate these bulletin boards in honor of various upcoming religious and cultural holidays?