



Girl Scout Raises Cultural Awareness

Neha Thiagarajan earns Gold Award for project, "Dance for Diversity"

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Ventura, CA —

Neha Thiagarajan, a current Junior at Moorpark High School, had the goal to address the lack of cultural knowledge in her community. With both of her parents emigrating from India, Neha was raised to be proud of her rich Indian culture and heritage. She noticed that there was not enough accessible information or resources to educate others on India's culture, which ultimately causes individuals to form misconceptions. To expose the younger generation to India's diversity and break stereotypes, Neha created a dance class at a local Elementary's after-school program, Success Express.

"I believe that immersing students in cultural activities gives them an opportunity to become comfortable with different races, languages, and lifestyles," she said. "This will also help them to be tolerant and open-minded towards others. I believe that learning about a new culture will break down barriers and overcome stereotypical attitudes."

She began by writing up a project outline to pitch to Success Express' after school advisor. Once her project was approved, Neha created a PowerPoint presentation to share India's language, food, architecture, festivals, art, and more. The presentation was shared with a group of over 50 after school students in an interactive session. After the fact, students interested in participating in the dance class signed up.

About 30 students in grades kindergarten through fifth grade joined Neha's class a week later. The program lasted for five months, where she taught the class two styles of Indian dance: Bharatnatyam and Bollywood. One challenge that she faced was choreographing dance moves that would be easy enough for the youngest students in her class while still engaging the older students. "I found it difficult to choreograph dance steps that would be interesting, yet doable for the kids," she said.

With some help from another dance instructor at the after school program, Neha was able to successfully teach her students two different dance routines. She organized an end-of-year



production where students could perform the routines for their parents. Two days before the event, she held a session where she explained the cultural significance of Henna. Neha recycled plastic water bottles to pay for her materials, enlisted the help of a few friends for the Henna applications, and students left the session with fun designs on their hands.

On June 7, 2019, children and parents gathered together for the student's final performance, which went flawlessly. "The program was well-received by everyone," she said. "I would like to thank Ms. Jenny and Mr. Jared and the after-school teachers for their support and encouragement all the way. It was a pleasure working with kids and I was very excited to see their enthusiasm in every class."

In completion of her project, Neha picked up quite a few useful skills along the way. "I learned how to create a project plan with a timeline and how to implement it," she said. "I learned how to communicate effectively with both adults and children. But the most important thing I learned during the project is that I can push myself out of my comfort zone and accomplish what I had set in my mind. This really helped me develop confidence in myself and my abilities."

Neha also created a blog to share her Gold Award journey and inspire others to start similar programs. Read more about her project [here](#). To learn more about Going Gold, you can visit our site at girlscoutscoc.org. Check out more incredible stories of our Gold Award Girl Scouts [here](#)!

About Girl Scouts of California's Central Coast

Girl Scouts of California's Central Coast serves over 8,800 girls across six counties and is committed to making the Girl Scout Leadership Experience available to girls in ways that impact their lives both in the moment and into the future. Girls participate in troops, individual projects, council events, day camps, resident camps and more. A variety of leadership, outdoor skills, and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) based programs and events provide girls with opportunities to learn and explore in fun and informative ways. To join or volunteer in Santa Cruz, San Benito, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara or Ventura County, visit: <http://www.girlscoutscoc.org>.

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