

Saint Edith Stein

Book Title: *Saint Edith Stein: Blessed by the Cross*

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Saint Edith Stein is known as a scholar, a Carmelite nun, and a martyr, but the aspect of her life that struck me the most as I read our Encounter book is her role as daughter. Mother/daughter relationships are complex and Edith's was no different. She seemed to defy her mother throughout her life with her decision to go away to college, her decision to be a wartime nurse, and ultimately her conversion to Christianity and her entrance into the Carmel. But Edith's mother always came around to see the wisdom in Edith's decisions. Sometimes it took longer than others, but each time, the hurt and the disappointment melted away. At the root of every mother/daughter relationship, no matter how complex, lies unconditional love.

Discussion/Written Response Questions

1. School, learning, and research were things that Edith loved for her entire life. What obstacles did she face as a scholar?
2. Why was Edith's mother so upset when she heard about Edith's decision to become a nun? What do you think finally made her accept Edith's decision?
3. God called Edith to many vocations: scholar, nurse, teacher, writer, and nun. How did each vocation prepare her for the next? Also, how did her decisions to pursue these vocations affect her family life, particularly her relationship with her mother?

Geography Connection

Germany

The Netherlands (Holland)

Switzerland

Poland

History Connection

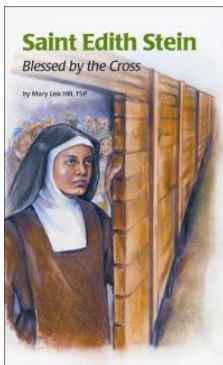
Read this book in conjunction with a unit on World War II and the Holocaust. Edith's story shows the power and reach of the Nazis in Europe at the time. That they would even bother tracking down a Catholic nun in the Netherlands shows how massive the genocide was.

P.E. Connection

Nurse Dodge Ball

Because Edith was a wartime nurse, this variation of dodge ball can be played with her in mind. In true Edith Stein style, there is intelligence and strategy involved and not just athletic prowess.

Two teams go to opposite sides of the playing area (a basketball court works well because the boundaries are clear and there is no need to set up cones). Each team chooses a nurse and keeps it a secret (although the teacher should be aware of who they have chosen). Regular dodge ball rules apply: All hits must be below the waist; if you catch the ball, the person who threw it is "out"; you can't cross the center line or go out of bounds; the team to get all of the opposing players "out" wins; etc. In Nurse Dodge Ball, if you get hit, you sit down where you are and wait for the nurse to come and heal you by tagging you. It is nearly impossible to win without getting the nurse "out", so it is advantageous to figure out early on who the nurse is. It is also advantageous to hide your nurse's identity by not hopping up immediately, or by having decoy taggers, or bodyguards for the nurse. Let the students figure out these strategies on their own. Once students have the rules of the game down, add another ball.



Edith Stein was born on October 12, 1891 in a part of Germany that is now Poland. Her father died when she was two, and her mother, a woman of deep Jewish faith, struggled to run the family business and care for her children. After reading the autobiography of St. Teresa of Avila, Edith felt a strong pull toward the Catholic faith. She asked to be baptized, and on January 1, 1922, she became a Catholic. Her family and friends found it difficult to understand this decision. Edith became a leader in the Catholic Women's Movement. She taught in a school that was run by the Dominicans and translated some of St. Thomas Aquinas's writings. In 1934, she became a Discalced Carmelite in Cologne. Her new name as a nun was Sister Teresa Benedicta of the Cross.

She continued to write, but most of her work could not be published at the time because she was a woman and because of her Jewish roots. As the Nazi party became stronger and more threatening, she was forced to escape to a Carmelite monastery in Holland. When Germany invaded Holland, many Catholics of Jewish heritage were arrested and deported to the concentration camps of Auschwitz. Edith was among them. She died in Auschwitz in the gas chambers on August 9, 1942. Pope John Paul II canonized her on October 11, 1998. *Saint Edith Stein: Blessed by the Cross* is a story that children can relate to as they study history and begin to see the effects of prejudice. Edith Stein is a saint who lived the complexities of modern political situations with the simplicity and trust of one who is confident in God's ultimate reliability. Ages 8 – 12
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