

## **Saint Juan Diego**

Book Title: *Saint Juan Diego and Our Lady of Guadalupe*

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In Southern California, where I grew up, Our Lady of Guadalupe makes near daily appearances on the back of truck windows, murals in people's backyards, and even purses. Needless to say, she is a beloved figure in Mexican culture. But the events in Mexican history leading up to her original appearance to Juan Diego way back in 1531 are quite controversial and should be approached with caution. Many natives were murdered and their villages were plundered. The conquistadors did exactly what their name suggests: they conquered.

I took a Mexican history class in college that covered the Aztec culture, the arrival of Cortez, and the appearance of Our Lady, and I was horrified by Cortez and his men. Our Encounter Book on *Saint Juan Diego* touches on this violence in an age-appropriate way. It is nearly impossible to cover all the complexity of that time period in a chapter or two of social context for the story of Juan Diego, but this book serves as a good starting point for class discussion. I highly recommend learning more about the Spanish conquistadors and Moctezuma, and presenting all of the conflicting motives to your children. Not every moment in history is black and white—many have gray areas. Children need to understand that there is not always a clear right and wrong or good guy and bad guy. Sometimes life is messy. It is also important for children to know that after all of the horrors that the native Mexicans endured, they were given the gift of Our Lady of Guadalupe—God hadn't abandoned them.

### **Discussion/Written Response Questions**

1. What cultural beliefs and practices made it easier for the native Mexicans to understand and accept the new religion that the missionaries brought to the region?
2. How were some of the Spanish conquistadors hypocritical? How did this make the conversion of the natives more difficult for the missionaries? Can you think of

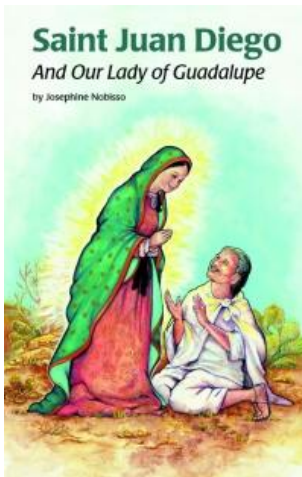
- a modern example of hypocrisy? How does it make you feel when someone acts like a hypocrite?
3. Why do you think the Blessed Mother chose to appear to Juan Diego? How was he the perfect person for the job?
  4. How did the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe encourage many natives to convert?

### Science Connection

The roses that Juan Diego gathered from the top of Tepeyac Hill were not native to Mexico. What plants are native to your region? What kind of climate and conditions do those plants thrive in? Try growing a plant that is not native to the region and see if you can help it survive.

### History Connection

Research the conquistadors' arrival in Mexico. What were the motives for exploration at that time? Try to view Cortez and his men through the eyes of the Aztecs. What did they see happening to their civilization? How does this conflict with the motives of the conquistadors?



It was to Juan Diego that Mary, the Mother of God, first introduced herself to the world as Our Lady of Guadalupe. Juan lived in the sixteenth century when Mexico City was known as the Valley of Anahuac.

After Juan's particular mission was completed, it is said that he became a hermit. He spent the rest of his life in prayer and penance. His little hut was near the first chapel that was built on Tepeyac Hill. He was greatly esteemed. Juan took care of the little church and greeted the pilgrims who began to come there to honor their Mother of Guadalupe. He would show them the miraculous tilma or cloak, that preserves Mary's beautiful image.

Pope John Paul II declared Juan Diego a saint on July 31, 2002. You can still see Juan Diego's tilma in Mexico City today. Juan Diego's story is a particularly powerful story for us in the Americas.

Ages 8 – 12

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