

### **Saint Kateri Tekakwitha**

Book Title: *Saint Kateri Tekakwitha: Courageous Faith*

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Some of our biographies feature saints that lived far away and spoke languages unfamiliar to us. The saint in this book did speak a language that many readers may be unfamiliar with but she lived much closer to home (she was born in what is now New York state and died near Montreal). The story of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha paints us a picture of a young woman who was both a person totally imbued with her culture and faithful to what she believed God was asking of her. For this she suffered greatly at the hands of her Mohawk people who often did not tolerate the intrusion of the foreign "blackrobes." Saint Kateri's story shows us how she bore the derision and prejudice of her people with gentle strength and resolve. Her story is both poignant and beautiful. I have to admit that on at least one occasion while reading the book, I was reaching for the box of tissues by my desk.

In reading *Saint Kateri Tekakwitha: Courageous Faith* you can enter into discussion with children about themes of prejudice, hatred, standing by one's convictions, and culture.

Discussion/Written Response Questions:

1. In the book, *Saint Kateri Tekakwitha: Courageous Faith*, we read, "The blackrobes taught a message of peace and love" (bottom of page 17). Why was this an important message for the Mohawk people to hear? If you were a missionary among the Mohawk people what message would you want to share with them? Why is it an important message for them to know? How would you teach that message?
2. Part of what makes people unique are their cultures. In reading about Saint Kateri we see a culture rich in oral tradition, dancing, and eating different types of food. No one culture is better than another and all cultures can praise God. Does your culture have any special traditions for family celebrations or holidays such as Christmas or Easter? Share it with a classmate or friend.

3. Before leaving for the Praying Castle Saint Kateri suffered much due to some of the Mohawk people's prejudices against the blackrobes and Catholicism. Did they have reasons for their prejudices? Can you think of some situations either in your school, city, nation or in the world in general in which prejudices cause unnecessary division? How can we help others move beyond the blindness that prejudices cause to see the giftedness of other peoples and nations?
4. Long before she learned her prayers and was baptized Tekakwitha would often go to the forest to pray using her own words to Rawanniio. Draw a picture of what your ideal prayer spot would look like. Write a prayer to God about something important to you.
5. Saint Kateri had some really good relationships/friendships. First is her relationship with the older Anastasia and then later with Marie Therese. What are some qualities of a good friendship? What do you look for in your friends?
6. Native Americans and First Nations people, as well as some Asian countries, often name their children something symbolic. For example, in the story we read that Saint Kateri was named *Ioragode* (little sunshine) and then later *Tekakwitha* (one who pushes things with her hands AND one who works hard and puts things in order). Perhaps you were named for a relative or a specific saint. Perhaps your name has a special meaning much like *Ioragode* or *Tekakwitha*. Do a little research and write about the meaning of your name or why your name was chosen by your parent. In addition, what name would you pick for yourself if you could pick something as descriptive as "little sunshine?" Make sure to write why you would pick that name and what it tells about who you are.

Curricular Connections:

### **Geography**

- o Interesting places. This book lists lots of interesting places and Saint Kateri travelled a lot in her young life. Provide a map to children of New France. Have them map out Kateri's life and travels. Kateri was born in Ossernenon (near Auriesville, NY). After her parents' death, she moved in with her uncle's family in Caughnawaga which is near present day Fonda, NY. After her Baptism, Kateri travelled to 200 miles or 322 kilometers through woods, rivers, and swamps to the Catholic mission of St. Francis Xavier at Sault Saint-Louis, near Montreal, QC. This exercise can be further augmented by having the child go on-line and search for pictures/illustrations of these places.

### **Health**

In Chapter One, we read how Anastasia did the best she could to try to take good care of Kahontake (St. Kateri's mother) and the whole family when they were struck with smallpox. Have the children list the various ways Kahontake tried to care for the family. How are some of those ways

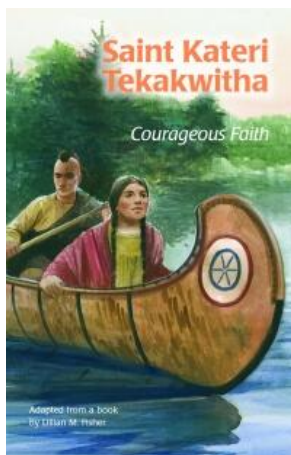
comparable to what we do today? What might Kahontake or the children do today to take care of their health?

## • Social Studies

- o Explain to children that there are different styles of government in our world. Have children go back through the book and note how the Mohawk people were ruled. Ask them to make a list of pros and cons for the Mohawk type of “government.” Have them make a similar list of pros and cons for the government we have today. These results can then be discussed together.
- o The “Praying Castle” Church was another name for the Saint Francis Xavier mission. Who was Francis Xavier? Have children do a bit of research and find a picture of him and some information about him on the internet. Ask them why he is a good patron for a church in which much missionary work was being done?
- o People of various cultures eat all kinds of different foods to which we may be unaccustomed. Make some Mohawk corn bread! Here is a link for a recipe the bread the First Nations people of Kahnawake (which is where Saint Kateri went) make:  
<http://www.nativetech.org/recipes/recipe.php?recipeid=449>.

## • Ecology

- Saint Kateri is patroness of ecology and environment and a patron saint for North America. Why is it important to take care of Earth? Discover what is being done in your community to take part in good ecological practices. Make a plan with your family how you can do one extra thing to contribute to taking care of the planet.



Perfect for ages 8 – 12, this 31st volume in the *Encounter the Saints* series captures the burning desire of Kateri Tekakwitha to become a Catholic amidst the difficult circumstances of her time: colonialism-induced disease and preexisting tribal tensions intensified by the arrival of Christian missionaries.

When Kateri is only a few years old, smallpox sweeps through her village, killing her Mohawk father and Algonquin mother, who is a secretly practicing Catholic. From this point on, Kateri longs for her mother's Catholic faith but her Mohawk uncle with whom she is sent to live despises the Christians.

With the arrival of the Jesuit missionaries, Kateri's longing to become a Catholic intensifies while her uncle becomes more enraged.

Desiring to be both a loyal daughter figure and a child of God, Kateri continues to fulfill her household responsibilities and receives the sacrament of baptism despite her uncle's disapproval. With this initiation, she becomes the target of harsh bullying. But she does not let these hardships deter her faith in God. She courageously escapes from her village to live a Christian life at Mission du Sault.

In this biography, adapted from a book by Lillian Fisher, children will learn that courage coupled with a faith conviction can help them overcome being shunned and bullied.

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