Saint Kateri

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Suggested Age Group: 5th-8th

Lessons/Themes: Tekakwitha (Saint Kateri), New World Colonization, Changemakers

Topic Overview:
This lesson plan includes a video and transcript of the video. Both discuss the life of Tekakwitha, Saint Kateri. Tekakwitha was a Mohawk woman who was converted to Roman Catholicism by Jesuit missionaries. This lesson plan includes a full biography of Saint Kateri as well as a discussion of the importance of her life story. Also included is matching activity cards and a transcript of a plaque dedicated to the memory of Saint Kateri.

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**Video Script**

**Chris:** In 1656, in the Mohawk village of Ossernenon, Tekakwitha—better known as Saint Kateri—was born as the daughter of a Mohawk Chieftain and Algonquin mother. Unfortunately, as a young girl, her community was disturbed by European exploration. The citizens of Europe carried diseases with them when they arrived on the American mainland. These diseases, never introduced to the Americas, spread like wildfire among the native population. One illness that was both deadly and highly contagious was smallpox. Kateri and her family were unfortunately stricken with it when she was just four years old. This ailment killed all the members of her family except her. However, Kateri didn’t leave unscathed either as her face was permanently scarred from the smallpox. This caused her to wear a blanket on her head to hide the marks. She was adopted by her uncle who was also a Mohawk Chief, living in her new village, named Caughnawaga. Here, she worked in the fields with her aunts, growing and harvesting corn, beans, and squash among many other crops.

**Justin:**

Kateri’s life, however, would be changed forever due to the works of a Jesuit priest, Father Jacques de Lamberville. He belonged to a Roman Catholic group of priests founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola. Their purpose in the Church was to act as educators and do missionary and charitable works. In Caughnawaga, Fr. de Lamberville established a chapel near Kateri’s village, sparking her interest in Christianity and resulting in her conversion. Consequently, she refused her adoptive parents’ plea to marry, claiming that she was only married to Jesus Christ. This whole situation was extremely unorthodox for a Mohawk Native American as native tribes were very deeply rooted in tradition. This caused much stir in her village; many of her Caughnawaga neighbors threw stones at her, taunted her, and threatened her with torture and even death.

**Jesus:**

Kateri felt alienated; she felt like she no longer belonged in her Mohawk village. She left her home for a second time and traveled over 200 miles to a Native American village near Montreal run by another group of Jesuit missionaries. What set her apart, not only from other Native Americans but Christians as a whole, was she essentially tortured herself to express her faith. Sadly, this attributed to her death on April 17th, 1680 at the young age of 24. Although her life was short, her impact on this world has been felt for much longer.

Kateri would be considered a changemaker thanks to her being a Native American Christian, something very unusual for her time. She believed in her religion strongly and didn’t let anybody change her mind, no matter the ridicule and setbacks. Thanks to her courageous actions, she was beatified in June of 1980 and later granted the title of saint on October 21st, 2012. Pope Benedict XVI bestowed upon her the title of “saint of Native Americans, people in exile, and environment and ecology.” Although she is gone, her presence can still be felt at the Saint Kateri National Shrine and Historic Site in Fonda, New York. Her tomb is located at the St.
Francis Xavier Mission Catholic Church in Kahnawake (Kaa - Nuh - Wayk), Canada. She is locally recognized in Rochester at the Saint Kateri Tekakwitha Parish in Irondequoit.

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Works Cited


Saint Kateri Tekakwitha is the Patron Saint of Native Americans, people in exile, and environment and ecology. What sets her apart from other saints is the fact that she was the first Native American to ever be given this title. Born in 1656, in the Mohawk village of Ossernenon, she was the daughter of an Algonquin mother and a Mohawk father who was the Chief of the tribe. At the young age of four, she and her family contracted smallpox, which left her face scarred and her eyesight permanently damaged. When the rest of her family succumbed to smallpox, she was adopted by her uncle, Chief of Caughnawaga, another Mohawk village. Kateri was just like all of the other young girls in her village, playing with the other children, crafting beadwork despite her hindered eyesight, and working in the fields growing and harvesting crops.

When Kateri was eighteen years old, Father Jacques de Lamberville, a Jesuit missionary, came to Caughnawaga and established a chapel near her village. This sparked her interest in Christianity and led to her baptism in 1686. However, once she converted to Christianity, she was ridiculed and harassed. This led to her 200 mile trek by foot and boat to a Native American Christian community near Montreal. Kateri was so devout in her newfound religion that she prayed for the conversion of her fellow Mohawks, fasted regularly, and endured self torture. She also prided herself in being a virgin, so when her aunt and uncle pleaded for her to become married, she proclaimed that she was only married to Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, these methods as well as the effects of the smallpox eventually led to her death at the young age of 24. Her lasting impact of breaking the barriers of her Native American heritage, despite the setbacks, have shown that people of all backgrounds can practice religious freedom. Kateri represents a person who will fight for what she believes in no matter the consequences and the opinions of
others. Due to her courageous work, she was beatified in June of 1980 and canonized, making her a saint, on October 21st, 2012.

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MATCHING ACTIVITY CARDS

**Corn, beans, and squash:** common crops grown by members of the Mohawk nation, including one of its most famous members, Saint Kateri

**Saint Kateri:** Patron Saint of environment and ecology, people in exile, and Native Americans
**Jesuits:** a group of Roman Catholic missionaries. Father Jacques de Lamerville was the Jesuit who introduced Kateri to Catholicism.

**Mohawk Nation:** Saint Kateri was born into a Mohawk tribe, being the daughter of a Chief and an Algonquin mother.

**Pope Benedict XVI:** Head of the Catholic Church who canonized Saint Kateri on October 21st, 2012.
Ossernenon: Place of birth of Saint Kateri

St. Francis Xavier Mission Catholic Church: Tomb of Saint Kateri located in Kahnawake, Canada
Map for Local Places Regarding Saint Kateri

https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/0/edit?mid=1HUPu7pr0t3Vdc_XFwAFDTX-0gQnQOFQ&ll=43.53899041012585%2C-75.62893295&z=7