

Patrick, Patron Saint of Ireland

Book by Tomie dePaola

Literature based unit study prepared by Suzanne Mazer Stewart

Bible

Bible Characters

You could parallel the life of Saint Patrick with different Bible characters:

1. Joseph sold into slavery - Patrick was sold as a slave to the Irish chief.
2. Jesus' baptism - to correspond with Patrick baptizing the Irish believers
3. Paul's missionary journeys - Patrick was a missionary and traveled quite a bit for a man in his time.

Psalm 23

Patrick was a shepherd and the Shepherd's Psalm would be very appropriate to either study or memorize this week.

Learn St. Patrick's Prayer

The Prayer of St. Patrick:

"I bind to myself this day:

The power of God to guide me,
The might of God to uphold me,
The wisdom of God to teach me,
The eye of God to watch over me,
The ear of God to hear me,
The word of God to give me speech,
The way of God to go before me,
The shield of God to shelter me.

Christ be with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ within me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ at my right,
Christ at my left,

Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks to me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.
Amen."

The Trinity

Patrick used the shamrock to explain the Holy Trinity. The whole thing represented God, but each leaf reflected his three persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. I printed a coloring book shamrock on green paper and had the children write "Father" on the top leaf, "Son" on the left leaf and "Holy Spirit" on the right leaf. At the top of the page, over the shamrock, they wrote "God."

Social Studies

Ireland

Find Ireland on a map. Locate France and England, as well. Ireland is an island of gently rolling hills and wide, green valleys. It has an ancient and rich culture.

One area of interest for this particular study may be of the *Book of Kells* and other early Irish Christian art. (There are many books and websites that have examples of pages from the *Books of Kells*.)

Another area to explore might be the early church and monastery architecture, especially the towers and "beehive" cells of the early monasteries. For centuries, Ireland was a part of the United Kingdom. Then, in 1948, all but 6 counties in the north gained total independence from Britain and formed the Republic of Ireland. The six counties that remained under British rule became Northern Ireland.

An older student might enjoy studying the struggles and strife of the Irish people under British law. One reason why St. Patrick's Day is such a popular holiday in the US is because there are so many people of Irish ancestry. In 1847 and 1848, there was a terrible famine in Ireland brought on by a blight (disease) of the potato crops. Many people faced the choice of leaving Ireland or starving. Many immigrated to America. This paved the way for future waves of immigrants,

peaking in the 1880's and 90's. We've even had a president with Irish ancestry, John F. Kennedy.

Holidays: St. Patrick's Day

St. Patrick's Day gives the perfect opportunity to introduce the practice of celebrating Saint's days and Holy Feast days, whether you are Roman Catholic or not. Many of our modern-day holidays and celebrations have their roots in church festivals and the church calendar. For example, Valentine's Day was a day to celebrate St. Valentine. Close to Christmas is the feast of the real St. Nicholas. You might like to explore and discover if your child shares his or her name or birthday with a saint or feast day.

Language Arts

Legends

After the biographical portion of the book, Tomie dePaola continues with a few of the legends surrounding Patrick. These would make a good introduction to the subject of legends.

Tomie dePaola has written several other books based on legends: [*The Legend of the Indian Paintbrush*](#), *The Legend of the Poinsettia*, *Clown of God*, *The Legend of Old Befana*, *Legend of the Bluebonnet*, and *Legend of the Persian Carpet*.

Legends are usually either based in truth or are a way of explaining the origin or reason behind something. Your student might like to study a few other legends and then try his hand at writing his own.

Theme Study

Tomie dePaola has written four books on the lives of saints: St. Patrick, St. Francis, St. Christopher, and the Virgin Mary. The titles for the others are: *Mary: The Mother of Jesus*, *Francis: Poor Man of Assisi*, and *Christopher: The Holy Giant*.

You might try and locate some or all of these others and conduct a theme study. When doing a literature theme study, look for differences and similarities in the various titles. Watch for certain parallels in the ways the stories are written.

Together with your student, make a chart or list of similarities or differences in the various titles.

Letter Writing

St. Patrick wrote letters to correspond with others. Use this as an introduction in letter writing if this is a skill you've not covered. If your student is familiar with letter writing form, have him write a letter, perhaps to a grandparent or friend, telling about your study of Patrick. If your student is imaginative, pretend to be Patrick or one of his friends and create a set of letters telling of the happenings in Ireland.

Art

Illustrating Water and Stars

Tomie de Paola has created stylized water and stars in his illustrations, and these are common among his illustrations in other titles. With your student, practice creating your own stars and waves. If you can locate a copy of it, study Van Gogh's starry night for another artist's version of stylized star art.

Illustrating Light

Tomie dePaola's representation of light is another similarity among his works. Take a mirror and fog it up with steam. Now, look at the lights in the room reflected in the steamy mirror. Can you see the same sort of "halo" effect Tomie has created around his candles in the illustrations? Try drawing it yourself.

Sacred Art

This book opens up the possibility to study some sacred art, especially early Christian art. *The Book of Kells* was mentioned in the Social Studies section, but there were many artworks carved in stone, as well. The "Celtic Cross" with its circular decoration around the cross-beams is a fine example. Many churches, especially the doorways, hold fine carvings. Even if you can't find any examples of Irish Christian art, perhaps you know of a church in your area that has carvings or stained glass windows that you could study and admire.

Saint Hallmarks

Saints became depicted with individual hallmarks—symbols that identified them

when depicted in statuary or other artworks. This was so people could know exactly which saint was being shown. Since most of the population in the Middle Ages were illiterate, it was important for the church to be able to communicate through means other than the written word. Thus, St. Patrick is shown with the shamrock, crozier (his staff) and often, but not always, with snakes at or under his feet. In the same way, St. Mark is depicted by a Lion with a raised paw. If your student is interested, research some other saintly hallmarks and why they were chosen. Perhaps you'd like to create a hallmark of your own!

Math

Counting

There are ample opportunities to practice counting or skip counting with your student, using the illustrations in the book, especially in the "border" illustrations.

Shapes: Arc

Tomie dePaola uses arcs in many of his depictions, especially of the water. If you've not added this shape to your geometry lessons, now would be a good time to explain these circle parts.

Science

Sheep

Since Patrick was a shepherd and being a shepherd had such an impact on him, sheep and wool production are ideal topics to accompany a study of his life. Tomie de Paola has written a clever little book, *Charlie Needs a Cloak*, depicting the steps a shepherd takes to produce a new cloak from the wool of his sheep.

Snakes

Even though there is no truth to the legend, St. Patrick is given credit by many for ridding Ireland of snakes. With that in mind, your young naturalist might want to explore the scaly, slithery world of reptiles a bit. What snakes are native to your area? What are the characteristics of a reptile? What other reptiles might you find in your neighborhood?

Irish Wolfhounds

The dogs being traded in the story are possibly Irish Wolfhounds, a breed native to Ireland. What can you discover about these large animals? Why would hunting and herding dogs be of such high value that they would be traded for other goods? How are hunting or herding dogs trained? Would your home be a good place for one of these friendly furry giants? Why or why not?

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