Biography Brief: Mary Slessor

Mary Slessor was born in Aberdeen, Scotland in 1848. She is well known for being a five foot, red haired Scottish missionary who pioneered her way into the jungles of Africa. She wanted to share the gospel to people who lived in the most remote areas of Calabar which is now called Nigeria. The inhabitants were accustomed to witchcraft, slavery and murder. She faced many challenges living with the villagers, and at times, even had to be a peacemaker between tribesmen.

Mary was about eleven years old when her family moved to Dundee, Scotland. Her father, Robert was unable to hold a steady job. She had to find work at a cotton mill to help provide for the family. Her paycheck helped to make ends meet as she sometimes worked ten to twelve hour days.

When Mary was about twenty years old, in 1868, she would gather young boys and girls to attend Sunday school. One day she her faced a gang of boys who would not let her and the children pass. The leader of the gang started to threaten her by whipping around a weapon make of string and weights. As it got closer and closer to her head Mary did not budge. All the children watching became frightened not knowing what to expect next, but the leader backed down impressed by her determination and courage and he eventually let her through. Mary invited the leader and the other gang members to attend the bible lesson with them and they did. Years later the leader of the gang became a Christian. He reflected that moment in his life as a turning point for him.

Mary Slessor died on January 13, 1915 from a fever in her mud hut in Africa. She was sixty six years old.

Key Facts

- Born December 2, 1848 in Aberdeen, Scotland. She was the second of seven siblings. and her family lived in poverty.
- Father was a shoemaker.
- Prayed with her mother continually for God’s provision and protection.
- Became a Christian at a young age.
- Not well educated but learned to read, and loved reading the Bible.
- Influenced by another missionary, David Livingstone.
- Gathered boys and girls to attend Sunday school in Dundee, Scotland.
- Encountered a gang who would not allow her to teach a bible lesson.
- Bully threatened her with weapon but Mary never budged. She thus gained respect of the leader of the gang and Mary invited them all to join in with the other kids to attend Sunday school.
- In 1875 went to Nigeria (formerly Calabar) on a missions assignment and lived with the Okoyong tribe and shared the gospel with the villagers.
- In 1902, among the Okoyong people, eleven youngsters were baptized including seven of her adopted children.
- Died January 13, 1915 in Nigeria (formerly Calabar), Africa from a fever.
For the presentation of Mary Slessor’s story, set the stage area with the following setting:

Setting: Mary’s room with items from her travels. (She would occasionally come back to see her mother for a visit or recover from an illness). Or set up an area with a collection of things about Mary and talk about it. Examples would be a piece of cotton, weapon used by the bully, small bible, etc. Likewise, you may also wish to have a leader dress up as Mary and tell her story while in her “room.”

Keep in mind the theme and key verse while talking with the children.

Key Verse

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19)

Questions

Mary and her mother prayed together for God to take care of them.
  • What do you think they prayed for? (Example: keep them safe from accidents or sickness, provide food for family, etc.)
  • Do you pray with someone in your family – mom, dad, grandparent?
  • What kinds of prayers do you think Mary prayed when she was a missionary in Africa?

Mary loved reading the Bible as a child.
  • Do you like to read the Bible?
  • What are some of your favorite verses in the Bible?
  • Do you think reading the Bible gave Mary the desire to become a missionary?

What do you think life was like when Mary first went to Africa?
  • Do you think there were wild animals? What kinds of animals?
  • What do you think the temperature was like?
  • Do you think the African people were friendly to Mary?
  • Do you think Mary missed her family when she went to Africa?

Missionary work had appealed to Mary since she was a young girl.
  • How old do you think you need to be before you can become a missionary?
  • Can a child become a missionary?
Key Verse

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:19)

Project Portion

Africa Continent Map:

- Print out maps for each child and show where Nigeria is.
- Point out other countries in Africa (Kenya, Sudan, etc.).

Hut Project:

- Hand out copies of the hut to each child (For older children, you can have them do the African Hut Craft Project below.)
- Have them color in the hut.
- Talk about the differences between their home and living in a hut.

Skit and Mary Slessor biography information from Hero Tales: A Family Treasury of True Stories From the Lives of Christian Heros
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Hut Craft Project Directions:

- You will need:
  - Empty round can, jar or pop can, cleaned
  - Brown construction paper
  - Paper shreds or raffia
  - Scissors, glue or tape, and crayons

1. Cut the brown construction paper into a strip the same height as the can and wrap it around the outside of the can/jar. Secure in place with tape or glue.
2. Build a roof for your hut by forming a cone with a second strip of brown construction paper. Rest it on top of your can/ jar and glue or tape it in place.
3. Decorate your dwelling by adding a doorway with crayons. Glue or tape paper shreds or raffia on the roof so it looks like thatched roof of grass or straw. (You may also color the doorway before attaching the paper to the can or jar.)

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