

The Value of Curiosity in Today's World

Did curiosity *really* kill the cat?

by Kate Berardo

Old sayings demonstrate outdated thinking. Curiosity is an important and over overlooked trait that builds bridges across cultures and communities.

As children, curiosity was our primary learning tool. It made us wiggle our toes and experiment with our voices. It inspired us to mimic the sounds we heard around us and explore the boundaries of our cribs, then rooms, then neighborhoods. When we accidentally discovered orange by mixing red and yellow, curiosity sent us on an excited finger painting frenzy to try all possible color combinations.

Somewhere along this great learning curve, many people stop their curiosity and much of its associated learning. Often, this is because of a bad experience, a sense of fear, or warnings from authority figures.

"Curiosity is one of the most permanent and certain characteristics of a vigorous intellect."

- Samuel Johnson

In fact, many adults have lost touch with the feeling that curiosity brings: an epiphany of discovery, a sense of excitement, a drive to learn. Instead, we find familiarity and comfort in the routine and familiar, and prefer the status quo to the world of change and uncertainty in which curiosity resides. For many, curiosity has almost

garnered a negative connotation. Like idealism, some people look down on curiosity as if it were a sign of naïveté or infantile development.

This couldn't be further from the truth. Curiosity has been the driving force behind most inventions, discoveries, and adventures in the history of mankind. Were it not for the curiosity of Christopher Columbus, Lewis and Clark, and countless others, there would be no United States of America, let alone cars, electricity, phones, or computers. Trying to separate curiosity from inventions and discoveries is futile. They are part and parcel.



Thanks to the curious minds of many, we have progressed and developed rapidly as a society.

Pictured here, Albert Einstein.

Use curiosity to build cultural awareness

Sayings like, *Curiosity killed the cat* demonstrate the apprehension some hold toward curiosity. It's important to note something here. It wasn't curiosity *itself* that killed the proverbial cat. What really got him in trouble was his inability to deal with the new situation he was in. And when it comes to learning about new environments, curiosity is key.

History of the Saying:

Curiosity Killed the Cat

The saying suggests people should mind their own business. This expression apparently first appeared in print in an O. Henry story in the early 1900s.

Source: *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Third Edition*. Edited by E.D. Hirsch, Jr., Joseph F. Kett, and James Trefil. Copyright © 2002 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

Curiosity creates an interest in learning and helps break down barriers between cultures and their differences. Curiosity asks important how and why questions:

- How are we different?
- How are we alike?
- How do we work effectively together, knowing our similarities and differences?
- How can we communicate more clearly together?
- Why do we have misunderstandings?
- Why do we have these different customs and viewpoints?

Curiosity, in this sense, is an essential stepping stone toward building awareness, appreciation, and understanding of other cultures. Through curiosity, people can gain new perspectives, unparalleled learning and growth, and a chance for interesting conversation and reflection at every interaction.

As a child, my grandmother, an incredibly gifted, creative, if not eccentric woman, imparted me with these simple but powerful words. She said:

"To be interesting, Kate, you have to be interested."

Curiosity not only makes the world interesting, it makes you interesting. Embrace it. ✧

Quotes from Curious Minded People

- "Everyone and everything around you is your teacher" KEN KEYES
- "...there is nothing in the world as interesting as people, and one can never study them enough." VINCENT VAN GOGH
- "Once you can see the boundaries of your environment, they are no longer the boundaries of your environment." MARSHALL MCLUHAN
- "The possession of knowledge does not kill the sense of wonder and mystery. There is always more mystery." AN AIS NIN
- Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood. MARIE CURIE
- "We have a hunger of the mind which asks for knowledge of all around us, and the more we gain, the more is our desire; the more we see, the more we are capable of seeing." MARIA MITCHELL
- "It takes a lot of courage to release the familiar and seemingly secure, to embrace the new. But there is no real security in what is no longer meaningful. There is more security in the adventurous and exciting, for in movement there is life, and in change there is power." ALAN COHEN

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