

HOW TO APPROACH THE CRUSADES

The Crusades were a series of military expeditions and mass pilgrimages to the Holy Land, ostensibly to free the Holy City, Jerusalem, from Muslim rule. Other factors are not to be overlooked: a desire for the Church in Europe to assert political control over the doings of kings and knights; and the wish to destroy Constantinople as a rival seat of Church power.

Many tales of horror come from the Crusades, whether of child pilgrims tricked and sold into slavery; of the sacking of Constantinople in 1204 by Christians; of the horrors perpetrated against the Muslims; of the crimes, in turn, of the Islamic armed forces. There are also a handful of glorious incidents which shine out as a ray of hope amidst the carnage: the wonderful exchanges between Saladin and Richard the Lionheart come to mind. And there were, of course, many tales of bravery on all sides as well as courageous acts stemming from disgust at the excesses of war and hatred.

There are sections on the Crusades in the various history books I've listed in the *Resources* section and a couple of hours of research on the internet could be very fruitful as you prepare to discuss the Crusades with your child.

After exploring the Crusades together with your child you could ask her to write a fiction piece inspired by what you've read and discussed together. Possible assignments include short 1 – 3 page pieces from:

- ❖ the point of view of a child in the Children's Crusade
- ❖ the point of view of a Muslim defending – or attacking – Jerusalem
- ❖ the point of view of one of Richard the Lionheart's men

Another interesting assignment could be based on an imaginary meeting between Richard and Saladin. We know from history that the two men admired each other greatly and that when Richard fell ill he asked Saladin to send him peaches and oranges. Saladin complied and also sent snow carried by the fastest messengers from the mountains to cool Richard's fever. The following is my son Gabriel's piece of writing from this assignment. Please do not use it as a measuring stick in terms of ability – he is a rather good writer! It is here, uncorrected, except for spelling:

To Arms

The messenger ran through the corridor and up the ornately carved stairs, and stopped in front of the huge gold double doors. Two guards stood on either side of the door, spears clenched in armored hands.

"I crave audience with Lord Saladin," the messenger announced, "I have important news."

The guard eyed him suspiciously for a moment: "all right you can go in."

The two guards pulled one of the doors open and the messenger walked in.