

Catholic Enrichment Activities

Alternative Book Reports
for Catholic Students

by Janet McKenzie

A RACE for Heaven Product

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Table of Contents

Introduction	i-ii
Writing Projects	1-7
Research a religious order	1
Research a historical period	1-2
Diary/Journal of main character	2
Outline from “Contents”	2
New introduction	3
Rewrite history	3
Christian decision-making	3-4
Research a heresy	4-5
Evangelize a character	5
News report	5
Rewrite a passage from memory	6
Simple book report	6
Book review	6-7
Change the scene’s point of view	7
Creative Activities	9-12
Advertisement	9
Book jacket	9
Culture box	9-10
Poster	10
Book summary from narration	10
Puppet show	11
Act out a scene	11
Interview character	11
Picture, puzzle, or collage	11-12
Acrostic poem	12
Saint Biography Topics	13-24
Descriptive list of characters	13
Short story from vocabulary words	13
Chapter summaries with pictures	13

Table of Contents

Persuasive essay (<i>positio</i>)	14
Directions for sainthood	14
Letter to saint	15
Day in the life of saint	15
Litany of a saint	15-17
Poem of a saint	17
Saint's fact list.....	17
Descriptive essay	18
Determine path to sainthood	18
Venn diagram	18-19
Saint T-shirt.....	19
Trading cards.....	19-20
Saintly quotations.....	20
Holy Spirit box	20-21
Saint banner	21-22
Map of saint's travels.....	22
Novena prayer	22
Catholic book club	22-24
Record of Completed Book Reports	25-26
When to Begin Each Book Report	27-28
Spiritual Read-Aloud	29-30

Introduction

It is a simple task to hand a book to a student and ask that the book be read or to read the book aloud together. However, after the book has been completed, the material should be summarized to ensure that the lessons the book offers have been assimilated. This is especially important if no discussion has taken place throughout the reading. Every book contains a message (or theme) and provides a model for living. It is important to reinforce those models and lessons that support and encourage us as Catholics and to explore those topics that may conflict with our Faith.

Oftentimes, a book report is a mere summation of the book's contents. Ideally, a book report should be a more personalized expansion of the material that was covered in the book. The following suggested projects encourage critical thinking and are intended to provoke a deeper reflection on the book's themes and topics. Some of these projects require expanded research related to the characters or events in the book. Several of the choices require an incorporation of the book's experience into our faith life—what lesson can we take from this book to strengthen our own faith in

Introduction

God? The suggested activities take shape in various forms, from written exercises to creative art projects.

Do not allow the suggestions that follow to limit report choices, but view them as the beginning of a creative flow of ideas for alternative book report formats. Be open to any format that seems workable including group projects. Encourage students to create their own plan for a book report on any topic upon which the book may have stirred an interest.

It is important to weave general historical material into its proper place in Church history and to encourage students to view events and to analyze characters from a Catholic perspective. To this end, many of the report ideas require the student to research one specific topic in the book rather than analyzing the entire book. A Catholic encyclopedia and/or dictionary, as well as a well-indexed book on Church history (such as Fr. John Laux's *Church History*) are essential reference tools for many of these projects.

Be aware that some of the book report choices outlined below will need to be started at the beginning of the book, so preview options before the reading begins. (See page 28 below for a list of book report options that need prior planning.) The Record of Completed Book Reports found on pages 25-26 provides a summarized list of ideas from each of the following categories:

- Writing Projects (fourteen selections)
- ❖ Creative Activities (ten selections)
- Saint Biography Topics (twenty-one selections)
- ★ Student's Original Report Ideas

Writing Projects

- Research any of the religious orders mentioned in this book. Consider the founder of the order, the purpose of the order (contemplative, service, etc.), when and where it was founded, the reason it was founded, and the rule of the order. Follow the order's growth or demise through the ages. Relate this information in the form of an outline, an illustrated chart, an essay, or an oral presentation complete with graphics.
- Write a research paper summarizing the historical conditions during the period of this book. What were the living conditions of that time, in that country and throughout the world? Include information on transportation, religious customs, education, daily family life, economic conditions, the arts, and/or political climate. What was the attitude toward organized religion in general and the Roman Catholic Church in particular? What other famous people lived during this time? What else was happening in the world? (You may wish to consult historical timelines such as the one found at the back of *The Story of the Church, Her Founding, Mission and Progress* by Rev. George Johnson,

Writing Projects

Rev. Jerome D. Hanran, and Sr. M. Dominica. This excellent resource contains an extensive chronological timeline of events in Church history cross-referenced with general historical events and characters.) An understanding of the events happening within the Church during the historical period the book takes place will lead to a deeper appreciation of the historical characters' motives and views regarding the Catholic Church in particular and religion in general. You and your family may wish to begin your own historical timeline to record specific information regarding the topics and saints you study.

- Compose a diary or journal of the main character. Write this in the first person; speak as though you are the character. Start this project at the beginning of the book and write as many entries as may be required after reading each chapter. Expand and elaborate on the events presented in the book. Be sure to include how the character was affected by the story's events as well as his/her feelings and plans.
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- Use this book's "Contents" list to produce an outline of this book. If necessary, research how to format an outline; then use the chapter titles as the main headings. As you read through this book, outline events under each chapter heading to produce an outline of the character's life or historical events as seen through the author's or character's eyes.