



THE CRUSADES IN POPULAR CULTURE

ADULT GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

AT A GLANCE

AUDIENCE	TIME	MATERIALS
Congregations, community groups, adult learning groups, colleges, and seminaries	30-60 minutes	Internet access, video display, and an optional copy of the questions for each participant

PURPOSE AND FACILITATOR PREPARATION

This guide accompanies a 12.5-minute ICJS video examining how the imagery and vocabulary of the Crusades continue to shape popular culture and public life. The video focuses on historical memory, religious stereotypes, sacred violence, and the modern “crusader mentality”; it is not intended as a comprehensive history of the Crusades.

FACILITATOR NOTE

The video includes descriptions of religious violence and massacres as well as references to terrorism, prejudice, dehumanizing rhetoric, and contemporary political events. Preview the video and select the questions that best fit your group.

LEARNING GOALS

- Recognize contemporary uses of Crusader imagery and language.
- Consider how historical memory shapes present-day assumptions and practices.
- Examine the relationship among sacred violence, stereotypes, and dehumanization.
- Explore how dialogue and pluralistic democracy might counter a crusader mentality.

SUGGESTED PROGRAM

5-10 min	OPENING REFLECTION Invite participants to respond to one prompt, first individually or in pairs and then as a full group. • What images, stories, or emotions come to mind when you hear the word “Crusades”? • Where have you encountered the words “crusade” or “crusader” in sports, entertainment, politics, religion, or public life? • What messages did those uses seem intended to communicate?
2 min	INTRODUCE THE VIDEO Suggested introduction: • “This ICJS video explores four themes: the Crusades in popular culture, a brief history, the idea of a crusader mentality, and modern examples. As you watch, notice how the meaning of a symbol may change according to who uses it, who encounters it, and the history each person brings to it.”
12.5 min	VIEW THE VIDEO Invite participants to note one idea they found illuminating, one they found troubling, and one question they would like the group to explore.

Video and course page: icjs.org/the-crusades-in-popular-culture

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: MEANING AND MEMORY

1. What surprised you, challenged you, or stayed with you after watching the video?
2. What different meanings might Crusader imagery carry for different people or communities? How should context, intention, and impact influence whether such imagery is used?
3. The video presents the Crusades through Christian, Muslim, and Jewish perspectives. How does hearing several perspectives complicate familiar stories about the Crusades?
4. How does the video define “sacred violence”? What dangers arise when people believe their cause or identity is so righteous that violence becomes permissible?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: PUBLIC LIFE AND DIALOGUE

5. Based on the video, how would you define a “crusader mentality”? Where do you recognize its “us versus them” logic in contemporary culture or public life?
6. Why can describing a modern war, political campaign, or moral cause as a “crusade” be especially fraught for Muslim and Jewish communities as well as for Christians?
7. The video connects stereotypes with dehumanization. How can assumptions that one group is civilized, peaceful, or righteous - and another is uncivilized, violent, or dangerous - make violence easier to justify?
8. How can study, dialogue, and sustained relationships across religious or cultural differences disrupt a crusader mentality? What examples have you witnessed?
9. The video suggests that multiracial, multiethnic pluralistic democracy can offer an alternative to a crusader mentality. What might that alternative require of individuals, institutions, and religious communities?

CLOSING REFLECTION AND ACTION

Invite each participant to choose one prompt:

- Where do I encounter crusade language or an “us versus them” mentality in my own community or media environment?
- What is one question I could ask when I hear language that portrays another group as dangerous, uncivilized, or less human?
- What is one opportunity to learn with - rather than merely about - people whose religious or cultural experiences differ from my own?
- What could my congregation, school, workplace, or organization do to cultivate dialogue and equal belonging across differences?

OPTIONAL GROUP COMMITMENT

Identify one realistic next step the group can take: continue learning about the historical legacy of religious violence; practice dialogue rather than debate; examine a local symbol or institutional tradition; or participate in an interreligious or multiracial conversation.

FACILITATION REMINDERS

- Invite multiple interpretations without treating every interpretation as equally supported by the video.
- Distinguish intention from impact, and historical description from present-day justification.
- Do not ask participants to speak for an entire religious, racial, national, or political community.
- Encourage curiosity and specific examples; interrupt sweeping claims about “all” Christians, Muslims, Jews, or Americans.
- When disagreement intensifies, return to the video’s language and ask what evidence supports each interpretation.

EXTEND THE CONVERSATION

Dialogue vs. Debate resource: icjs.org/debate-vs-dialogue

Full on-demand course: [The Crusades: Are We Prisoners of Our Interreligious History?](#)