

# Passport to History

by Jennifer Mackintosh

We're in Rome these days—taking in the Coliseum and aqueducts, columns and architecture, gladiators and the early Church—they're all a part of our visit! We're not there physically, but our imaginations have been transported back almost 2,000 years to a time of great inventions, amazing architecture, and an Empire that spanned around 400 years. Reading and experiencing history in a multi-sensory way fosters connections between current culture and the past, and literally brings us right to the catacombs with a candle and an awe for the early martyrs of the Church.

Have you ever heard the phrase, “You can't get there from here”? You can't get to the catacombs by reading a paragraph in a social studies textbook and looking at one 2”x3” picture in the corner of the page. You'll need to travel a different way—one that appeals to a child's imagination and engages their hearts and minds. They step into the past and begin walking the road with companions such as St. Paul and St. Athanasius, experiencing Rome as it truly was.

## Living History Books

Some books are so compelling that you seem different for having read them. They engage you in a way that is almost magical. These books are written by authors who have a passion for the subject they are writing—they're the best of the best. Full of noble and worthy ideas, these authors engage the whole person—the intellect, the imagination, the soul—as they tell the story of history. These are living books, as Charlotte Mason would say, “inspiring tales, well told.” [Home Education Series, Parents and Children (volume 2), p.263 ]

## Building a Book List

Don't feel as though you need to limit yourself to one genre of books as you plan your book list. Living books can be fiction, nonfiction, picture book, biography, religious biography, speeches, letters, journals, travel logs, or history magazines.

Fortunately, many knowledgeable people have generously spent time compiling lists of books that coordinate with the study of particular historical time periods. One of my favorite sources is *Reading Your Way Through History*. I've been using this list for years, and have found it to be an excellent compilation of some of the best books. They offer a chronological listing of worthwhile reading in print at <http://www.readingyourwaythroughhistory.com/>, but they update and maintain their list on a blog that is an absolute treasure of a resource; visit them at <http://readingyourwaythroughhistory.blogspot.com/>.

*Bethlehem Books* ( <http://www.bethlehembooks.com/> ) is an amazing source for wonderful historical fiction, and their “book timeline” makes it easy to select the right book for a particular era..

*RC History* ( <http://www.rchistory.com/> ) is a Catholic program which provides a history curriculum that uses living books. One of the many strengths of this program is the family-learning approach they offer: You can have many children of differing reading abilities studying the same period of history.

Using these sites and a few other sources, you can compile a book list as you prepare to study a particular period of history. These books are always worthwhile additions to the family library, but if purchasing is not an option, you can locate most of them in your local library.

## A Timeline

Studying history by use of inspiring books that tell one story at a time might seem disjointed to you. Perhaps you're asking, “How do you connect it all?” You connect the stories of history through the use of a timeline, or book of centuries. A timeline becomes the structure upon which you hang all the

facts of history. The child, after reading a delightful book, chooses a key figure or event to add to the timeline, placing that event or figure at the appropriate date in time, using neat penmanship and perhaps a small illustration. As the child begins to study history in more detail, maps and short biographies make useful additions to the timeline book.

This timeline follows the child year after year, becoming a treasure as the young child's drawings develop from stick figure illustrations to more thoughtful and detailed images. If the child begins around the fourth grade and completes the timeline in high school, it will be a rich history resource in itself.

There are a variety of ways that you can make—or buy—your own timeline or book of centuries:

*GuestHollow.com* is a treasure of free printables. Check out their wonderful timeline you can download and print for *free*! (<http://www.guesthollow.com/homeschool/history/timeline.html> )

*Homeschool In the Woods* offers some lovely history resources. We use their *Record of Time* book.  
( <http://homeschoolinthewoods.com/HTTA/RecordofTime.htm> )

*Simply Charlotte Mason* offers a free downloadable Book of Centuries  
( <http://simplycharlottesmason.com/timesavers/book-of-centuries/> )

The *Catholic World History Timeline and Guide*, edited by Marcia Neill, is an excellent resource and reference.

### **DVD Rentals Through Netflix**

Yep! You read that right! *Netflix*! I've been using Netflix ( <http://www.netflix.com/> ) online movie rentals for the last couple of years, and I have been astounded at the treasure of a resource this can be in your home education. We live in a rural area, and I carefully guard trips out of the home. What could be better for our family than a history documentary that lands in my mailbox, at our convenience? Some Netflix selections are even available for instant play on my laptop.

You can find documentaries, biographies, and historically based movies using Netflix. Last year, we were studying salvation history as part of our focus on ancient history. Imagine my surprise and elation when I could supplement our studies with Stephen Ray's amazing series "The Footprints of God"! I encourage you to search the Netflix genres for appropriate movies. Many of the wonderful independent films by Catholic director Leonardo deFilippis (who is well known for his dramatizations of the lives of the Saints) are offered by Netflix, and these can really enrich your history study!

I use a variety of resources to gather ideas, from catalogs to movie recommendation sites. *Love2Learn* has a movie blog that is a good resource ( <http://love2learnmovieblog.blogspot.com/> ) and *Movies Catholics Love* maintains a good database of movie reviews at their site (<http://www.moviescatholicslove.com/> ).

### **Online Resources**

The Internet has opened so many doors open and made so many more resources available to us. While not everyone is comfortable using this medium, I think it can be an excellent tool for research or enhancing a study of any period of history. While I don't think the Internet could or should replace books, it can be very beneficial. We can't pop over to the Vatican after lunch, but we can tour the amazing Vatican Art History Museum online—with our peanut butter and jelly sandwiches in hand! (Check them out at [http://mv.vatican.va/3\\_EN/pages/MV\\_Visite.html](http://mv.vatican.va/3_EN/pages/MV_Visite.html).)

*History Guide* ( <http://www.historyguide.org/resources.html> ) is a valuable reference because of their collection of digital resources covering every era of history. (*Exercise prudence when viewing as some of these links may not be faithful to the Magisterium of the Catholic Church*) Some of my favorite resources online:

*The Center for Teaching History with Technology*—This amazing site has compiled some excellent digital resources. <http://thwt.org/index.html>

*The Labyrinth, Medieval Studies*—Resources for Medieval Studies for grades K-12  
<http://www8.georgetown.edu/departments/medieval/labyrinth/pedagogical/k12/k12.html>

*The Victorian Web*—Overview of the culture of Victorian Britain  
<http://www.victorianweb.org/>

*Digital History*—A unique site specializing in American history, featuring reference documents, images, timelines. <http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/>

*Tales of the Early Republic*—Offers an amazing glimpse into early U.S. history through essays and original writings <http://www.jmisc.net/>

*A Chronology of U.S. Historical Documents*—Valuable timeline placing key documents in chronological order. The text of the documents is linked and available for viewing as well.  
<http://www.law.ou.edu/ushistory/index.shtml>

*The Library of Congress, American Memory*—A unique collection of recordings, films, photos, maps, and sheet music that document the American experience  
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>

As well, don't discount the value of a simple Google search. Entering search terms such as "tour catacombs online" yielded some helpful sites with great detailed images. Another feature you can try is to enter a specific identifying word, such as "catacomb," on the Google search page and then choose "videos" to focus your search. Your search results will yield links to relevant videos. Again, exercise caution when doing any searching on the Internet, especially if the children are present. I do my searching in the evenings, bookmarking as I go so that I'm ready for our studies the next day.

### **History Magazines**

As a final resource on your travels through history, consider some back issues of a few history magazines available for children. Here are a few that I really enjoy:

*The Learning Through History Magazine* ( <http://www.learningthroughhistory.com/> ) offers themed magazines that feature well-written and engaging articles. The magazine offers book suggestions for further reading, movie suggestions that might coordinate, maps, projects, and crafts ideas. It is a perfect resource for a middle-school or high-school aged student, but each magazine contains a resource in the back that offers preschool/elementary ideas in unit-study form. I find the entire magazine useful in my home with a variety of ages. What is so wonderful is that you can search their amazing back issues.  
( <http://www.learningthroughhistory.com/Store/CategorySingleIssues.html> ) which are readily available for purchase. Purchase only the back issues you'll need for a period of history.

*Cobblestone History Magazine* is another favorite magazine at our house. It is a history magazine for children that has been around for a long time—since 1980! I prefer the writing and articles in the older magazines, but they're all great, really. Back issues are available all the way back to 1980 ( <http://www.cobblestonepub.com/issue/cob#backissues> ). These back issues, like the *Learning Through History Magazine* back issues, are readily available and well written. The website says their targeted age group is 9 to 14. I think some of the newer magazines could be comfortably read by a 9 to 11-year-old, but the older magazines (the ones with black and white photos from the '80s and '90s) are more ideally suited for the 11 to 14 age range. Scan the topics for the theme of the magazines and purchase only those you'll need for the year.

*Appleseeds History Magazine* is a sister publication of *Cobblestone*. It is geared more toward the 8 to 11-year-old crowd. My fourth-grade son enjoys reading these. Check out the *Appleseeds* magazine back issues here: ( <http://www.cobblestonepub.com/issue/app#backissues> ).

It's back to Rome for us! We're headed back down into the catacombs with the early Church via our books, documentaries, and history magazines. Grab a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and meet us down there with a candle and your sense of adventure!

Jennifer and her crew of four adventurers are munching on peanut butter and jelly in the foothills of North Alabama where Jennifer educates using living books and experiences. She blogs some of their adventures at [www.wildflowersandmarbles.blogspot.com](http://www.wildflowersandmarbles.blogspot.com).