

## Angel Fish

By Lili Wilkinson

### ABOUT THE BOOK

In *Angel Fish* Lili Wilkinson imagines what it might have been like on the Children's Crusade. She dips the reader into a dreamlike history, told through the eyes of an unforgettable character, Gabriel. When Stephen arrives in Gabriel's town of Machery and says that children can save the Holy Land from the Saracen, Gabriel believes him; he believes that he is special.

We follow the children as they leave their homes and journey across the Alps to Genoa, where Stephen believes the sea will part for them. Wilkinson explores wider issues of gender, class and religion. She also draws the reader into the small details of her characters: their fears and dreams. The effect is mesmerizing.

*Angel Fish* makes for an exciting class study. It encourages students to question history. It asks them to imagine it. It's a great starting point for studying the crusades. The themes are relevant to contemporary conflicts, providing an opportunity for students to draw parallels between times periods and societies.

### Genre

Historical fiction

### Reading level

Upper primary to lower secondary

### Interest level

Upper primary to lower secondary

### MAJOR THEMES AND ISSUES

Conflict (religious, class, gender, personal)

Friendship

Courage

Faith

Prejudice

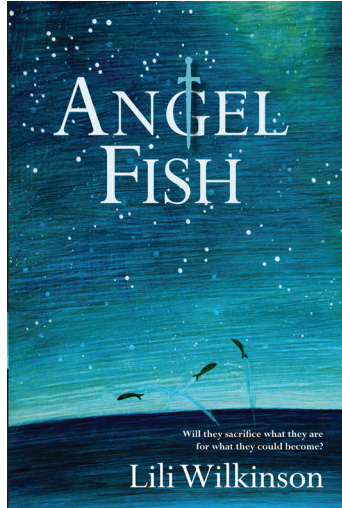
Family

Faith

Freedom

Christianity

Islam



### Vocabulary List

- In pairs, look up one of these words. (Remember that the words are taken from a novel set in the 13th Century.)
- Write or draw a definition of your word.
- Share your definition with the class.

Saracen	Holy Land	Heretic	Insolence	Pilgrims
Abbey	Martyrs	Heathens	Prophet	Poultice
Relic	Brigands	Unchivalrous	Apostate	Charlatan

Quintessence

### SOSE/HSIE

#### Strange History

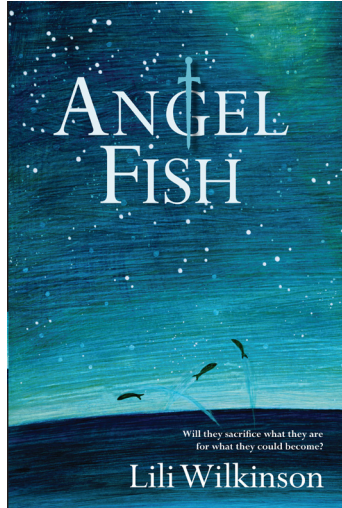
*'History is a strange thing...sometimes it is hard to separate stories from the facts.'* Lili Wilkinson

- What do you think the author means by this statement?
- Why is it hard to separate stories from facts?
- What is a primary resource?
- What is a secondary resource?
- Why is it important to use both types of sources when investigating history?
- Based on what you have read in *Angel Fish*, what facts have you learnt about life during this time period?

#### The Crusades

##### Individual Tasks

- Construct a timeline of the Christian Crusades.
- Write a definition of a crusade.
- Draw or trace a map of 13th Century Europe. Make sure you include a border, title, northing, key and scale on your map.
- Mark in Gabriel's journey on your map.



### **Group Tasks**

In groups, investigate one of the topics listed below.

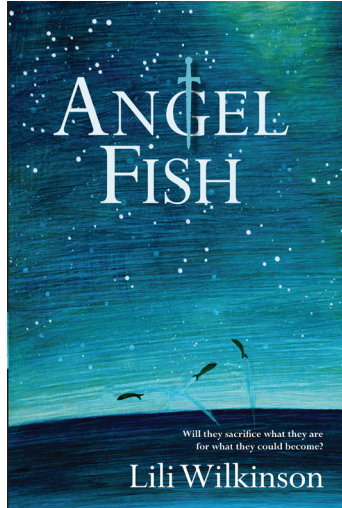
- The origins of the Christian Crusades
- The First Crusade
- The Second Crusade
- The Third Crusade
- The Fourth Crusade
- The Fifth Crusade
- The Sixth Crusade
- The Seventh Crusade
- The Eighth Crusade
- The Ninth Crusade
- The Children's Crusade
- Women in the Crusades

### **Christianity and Islam in the 13th Century**

- What have you learnt about Christianity in the 13th Century as a result of reading *Angel Fish*?
- What have you learnt about Islam?
- As a class, compile a list of questions that you have about these faiths after reading the novel.
- In pairs, choose one of the questions to research and answer.
- Discuss reasons why there might have been conflict between these religions in the 13th Century.
- In what ways does the conflict continue today?

### **Social Class**

- What is a 'social class'?
- Choose a scene from *Angel Fish* that illustrates how the class system divided people in the 13th Century. Discuss the scene. What do you see as fair or unfair?



- Do we still have classes today? Explain your answer.

**Discussion Topics**

- What were some of the causes of the crusades?
- Lili Wilkinson writes that the armies of the Children’s Crusade were ‘made up of people who were traditionally powerless: peasants, farmers, young people and unmarried women.’ Why do you think this was the case?
- Discuss why it is important to study the crusades. What things do you learn from them that are relevant today?

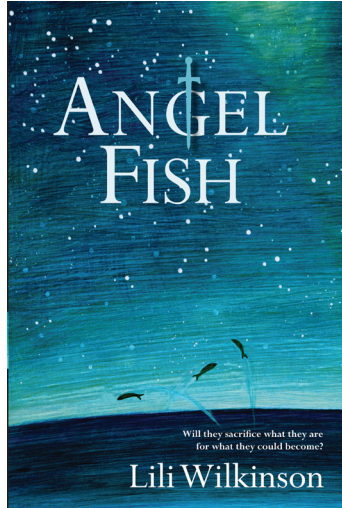
**ENGLISH**

**Reading and Writing**

**Characters**

Complete the chart below on some of the other main characters in *Angel Fish*.

Character	Plus (Positive characteristics)	Minus (Negative characteristics)	Interesting (Characteristics that caught your attention)	Similarities (Experiences or traits that characters share)
Gabriel				
Stephan				
Ines				
Fox boy				
Eustache				
Gabriel’s Papa				
Blanchefleur				
Nicklaus				
Alard				



### **Gabriel**

- While Gabriel's journey is set a long time ago, we can still relate to his fears and dreams. Write a journal entry about a time when you felt afraid.
- At times in the novel, Gabriel pretends he is somewhere else. Sometimes he pretends he is something else. Draw a picture of Gabriel's imaginings. Include a caption under your picture to highlight how he is feeling.
- Write a journal entry about a place that makes you feel free. What would you choose to be if you could change form?
- As the novel progresses, Gabriel changes his view of the world. How does his view change?

### **Gabriel's Maman**

- Write a journal entry from the perspective of Gabriel's Maman. How does she cope with the loss of her son? What does she miss most about him? Does she blame anyone for her loss?

### **Stephen**

- Stephen is a complex character. As a class, make a list of questions that you have for him. Write a journal entry as Stephen, answering at least three of these questions.

### **Themes**

There are many important themes in the novel, *Angel Fish*.

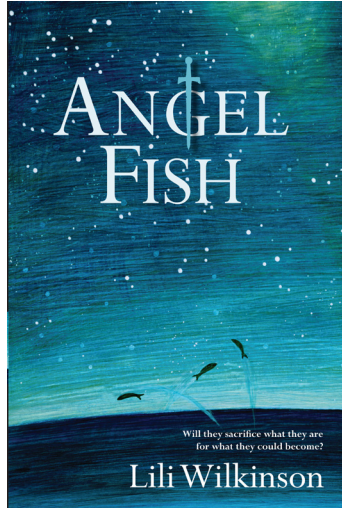
- As a class, discuss the meaning of the word 'theme'.
- In groups, create a collage from magazines to illustrate the main themes of the novel. Explain your collage to the class.

Choose one theme that you have illustrated.

- Find one scene in the book where this theme is illustrated. Share this scene with the class.

### **Writing History**

Lili Wilkinson asks questions of history and brings it alive for her readers. Imagine that you are a soldier on one of the crusades. Write a short story about your experiences. Your aim is to explore how you feel about your mission. It is also to evoke a sense of time and place for your reader.



At the end of the novel, Gabriel sees life from the perspective of the people he believed to be the enemy. Write about the crusades from the perspective of a person whose land is being invaded.

### Language

#### Descriptions

There are many beautiful descriptions in *Angel Fish*. Lili Wilkinson brings history alive by giving the reader information about what the characters see, hear, taste, touch and smell.

- Choose a place that is significant to you.
- Describe it with detail, giving the reader as much information as you can.
- Describe how you feel when you are in this place. Are you sad, happy, lonely, or hungry?
- Read your description to the class and see if you have achieved the aim of putting your reader into the picture.

The descriptions in *Angel Fish* are original and stay in the reader's mind. Lili Wilkinson takes a colour and imagines how it feels. 'And his eyes. Blue like the sky. Blue like an arrow. Blue like when someone hits you in the stomach and for a moment you can't breathe.' (p.3)

- Choose three or four colours and imagine how they might feel.
- Write some descriptions of your colours like the author has in *Angel Fish*.

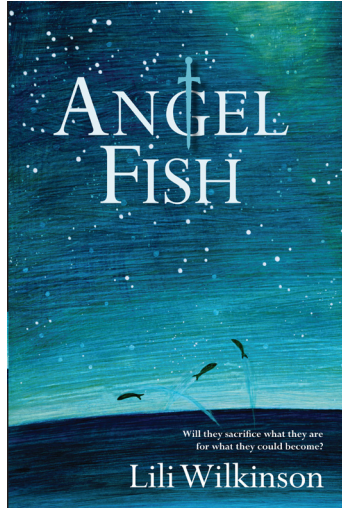
#### Similes

- What is a simile?
- In pairs, find examples of two interesting similes in *Angel Fish*.
- As a class, discuss what makes a successful simile.
- In pairs, make up your own similes. Be creative. Be original.

#### Speaking and Listening

##### Discussion Questions

'Maman says I must grow strong because I will never be very smart, and a man needs to be one or the other.' (p.2)



- Do you agree with this statement? Do you think it only reflects the attitudes of the time or do you think people still believe this today?
- What other qualities are important in a person?
- Does Gabriel grow to be smart and strong? How? What other qualities does he develop?

'There is no adult in the world who is untainted by wickedness. Only children are truly pure.' (p.9)

- What do you learn about Stephen from his comment?
- What do you learn about the beliefs of Christianity in the 13th Century?

Why do you think Gabriel and the other children went on the Children's Crusade? How did Stephen convince them to leave their homes? How did he convince them that they were entitled to steal?

Discuss the character Fox boy. Why might the author have given him the name of an animal rather than a boy? Why is he an important character in the novel?

'I'm just as good as any of you boys.' (p.61)

- Ines is a very brave girl. How were women restricted during this time?
- What things still restrict women today?

'A Saracen is as tall as two people and has smoke coming out of his nose and wicked horns and feet like a horse's.' (p.61)

- Why do Gabriel's views change in the novel?

Discuss the events of Chapter Twelve.

- What sort of person is Eustache?
- What reasons can you give for his actions?
- Can any reason justify what he has done?
- Why does Eustache believe he can tell the other children what to do?
- Do you think classes still exist today?

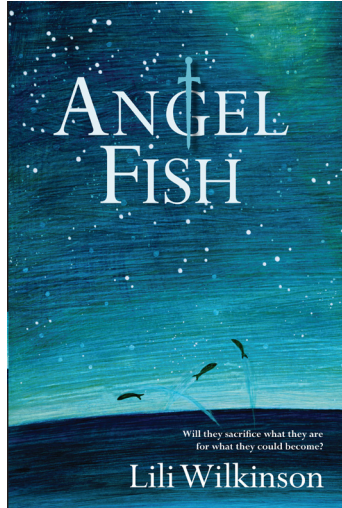


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Discuss the differences between Nicklaus and Stephen.

Discuss Chapter Seventeen. What is your opinion of Gabriel's actions?

'Sometimes I think we are just as bad as the Saracen.' (p.154) Discuss this comment. What point do you think Lili Wilkinson is making in *Angel Fish*?

There are many times in the novel when people struggle because they feel they are not pure. Can a person ever be 'pure'?

Gabriel says at the end of the novel that he has 'wings'. What do you think he means by this statement?

### SCIENCE

Ines knows much about plants and their healing properties. Research one of the plants mentioned in the novel. Give a description of the plant and its practical purpose.

The children's toes became black because of the cold. Find out some facts about frostbite.

Ines explains the belief in the Middle Ages that a person's body is made of four humours. (p.166) Research this belief and give an explanation of the humours.

### DRAMA

Choose a key scene from *Angel Fish* and write it as a script. Perform your scene for the class.

### CREATIVE ARTS

Create a new cover for the book, highlighting some of the key themes of the text.





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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### LILI WILKINSON

Lili Wilkinson remembers the day in Beijing when she learnt to read ‘in her head’. She was six and has been immersed in the world of books since. It’s an obsession she shares with her mother, Carole Wilkinson (the China trip was the germ that sprouted the award-winning *Dragonkeeper*).

Lili was first published when she was only eleven, in *Voiceworks*, a creative writing magazine for young people. Following an honours degree in Creative Arts and six months of teaching English in Japan, Lili began working at the Centre for Youth Literature, State Library of Victoria.

Lili lives in inner Melbourne, and loves reading, quality TV, the work of Jim Henson and Japanese food.