BIG IDEAS FROM HISTORY

A HISTORY OF THE WORLD FOR YOU

BIG IDEAS FROM HISTORY

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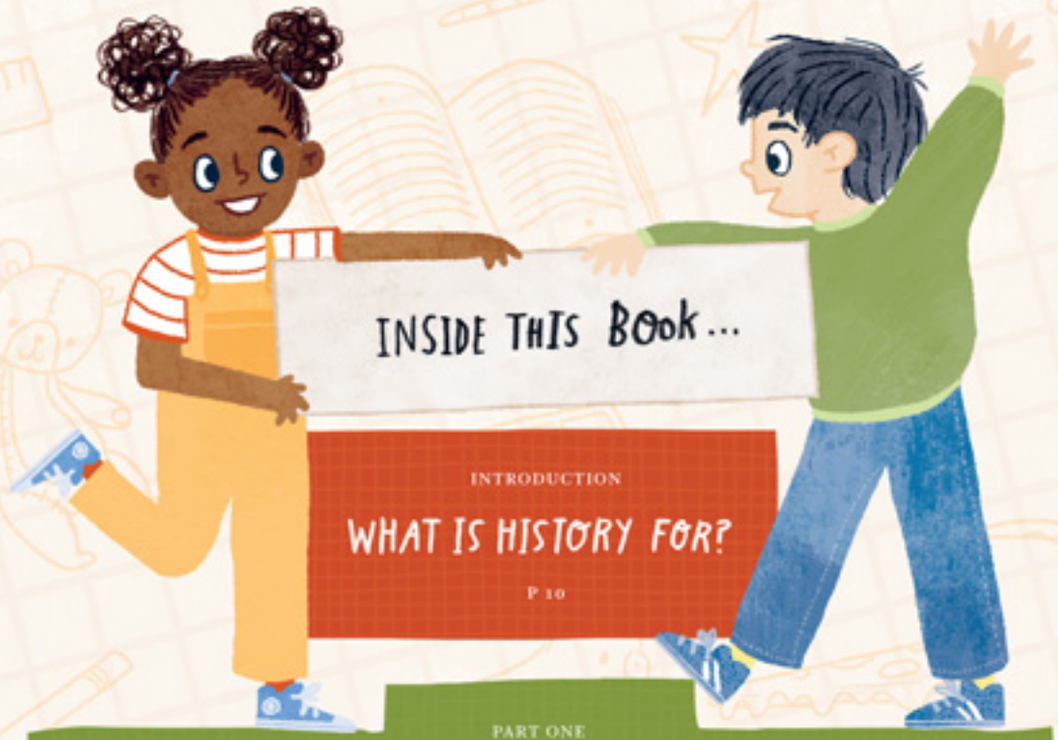

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WHAT IS HISTORY FOR?
START
FAITH
ABOLISH SLAVERY ABOLISH SLAVERY ABOLISH SLAVERY
THE BIBLE
VOTES FOR WOMEN
DAILY SURPRISE
NEW HISTORY BOOK!
LET'S FIND OUT!



What Is History For?

History is the story of everything that has happened up to now. But obviously no book can tell you *everything* that has ever happened: you'd need a book billions of pages long. So even though this book is quite big it has to leave a lot out. This raises an interesting and tricky question: what is important *for you* to know about history?

Sometimes people say you need to know about history so you can work out what to do. This sounds like quite a good idea. For instance, in the early 1800s, the French leader, Napoleon Bonaparte, invaded Russia. His troops got caught in the winter snow and had to retreat; hardly any

of them made it back to France. Then, in the 1940s, during the Second World War, the German army invaded Russia; it too got stuck in the snow and had to retreat and hardly any of their soldiers survived. So the lesson from history might be: don't invade Russia. But how important is this lesson to you? We don't know exactly what your plans might be, but we can be pretty sure that invading Russia isn't one of them. So maybe it's a lesson you don't really need.

A lot of history is like that. It tells you that certain things are very bad. Don't set up an empire and impose your values on the rest of the world (in case you were thinking of doing that during your lunch break). If you become president, be careful who you appoint as your advisors. It's a bit odd because you are you and not someone in charge of the world.

Another way people often think about history is that it is like a quiz. Someone is going to ask you a difficult question and you should learn about history so you'll get the answers right. Maybe they'll ask, 'Who was the first President of the United States?' and you'll be able to say 'George Washington'. Or they'll ask, 'When did the French Revolution start?' and you'll know the answer was 1789.

But being good at quizzes isn't really that important. And anyway, maybe the questions will be about sport or animals so history might not be the best thing to know about.



We take a different view. We think history is important because it can help *you*. That can sound quite strange: how can knowing about things that happened before you were even born be helpful to you now? There are four big ideas about how it can.

Perspective

Perspective tells us about a special kind of trick our minds play on us. When something is near us it *looks* big, even though it's *actually* quite small.



Looking at this picture, you might think this person is a terrifying giant. The Eiffel Tower, in Paris, France, is more than 300 metres high, so are you looking at someone who's *even bigger?* What if he stomps all over the streets? But if you understand perspective you realise that actually he's an ordinary size; it's just that the Eiffel Tower is a long way off.

The funny thing is that our minds play the same sort of trick around time. The things that are happening now *seem* huge, but if you see them *in perspective* you realise they're not very big at all. Finding out about history is finding out about how big and small things really are so you don't get so frightened by the things that are near and in the present. They *seem* much bigger than they really are. If you know about history – the long story of all that's happened in the past – what's happening now doesn't seem so important, or so scary.



Let's take a big example. This book is being written in 2022 and at the moment, every day, lots of grown-ups are talking about 'the pandemic' or 'the virus'. You think this is terrible, it's the worst thing that's ever happened, the world is falling apart. But in history it looks very different. *Of course* it's bad, but the world has been through *much worse* and gone on to be fine. The news makes what's happening right now look much bigger and scarier than it really is. History is a kind of cure for panic.

This idea can help you in lots of little, unexpected ways as well. Because the events in your life are part of history too. Maybe sometimes you get upset because something goes wrong – your teacher got cross with you, Dad was too busy to play at cards, your new bike got a puncture. It feels awful because this bad thing is close up; it's happening now. But if you think about history – all the time the dinosaurs were on Earth, how people gradually explored the world, how there were huge battles, how people invented electric lighting – this thing now looks so small you can hardly even notice it.

Inspiration

Inspiration is when you get an idea that makes life feel more exciting. Suppose you're finding out about the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Some of them look pretty amazing. The man with the spear and the torch was actually an enormous statue, more than 100 feet high, named the Colossus (it's where we got the word 'colossal', meaning enormous, from). It stood outside a harbour on the Greek island of Rhodes. But the really amazing thing is that someone came up with the idea. They thought it would be great. But you can imagine how at the time lots of people might have said very negative things: they'd have said, *don't be silly, it will never work, it will just crash down into the sea straight away, it will cost too much and boats will bump into it at night*. But we know that it was made and that it stood for many years, becoming so famous and admired that it was called a 'Wonder of the World'.

History shows you that big, ambitious projects can be done. Obviously, they aren't easy. But they *can* be done. We know that because they have been done before.

Right now, it often feels as if it's impossible to make much of a difference; you're just one person. Everything seems too difficult. But again and again in this book we will see how actually things change all the time and often it's because someone came up with a big idea and worked at it.

If you were planning a big idea, what would it be? It might not be about building something; there are lots of other ways you might want to change the world. It can feel a bit scary even telling yourself about this. But we hope this book will give you courage and inspiration.



How Things Get Better

Did you know that when George Washington was little, an important part of what is now the United States was actually part of the United Kingdom? He and his friends didn't like that. They thought it would be much better if they became a country of their own. So they fought lots of battles – sometimes in the snow.

It was tough but eventually George and his friends won. You'd think they'd be happy. But look at this picture of George when he was older. He looks pretty glum. That's because even though he'd made things better, they were still only a bit better. There were still lots of *other* problems.



This isn't just a story about George, it's about your life too. Because it tells you about how things can get better – even though they don't become perfect and improvement takes a lot of time. It sounds obvious when you say it, but it's hard to remember this lesson. If you aren't getting on with your mum, you could get on with her a bit better, even if there are still ways she annoys you. Or if you don't like doing your homework, you could do some of it and that would be a bit better than not doing it at all. Or if you're shy you think you need to be really confident, but things could be a bit better if you just asked one person a question. Progress is messy and imperfect, but it is still progress; that's one thing history keeps teaching us.

When you think about it, there are lots of ways the world *could* be much better than it is. Everyone could have a nice house and an interesting job; people could be kind rather than mean; we wouldn't be wasteful; we'd all concentrate on what's really important instead of getting obsessed with little things that don't really matter. You can get frustrated, impatient and angry. Why is the world so stupid? Why aren't things better *now*?

Well, says history, that would be lovely, but remember where we're coming from. Trying to get the whole world to be wise and to behave nicely is an incredibly difficult task. It doesn't just involve solving one problem, like freeing your country, it involves millions and millions of problems. We really are solving them one by one, but there is still a long way to go. If you knew what it really was like in the past you'd see what a lot of good work has been done. It's so frustrating looking at all the problems of the world. You need history to come along and explain to you why things can get better without them becoming just the way we want them to be.



How Much We Don't Know Yet



Imagine what it was like just before telephones were invented. If you wanted to contact someone far away you had to write them a letter. It could take ages to reach them. And that would feel very normal. But then in the 1870s a huge change occurred: the telephone was invented. Now you could give your friend a call, even though the phone did look a bit strange.

But no one at the time imagined this was going to happen. This has happened a lot in the past. Before planes were invented in 1903, hardly anyone thought humans would ever fly. And it must be the same today. We don't know what is going to happen next. That's important because often we think we do. We forget how fast and in what big ways the world can change. We feel as if what we know now is what it will always be like.

This is really important, because your life is like history. Maybe right now you feel confused about how you'll cope with the things you're expected to do when you are thirty. How will you get a house? How can you get a job? What if everything goes wrong with the world? What's happening is that you're forgetting about history. History says that you'll develop new

capacities and skills and ideas that *right now* you can't really imagine very well. Of course you'll have to face some bigger challenges, but you'll be bigger and cleverer when that happens, so you'll be able to face them pretty well.



The important thing in history is you. And that's why we've only talked about some of the things that happened in the past and missed out a lot of others. We've tried to pick the ones that might most help you.

Maybe sometimes finding out about history will feel as if you are in the classroom; are you expected to remember everything and take an exam at the end? We don't mind if you don't remember things (you can always dip back into a chapter). And anyway, it's not the details that matter. History isn't really asking you to keep lots of dates and names in your head, it's asking you to take some big ideas to heart. And not because you are going to sit an exam, but because you're going to be alive. You're going to be living in our annoying, wonderful, frightening and exciting world. And history wants to be your friend, standing beside you giving you encouragement and calming you down and suggesting possibilities and helping you not to be afraid.

You are little (excuse us for mentioning this), but also you're not. You are high up. You are sitting on top of everything that's happened in the whole of history. Imagine a huge tower that's being built. You are like one of the people working at the top. You didn't design the lower parts of the tower, but what happens next will be your work – and the work of a lot of other people like you. History is the story of all of us building the tower. Let's get on with it!





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We do this through films, workshops, books and gifts – and provide a warm and supportive community. You can find us online, in stores and in welcoming spaces around the globe.

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