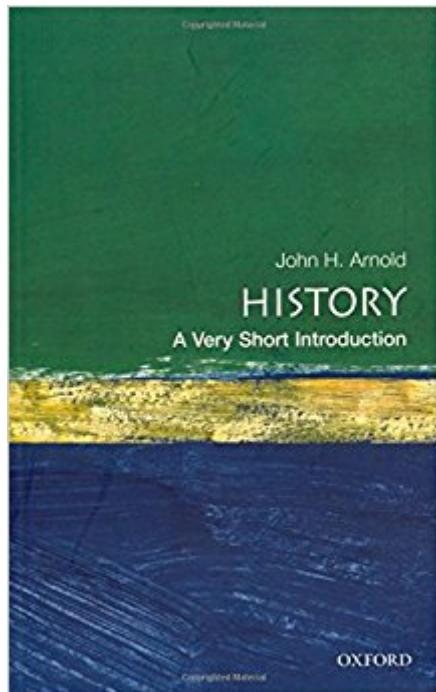


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# History: A Very Short Introduction



## Synopsis

There are many stories we can tell about the past, and we are not, perhaps, as free as we might imagine in our choice of which stories to tell, or where those stories end. John Arnold's addition to Oxford's popular Very Short Introductions series is a stimulating essay about how people study and understand history. The book begins by inviting us to think about various questions provoked by our investigation of history, and then explores the ways in which these questions have been answered in the past. Such key concepts as causation, interpretation, and periodization are introduced by way of concrete examples of how historians work, thus giving the reader a sense of the excitement implicit in discovering the past--and ourselves. The aim throughout *History: A Very Short Introduction* is to discuss theories of history in a general, pithy, and accessible manner, rather than delve into specific periods. This is a book that will appeal to all students and general readers with an interest in history or historiography. *About the Series:* Oxford's Very Short Introductions series offers concise and original introductions to a wide range of subjects--from Islam to Sociology, Politics to Classics, Literary Theory to History, and Archaeology to the Bible. Not simply a textbook of definitions, each volume in this series provides trenchant and provocative--yet always balanced and complete--discussions of the central issues in a given discipline or field. Every Very Short Introduction gives a readable evolution of the subject in question, demonstrating how the subject has developed and how it has influenced society. Eventually, the series will encompass every major academic discipline, offering all students an accessible and abundant reference library. Whatever the area of study that one deems important or appealing, whatever the topic that fascinates the general reader, the Very Short Introductions series has a handy and affordable guide that will likely prove indispensable.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"John Arnold builds around a few glittering fragments of the past-- a medieval murderer, a 17th-century pension to an abandoned wife, a speech by a black woman born into slavery-- a whole exhibition about what history is and is not. Writing with lucidity and passion, he lays out for inspection all the ways of recounting and exploiting the past through narrative which has been used from Herodotus to Hobsbawm. His range of knowledge and interests is phenomenal, but his skills as a communicator makes his own subtle analysis of history's history as gripping as a novel."--Neal Ascherson

"A stimulating and provocative introduction to one of collective humanity's most important quests-- understanding the past and its relation to the present. A vivid mix of telling examples and clear-cut analysis."--David Lowenthal, University College, London

"Intriguing and original in its discussion of why history matters and what are the problems inherent in studying it. The book is admirable in being discursive and thought-provoking."--Paul Freedman, Yale University

"Accessible to students and wide-ranging in content, Arnold uncovers major issues in the historical profession in a way that invites student participation."--Russ Reeves, Trinity Christian College

"Exactly what I needed. Suitable for the non-major undergrad and the graduate school bound major student."--Rea Andrew Reid, Waynesburg College

"This is an extremely engaging book, lively, enthusiastic and highly readable, which presents some of the fundamental problems of historical writing in a lucid and accessible manner. As an invitation to the study of history it should be difficult to resist."--Peter Burke, Emmanuel College, Cambridge

"A few millenia of events, millions of transcripts tucked away, uncountable lives passed, endless stories to tell. History: where to begin? John Arnold's History: A Very Short Introduction is an excellent short answer. Lucid and thoughtfully written, it will inspire confidence in students who wish to seek their own historical answers."--Dorothy Porter, Birbeck College, London

John Arnold teaches history at the University of East Anglia, specializing in the medieval period and the philosophy of history.

"The past itself is not a narrative. In its entirety, it is chaotic, uncoordinated, and complex as life. History is about making sense of that mess, finding or creating patterns and meanings and stories from the maelstrom." -- John H. Arnold, HistorydescriptionA friend on Facebook introduced me to

this series a couple weeks ago. I usually steer towards larger books (Diary of Samuel Pepys, The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, etc.). I like to submerge in a book, so I was initially skeptical of this format. These are short books, almost novella size (although the font being 8 or 9 point might allow Oxford's editors to squeeze a bit more in). These are books not meant for the expert, but the enthusiast. They are, as Oxford titled them, **VERY SHORT INTRODUCTIONS**. Perfect. There is an art to writing tight. To cutting your story, your explanation, your introduction into the fewest words possible. Things are not included, left out, obviously, but like haikus there is beauty in scarcity and there is a definite place for these books in my library. I've only finished one (This one), but I'm addicted. I loved Arnold's voice, his take, and his approach. I think he managed to engage, explain, synthesize the history of history, and did ALL of that in just under 124 pages. I just ordered World War II: A Very Short Introduction (for my son) and The American Revolution: A Very Short Introduction (for my daughter). I expect I will be buying more very shortly.

A really excellent overview of historiography and the reasons for studying or creating history, and the ways those reasons have changed and evolved to suit the needs of the society in which a history is being produced. This year I embarked on a project to read 100 books that cover the history of the world, and this was book 1 in my project and was the perfect introduction to get my brain thinking critically and studiously as I proceed through the rest of my list.

I've read a few other books of the Oxford series and this is by far the best. Such a vital topic for all literate people deserves a convincing and well-written introduction such as this.

Arnold tells us the difference between "history" and "the past." Very interesting! There are different ways to interpret the same thing, and people see things that others do not. While this is obvious, Arnold tells us how this changes history, and how the story and effects are changed as well. I have read it about five times, and am looking over it again as I write my Thesis.

An appetizer to the study of history, succinct and clearly written. Makes history sound so much more exciting and interesting than names, dates and battles. History is lived by real people like you and me.

Oxford University Press has a long list of these "very short introductions" to all kinds of topics - mostly in the academic realm. However, they are intended for non-specialists, and those I've read

are accessible to the general reader who wants to know more about a topic. All are written by experts, with clear, lively prose, and all have references for those who want more in-depth reading. I intend to use this one as a text for a grad school course focused on uses of history, for non-history majors.

I returned to the university classroom spring after a multi-year hiatus, and I assigned this book to my students. It is highly readable, succinct and engaging. My students enjoyed it, and it provoked wide-ranging discussions about history and its place in contemporary culture. I think teachers of advanced secondary students to graduate students would find much in this little gem that is of use.

This was a nice short summary about historiography and how one can apply it. Writing about truth was big. I was disappointed when the author mentioned he heard about homeless people sleeping among the stacks of a New York archives. That's conjecture. It may be true, but his verification is "I have been told." That shouldn't be good enough for a historian. Otherwise, a good book.

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