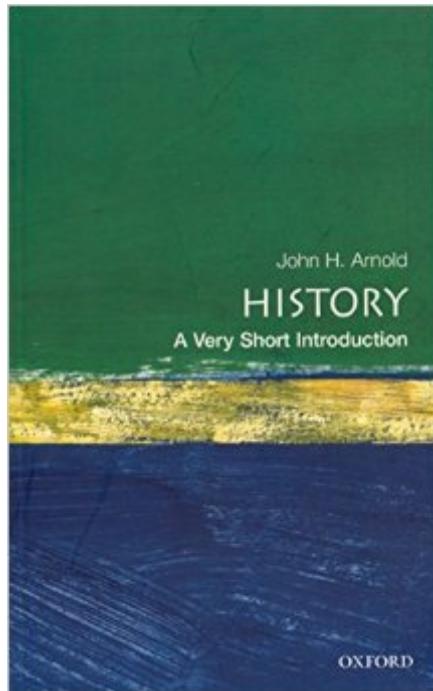


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# History: A Very Short Introduction (Very Short Introductions)



## 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 *Very Short Introduction* is a stimulating essay about how we study and understand history. The book begins by inviting us to think about various questions provoked by our investigation of history, and explores the ways these questions have been answered in the past. Concepts such as causation, interpretation, and periodization, are introduced by means of concrete examples of how historians work, giving the reader a sense of the excitement of discovering not only the past, but also ourselves.

**ABOUT THE SERIES:** The *Very Short Introductions* series from Oxford University Press contains hundreds of titles in almost every subject area. These pocket-sized books are the perfect way to get ahead in a new subject quickly. Our expert authors combine facts, analysis, perspective, new ideas, and enthusiasm to make interesting and challenging topics highly readable.

## Book Information

File Size: 1468 KB

Print Length: 152 pages

Page Numbers Source ISBN: 019285352X

Publisher: OUP Oxford; 1 edition (February 24, 2000)

Publication Date: February 24, 2000

Sold by: Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ISBN-10: 019285352X

ISBN-13: 978-0192853523

ASIN: B005PUWTWW

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #82,161 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #5 in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > History > Historical Study > Historiography #48 in Books > History > Historical Study & Educational Resources > Historiography #2607 in Books > History > World

## Customer Reviews

Arnold's lucid and slender book is worthy of praise for its concision and accessible writing style. The clear writing enables non-specialists to entertain some of the central questions in Historiography and Philosophy of History. His use of historical examples to illustrate important points is skillful and engaging. Some of these examples include a religiously motivated medieval murder at the time of the inquisition; the story of one man who lived through both the English Civil War and the religious conflicts in the early Massachusetts Colony then governed by John Winthrop; a case of cat-killing in 17C France with an accompanying discussion of the history of attitudes towards cats; and the case of Sojourner Truth's famous "Ain't I a Woman?" speech-- which survives in 2 very different records--neither of which is the same as what she said in the speech. Despite the relatively jargon-free writing, the author manages to articulate many of the central questions, problems and challenges facing contemporary historians who try to make sense of their craft. If he offers more questions than definitive answers, that is in keeping with his tendency to debunk those historians and philosophers who have claimed to have final answers to extremely complex questions. If the book has a thesis at all, it is probably that one should be extremely cautious about the use of historical constructs, generalizations and abstractions that are too often confused with the past itself. An obvious example is periodization. Students often learn about the Renaissance, Middle Ages and Enlightenment periods as though these are realities that existed in the past.

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