

a history of the world in 100 objects

****A History of the World in 100 Objects: Exploring Humanity Through Artifacts****

a history of the world in 100 objects is more than just a catchy phrase; it's a fascinating way to understand the vast and intricate story of human civilization. By examining objects that span thousands of years and countless cultures, we gain unique insights into how people lived, thought, and evolved. Each artifact tells a story, connecting us to moments of innovation, survival, creativity, and transformation. This approach not only makes history tangible but also reveals the interconnectedness of humanity across time and geography.

The Power of Objects in Understanding History

When we think about history, famous dates and events often come to mind—wars, discoveries, rulers, and revolutions. However, objects provide a more intimate and nuanced perspective. They give life to the abstract and bring us closer to the everyday experiences of people long gone. From ancient tools to exquisite artworks, from coins and manuscripts to clothing and technological gadgets, objects serve as storytellers in their own right.

The idea of tracing a history of the world in 100 objects was popularized by projects like the British Museum's radio series and subsequent book by Neil MacGregor. This method helps distill the complexity of global history into a curated selection that highlights pivotal moments and universal themes, such as trade, religion, art, and human ingenuity.

Early Human Innovation: Tools and the Dawn of Civilization

The Origins of Humanity Through Tools

One of the earliest categories of objects that illustrate our shared history are primitive tools. Stone hand axes, flint knives, and bone needles demonstrate the ingenuity of early humans in adapting to their environment. These tools were essential for hunting, building shelters, and making clothing—fundamental activities that allowed our ancestors to survive and thrive.

From Nomads to Settlers: Pottery and Agriculture

As humans transitioned from nomadic lifestyles to settled farming communities, new objects emerged that marked this shift. Pottery vessels, for example, reveal the domestication of plants and animals and the rise of food storage and cooking techniques. These artifacts tell us about diet, trade, and social structures developing around agricultural production.

Art and Symbolism: Expressing Identity and Belief

Early Artifacts of Spirituality and Culture

Objects like cave paintings, figurines, and ritual masks provide glimpses into early human spirituality and cultural expression. The Venus figurines, for instance, are thought to symbolize fertility and are among the oldest known examples of figurative art. These items help us appreciate the depth of symbolic thinking and communal identity in prehistoric societies.

Religious Relics and Sacred Objects

As civilizations grew, so did the complexity of their belief systems. Sacred texts, temple relics, and religious icons not only served spiritual purposes but also acted as tools for political power and cultural cohesion. The Rosetta Stone, for example, was instrumental in deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphs, opening a window into a long-lost civilization's worldview.

The Age of Empires: Objects of Power and Innovation

Artifacts from the Great Civilizations

From Mesopotamia's cuneiform tablets to Roman coins and Chinese silk, objects from established empires tell stories of governance, economy, and culture. Each item reflects the ingenuity and reach of these societies, highlighting advances in writing, administration, and international trade networks.

Technological Breakthroughs and Everyday Life

Inventions such as the wheel, aqueducts, and early mechanical devices are captured in surviving artifacts and models. They illustrate how technology shaped urban planning, transportation, and industry. Everyday objects like jewelry, clothing, and household items provide insight into social status, fashion, and domestic routines.

The Medieval and Renaissance Periods: Art, Science, and Exploration

Objects Reflecting a Changing World

The medieval era was rich with artifacts that symbolize religious devotion, feudal power, and emerging scientific inquiry. Illuminated manuscripts, armor, and religious relics highlight the values and conflicts of the time.

Renaissance Masterpieces and the Dawn of Modernity

The Renaissance brought a renewed interest in art, science, and exploration. Objects like Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks, navigational instruments, and early printing presses mark the shift toward modernity. These artifacts reveal how curiosity and innovation fueled a cultural rebirth that reshaped Europe and eventually the world.

The Industrial Revolution and Modern Era: Objects of Change

Machines That Transformed Society

The Industrial Revolution produced objects that symbolize a radical transformation in production, labor, and daily life. Steam engines, factory tools, and early automobiles illustrate how technology accelerated economic growth and altered social structures.

Communication and Global Connectivity

Telegraphs, radios, and eventually computers are artifacts that trace the evolution of communication. They document humanity's increasing ability to connect across vast distances, fostering globalization and cultural exchange.

Objects as Witnesses to Conflict and Progress

Artifacts from Wars and Peace Movements

Many objects bear silent witness to humanity's darkest and most hopeful moments. Military medals, propaganda posters, peace treaties, and civil rights memorabilia all tell stories of struggle, sacrifice, and resilience.

Environmental and Cultural Preservation

In recent decades, objects have also become symbols of environmental awareness and cultural preservation. Artifacts saved from destruction and efforts to protect indigenous heritage underscore the ongoing dialogue between past and present.

Why a History of the World in 100 Objects Matters Today

Studying history through objects not only enriches our understanding of the past but also informs our present and future. These tangible links to human experience remind us of our shared origins and diverse paths. They encourage empathy and respect for cultures different from our own.

Moreover, engaging with objects encourages critical thinking about how history is recorded and remembered. It invites us to question which stories are told and who gets to tell them. In a world where digital media often dominates, the physical presence of objects offers a grounding and immersive connection to history.

Tips for Exploring History Through Objects

If you're inspired to explore history through objects yourself, here are a few tips:

- **Visit Museums and Exhibitions:** Museums often curate objects in ways that highlight historical themes and connections. Look for guided tours or audio guides that tell the stories behind the artifacts.
- **Explore Online Collections:** Many major institutions have digitized their collections, allowing you to examine objects in detail from anywhere in the world.
- **Read Books and Listen to Podcasts:** Resources like Neil MacGregor's *A History of the World in 100 Objects* provide accessible and engaging narratives that deepen your understanding.
- **Reflect on Everyday Objects:** Consider the history behind common items around you—how they were made, where materials come from, and what changes they've undergone.
- **Engage with Local History:** Artifacts are not only found in grand museums but also in local archives, historical societies, and even family heirlooms.

By approaching history through objects, you embark on a journey that is as much about discovery as it is about connection—connecting with people across time and space through the things they created and cherished.

In tracing a history of the world in 100 objects, we realize that every artifact is a portal to a larger story. Each object holds layers of meaning, revealing the complexity of human life and the shared threads that weave together our global heritage. Whether it's a simple tool or a magnificent work of art, these objects invite us to explore, learn, and appreciate the rich tapestry of human history.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is 'A History of the World in 100 Objects' about?

It is a BBC radio series and accompanying book that tells the history of humanity through 100 objects selected from the British Museum's collection.

Who created 'A History of the World in 100 Objects'?

The series was created by Neil MacGregor, former director of the British Museum.

When was 'A History of the World in 100 Objects' first broadcast?

The series was first broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in 2010.

What criteria were used to select the 100 objects?

Objects were chosen based on their significance in illustrating key moments, cultures, and developments in human history.

Can you name some notable objects featured in the series?

Notable objects include the Rosetta Stone, the Sutton Hoo helmet, and the Lewis chessmen.

How does the series help in understanding world history?

By examining artifacts, the series provides a tangible connection to different cultures and eras, offering insights into human creativity, technology, and social development.

Is there a book version of 'A History of the World in 100 Objects'?

Yes, Neil MacGregor also authored a book that complements the radio series, providing detailed information about each object.

Are the objects only from the British Museum?

Yes, the 100 objects are all from the British Museum's extensive collection.

Has 'A History of the World in 100 Objects' been used in education?

Yes, it has been widely used as an educational resource to teach history and archaeology around the world.

Is there an online resource for 'A History of the World in 100 Objects'?

Yes, the British Museum hosts an online collection and interactive website featuring the 100 objects with detailed descriptions and audio clips from the series.

Additional Resources

A History of the World in 100 Objects: Tracing Civilization Through Artifacts

a history of the world in 100 objects offers a compelling framework to understand human civilization's development across millennia. This innovative approach, popularized by the British Museum's collaboration with BBC Radio 4, encapsulates the vast, complex tapestry of global history through tangible artifacts, each object serving as a window into the cultural, technological, and societal shifts of its era. By examining a curated selection of artifacts—from prehistoric tools to modern inventions—historians and enthusiasts alike gain nuanced insights into how human ingenuity and circumstance shaped the modern world.

The concept of narrating world history through objects taps into the inherent power of material culture. Unlike traditional textual records, artifacts provide a physical connection to the past, revealing details about everyday life, belief systems, and technological progress. This method underscores the importance of interdisciplinary study, blending archaeology, anthropology, and art history to create a holistic understanding of global heritage.

The Significance of Objects in Historical Narratives

Historical narratives often rely on written records, oral traditions, or monumental architecture to convey the story of humanity. However, objects serve as silent witnesses to the past, offering evidence that complements or challenges established accounts. A history of the world in 100 objects leverages this principle by selecting artifacts that are emblematic of broader historical themes, such as trade networks, religious practices, or technological breakthroughs.

For example, the inclusion of the Sumerian cuneiform tablet highlights the birth of writing and administration, marking a transition from prehistory to recorded history. Similarly, the Rosetta Stone exemplifies the critical role of linguistic artifacts in deciphering ancient languages, unlocking knowledge about civilizations like Egypt's that would otherwise remain enigmatic.

Artifacts as Cultural and Technological Markers

Objects often encapsulate the technological capabilities and cultural values of their time. Take, for instance, the Iron Age tools and weapons that signal advances in metallurgy, which in turn facilitated agricultural productivity and territorial expansion. The evolution from stone to bronze and eventually iron tools reflects shifting resource availability and human innovation.

Moreover, religious artifacts such as Buddhist sculptures or Islamic calligraphy reveal the spiritual

dimensions of societies and the diffusion of ideas along trade routes. These objects not only serve devotional purposes but also act as vehicles of cultural exchange, illustrating how beliefs and artistic styles transcend geographic boundaries.

Curating a Global Perspective

A history of the world in 100 objects deliberately emphasizes a geographically and chronologically diverse selection to avoid Eurocentric or regionally biased narratives. This inclusivity enriches our understanding of interconnectedness among civilizations through trade, conquest, and diplomacy.

Examples of Diverse Objects and Their Contexts

- **The Jomon Pottery (Japan, c. 14,000 BCE):** Among the oldest known pottery, these objects demonstrate early human settlement and artistic expression in prehistoric East Asia.
- **Benin Bronzes (Nigeria, 13th century CE):** These intricate brass plaques celebrate the sophistication of West African kingdoms and challenge misconceptions about African artistic traditions.
- **The Viking Sword (Scandinavia, 10th century CE):** Symbolizing the martial culture and seafaring prowess of the Vikings, this object also reflects the movement of goods and ideas across Europe.
- **Aztec Featherwork (Mexico, 15th century CE):** A testament to the artistic ingenuity and religious symbolism in Mesoamerica prior to European contact.

These objects illustrate the diversity of human achievement and the various ways societies have documented identity, power, and knowledge.

Challenges and Considerations in Object-Based Histories

While using objects to narrate history yields rich insights, it also presents challenges. One such challenge is the representativeness of the chosen artifacts. Selecting only 100 objects to depict the entirety of world history inevitably involves subjectivity and risks oversimplification. Certain regions or periods may be underrepresented due to the scarcity of surviving materials or biases in archaeological discovery and museum collections.

Another consideration is the interpretation of objects detached from their original context. Without comprehensive provenance, the meaning or function of an artifact can be misunderstood. This necessitates careful scholarship and, at times, interdisciplinary collaboration to reconstruct the

stories behind these items accurately.

The Role of Museums and Digital Archives

Modern museums play a crucial role in preserving and interpreting historical objects for public education. Exhibitions based on a history of the world in 100 objects generate engagement by making history tangible and relatable. Furthermore, digital archives and virtual exhibits have expanded access, allowing global audiences to explore these artifacts beyond geographic and socioeconomic barriers.

However, ethical debates surround the ownership and repatriation of cultural objects, especially those acquired during colonial periods. Responsible stewardship and dialogue with source communities are vital to ensuring that the study and display of historical objects respect cultural heritage and promote inclusive narratives.

Impact on Historical Understanding and Education

The approach of telling a history of the world in 100 objects has influenced how history is taught and understood. It encourages learners to think critically about the material culture and the interconnectedness of civilizations rather than viewing history as a series of isolated events or figures.

By engaging with objects, students and researchers develop skills in observation, contextual analysis, and empathy for past human experiences. This method also highlights the continuity and change inherent in human societies, demonstrating how innovations and ideas have evolved and spread over time.

SEO Keywords and Their Integration

In crafting an article about a history of the world in 100 objects, it is important to integrate relevant keywords such as "historical artifacts," "world history through objects," "material culture in history," "archaeological discoveries," and "museum collections." These terms help optimize the content for search engines while maintaining natural readability and relevance.

For example, discussing archaeological discoveries alongside specific artifacts enriches the narrative and connects readers to the broader field of historical inquiry. Similarly, referencing museum collections underscores the accessibility of these objects to the public and their educational significance.

The strategic integration of these LSI keywords throughout the article ensures that it reaches audiences interested in history, archaeology, and cultural heritage, without compromising the professional tone or analytical depth of the content.

Through the lens of 100 carefully selected objects, the vast panorama of human history becomes accessible and engaging. Each artifact not only embodies a unique story but also connects to the broader currents of civilization, illuminating the shared heritage that defines humanity's past. This approach continues to inspire new ways of thinking about history, inviting us to explore the tangible remnants of our collective journey across time and space.

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a history of the world in 100 objects: *A History of the World in 100 Objects* Neil MacGregor, 2011-10-06 This book takes a dramatically original approach to the history of humanity, using objects which previous civilisations have left behind them, often accidentally, as prisms through which we can explore past worlds and the lives of the men and women who lived in them. The book's range is enormous. It begins with one of the earliest surviving objects made by human hands, a chopping tool from the Olduvai gorge in Africa, and ends with an object from the 21st century which represents the world we live in today. Neil MacGregor's aim is not simply to describe these remarkable things, but to show us their significance - how a stone pillar tells us about a great Indian emperor preaching tolerance to his people, how Spanish pieces of eight tell us about the beginning of a global currency or how an early Victorian tea-set tells us about the impact of empire. Each chapter immerses the reader in a past civilisation accompanied by an exceptionally well-informed guide. Seen through this lens, history is a kaleidoscope - shifting, interconnected, constantly surprising, and shaping our world today in ways that most of us have never imagined. An intellectual and visual feast, it is one of the most engrossing and unusual history books published in years.

a history of the world in 100 objects: *A History of the World in 100 Objects* Mark Kilfoyle, 2010

a history of the world in 100 objects: *A History of the World in 100 Objects* Neil MacGregor, 2012-07-31 Neil MacGregor's *A History of the World in 100 Objects* takes a bold, original approach to human history, exploring past civilizations through the objects that defined them. Encompassing a grand sweep of human history, *A History of the World in 100 Objects* begins with one of the earliest surviving objects made by human hands, a chopping tool from the Olduvai gorge in Africa, and ends with objects which characterise the world we live in today. Seen through MacGregor's eyes, history is a kaleidoscope - shifting, interconnected, constantly surprising, and shaping our world today in ways that most of us have never imagined. A stone pillar tells us about a great Indian emperor preaching tolerance to his people; Spanish pieces of eight tell us about the beginning of a global currency; and an early Victorian tea-set speaks to us about the impact of empire. An intellectual and visual feast, this is one of the most engrossing and unusual history books published in years. 'Brilliant, engagingly written, deeply researched' Mary Beard, *Guardian* 'A triumph: hugely popular, and rightly lauded as one of the most effective and intellectually ambitious initiatives in the making of 'public history' for many decades' *Sunday Telegraph* 'Highly intelligent, delightfully written and utterly absorbing' Timothy Clifford, *Spectator* 'This is a story book, vivid and witty, shining with insights, connections, shocks and delights' Gillian Reynolds *Daily Telegraph*

a history of the world in 100 objects: *Summary of Neil MacGregor's A History of the World in 100 Objects* Everest Media,, 2022-04-30T22:59:00Z Please note: This is a companion

version & not the original book. Sample Book Insights: #1 Human life began in Africa. Our ancestors there created the first stone tools to chop meat, bones, and wood. It was this increasing dependency on the things we create that makes humans different from all other animals. #2 The mummy of Hornedjitef, an Egyptian priest, is still yielding new information and sending us messages through time. The objects that were made for him demonstrate the ways in which this history will ask and occasionally answer different kinds of questions about objects. #3 The inner coffin has a gilded face, which indicates divine status. It also has an image of the sun god as a winged scarab beetle, symbol of spontaneous life, flanked by baboons who worship the rising sun. #4 Thanks to scientific advances, we can learn a lot more about Hornedjitef today than was possible in 1835. For example, we can see how old he was, what kind of food he ate, and how he died.

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a history of the world in 100 objects: Chicago in 50 Objects Chicago in 50 Objects, 2021 When investigating the mysteries of Chicago's past, it's helpful to examine the physical evidence. From a fiddle played by a Chicago pioneer and a jersey worn by Michael Jordan to a relic of the Great Chicago Fire and the guns used in the St. Valentine's Day Massacre, these talismans chronicle the city's tragedies and triumphs. Some heirlooms shed new light on familiar figures like Louis Sullivan, while others commemorate the contributions of less heralded visionaries like Frances Glessner Lee. Joseph Gustaitis explores Chicago's history through fifty carefully chosen objects, a collection that includes stockyard knives, the world's first portable radio and Nelson Algren's typewriter.--Provided by publisher.

a history of the world in 100 objects: Peace Museums Peter van den Dungen, 2024-12-31 This book is the first comprehensive study of the history, nature, and purposes of peace museums, comprising twenty-one essays by a leading authority in the field. It presents a powerful argument for the need for this new kind of museum that informs and inspires visitors that a world of peace and nonviolence is both necessary and possible. Whereas there are numerous museums about war and the armed forces, museums about peacemaking and peacemakers are rare; indeed, the very concept of peace museums is still largely unknown. This is a reflection of the traditional writing and teaching of history which is dominated by narratives of war and warriors, with little or no attention being paid to the history of efforts to prevent and abolish war. Peace museums are ideal instruments to bring the long, fascinating, and vitally important history of peace to life for a large public. Among the essays included are histories of two (forgotten and unknown yet) heroic efforts to prevent World War I, and then World War II, through museums that educated and alerted visitors about the disasters ahead if war was not avoided, and ways to steer a different course following the catastrophe that was the Great War. At a time when a barbaric war in Europe, continuing wars in Africa, and ominous threats of war in Asia, are raising the specter of nuclear war and World War III, the need for anti-nuclear bomb and anti-war museums is greater than ever. Such museums are essential for the

development of a global culture of peace and nonviolence. The book provides inspiration and hope for everyone interested in efforts to overcome an existential threat to civilization that is wholly man-made.

a history of the world in 100 objects: A History of Cricket in 100 Objects Gavin Mortimer, 2013-06-06 Once the preserve of the English, now, for nations the world over, summertime means cricket bats to be oiled, rain forecasts analysed and tea in the pavilion. Cricket has enthralled us since the seventeenth century. But what is it about the game that provokes such fervour? Award-winning sports author Gavin Mortimer calls together a cast of salt-of-the-earth Yorkshiremen, American billionaires and dashing Indian princes to tell the strange and remarkable tale of cricket's journey from medieval village sport of 'club-ball' to the global media circus graced by superstars from Denis Compton to Sachin Tendulkar. If you've ever wanted to know what a hoop skirt has to do with overarm bowling, why England fight Australia over a burnt bail, or how to avoid tickling a jaffa in the corridor of uncertainty, Mortimer chucks up a stunning century of tales in the first truly accessible global history of cricket.

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India, Sudeshna Guha provides a panoramic view of the rich histories of the subcontinent. The incisive essays in this collection detail not just the objects but the histories of their reception: examining how changing times and attitudes cast their shadow on the ways in which the past is interpreted and narrated. In doing so, *A History of India through 75 Objects* inspires us to interrogate our own notions of a knowable past and fixed national history. Teeming with thought-provoking insights and surprising anecdotes, the essays instill a sense of wonder about the continuous processes by which histories are constructed.

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a history of the world in 100 objects: Museums as Ritual Sites Lieke Wijnia, James S. Bielo, 2024-10-14 *Museums as Ritual Sites* critically examines the assumption that museums inherently function as ritual sites and, in turn, are poised to exert influence on cultural and societal change. Bringing together a diverse, international group of interdisciplinary scholars and curators, the volume celebrates and critically engages with Carol Duncan's seminal work, *Civilizing Rituals*. Presenting a wide-ranging exploration of how museums function as liminal zones in broader societal contexts, the book discusses major topics identified as functioning at the heart of the above-mentioned paradigm shift: diversity and inclusion, consumption, religion, and tradition. These topics are studied through the lens of their ritual implications in museum practice. Presenting case studies on ethnographic, art, history, community, and memorial practices in museums, the book reflects the diversity of the contemporary international museum field. As such, the volume presents a critical and updated revision of the ritual perspective on museums - both as it was presented by Duncan and as it has since been developed in the field of museum studies. *Museums as Ritual Sites* will be essential reading for academics and students working in museum studies, heritage studies, cultural anthropology, religious studies, and ritual studies. *Museums as Ritual Sites* will also be of interest to those working across the humanities and social sciences who are interested in the intersection of museums or archives with indigeneity and decolonization.

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a history of the world in 100 objects: Cultural Objects and Reparative Justice Patty Gerstenblith, 2023-09-20 *Cultural Objects and Reparative Justice* provides a comprehensive legal and historical analysis surrounding a highly debated current question: Where should cultural objects that were removed without consent be located? This book follows an innovative, interdisciplinary approach based in law, history, art history, anthropology, and archaeology and proposes a paradigm for reparations. Tracing the historical foundations of the current legal framework, the work closely examines three factors that heavily informed the cultural heritage debate since the late eighteenth century: the rise of the encyclopaedic museum, the development of archaeology as a science, and

the appropriation of objects in the context of armed conflict and colonialism. Each of these explorations is enriched by examples from around the globe and assessed on the international, national, and local level. Subjecting contested objects -such as the Parthenon Sculptures, those from the Yuanmingyuan Palace, the Benin artifacts, looted archaeological artefacts and human remains, and artwork stolen during the Holocaust - to this holistic approach enables a contextualisation of the unique history of appropriation of these objects. Cultural Objects and Reparative Justice outlines how current cultural heritage laws and ethical guidelines with respect to cultural heritage derive from a background of imperialism and colonialism. The book advocates for a new structure based on reparation, restitution, repatriation, compensation, and market regulation to cease perpetuating past harms and to disincentivize new ones.

a history of the world in 100 objects: Essential Primary History Christopher Russell, 2016-07-16 This book is an essential handbook on teaching primary history, combining subject knowledge with practical teaching ideas to ensure your teaching of history is both imaginative and creative. Emphasizing the importance of history and its wider skillset, the book explores the concepts and skills that are the fundamental building blocks of history teaching such as: • Chronological understanding • Concepts and skills • Interpretation and evidence Each chapter offers a structured approach and provides a range of activities that both address specific elements of the history curriculum and help develop this wider skillset. It includes practical ideas for lessons through an essential toolkit of ideas, teaching strategies and activities, with each activity designed to focus on a key skill or attribute associated with teaching primary history. The practical insights accompanied by a grounded rationale for each aspect of history will help you learn the best methods for approaching the teaching of history in the primary school, as well as plan and deliver effective history lessons. This book is ideal if you are training to teach as it will help you with your assignments and your teaching placements. It is also recommended if you are a more experienced practitioner or history coordinator and want to provide the very best experiences in primary history to children in your school. "An essential and inspirational guidebook for the successful teaching of history within the primary classroom! If you are in any way involved with the teaching of history, you owe it to yourself to read this book. A 'must have' for all history coordinators and teachers within the primary sector, from trainees to the experienced, who wish to raise the profile of history within their school. Closely tied to the new primary curriculum, it is enriched with excellent ideas to make history in the classroom a fun and memorable experience." Julia Wilson, Primary Teacher, Hensingham Primary School, UK "This book is easy to read and will enable all teachers (whatever their stage of career development) to become even better at teaching History. The chapter about the history of the curriculum is particularly interesting because it helps us all to understand what has influenced curriculums and pedagogies over time, whereas the Planning, Assessment and Toolkit chapters are useful on a more practical level. What is particularly ideal for trainee teachers is the Theory into Practice chapter that blends the pedagogy of History with learning theory. I will certainly be recommending this text to all my student teachers." Maggie Webster, Senior Lecturer and RE Subject Coordinator, Edge Hill University, UK "Chris Russell has provided a gem of a guide with lots of practical advice for the student and practising teacher of history in the primary classroom, as well as a good book to read in its own right. Marian Hodgson, Head Teacher, St Philips CE Primary School, Litherland, UK

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