

BOOK REVIEWS

History for beginners

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Introduction

History can be taught in a way that excites curiosity rather than passively learning history through memorisation. This is a statement that the *'History for Beginners'* educational book breaks down by simplifying the subject content through creative images, explanations and storytelling. *'History for Beginners'* written by Andy Prentice and Tom Mumbray in collaboration with Paul Boston for illustration, Jamie Ball and Samuel Gorham in designing the book and history experts such as Dr Vanda Wilcox and Dr Samraghni Bonnerjee. The educational book was published in 2024 by Usborne Publishing Limited. Usborne Publishing Limited is one of the world's leading independent children's book publishers. It was founded in 1973 by Peter Usborne and has over 3000 children's books in print.

Layout of the book

The book consists of seven chapters, which is also notable, considering it is intended for beginners in history. Throughout the various chapters, the authors demonstrate how historical knowledge can be effectively taught to learners without prior background knowledge of academic history, without overwhelming or confusing them. A glossary page is included to explain terminology used throughout the book. Additionally, the glossary page offers more detailed information about specific historical events and time periods.

The book also features an index, allowing readers to locate specific information quickly.

Contents in the textbook

The book's cover is quite appealing to the eye and grabs one's attention. The cover provides insights into what to expect when reading the book through intriguing key questions and colourful, meaningful images. The images and texts evoke a sense of curiosity in the reader's mind, prompting them to explore the content of the book further, as revealed on the cover page. Additionally, the images and texts on the cover page emphasise the inclusion of the 'BIG SIX' concepts stated by Peter Seixas when teaching history knowledge. A practical example of one of the images on the cover page is the clock, which symbolises 'time and chronology' as a concept in history education. The images on the cover page serve as a foundation for the numerous images and graphics within the book. However, it is uncertain whether the images can be viewed as historical evidence, whether they are primary or secondary sources, and the level of accuracy and reliability they possess. It can also be noted that the images' format, layout and design do not resemble one constructed within a South African context or perspective.

The book's contents focus on academic historical knowledge, such as 'defining history', which lays the foundation for the addition of new knowledge and enhances prior knowledge, providing the lens through which historical knowledge should be viewed. Furthermore, it also focuses on historical knowledge, including tools and resources for historians, which equips learners with skills to investigate proposed evidence and narratives within it, as well as how to utilise multiple sources effectively. The third chapter focused on different approaches in teaching history, which resembles a crucial stage in acquiring history knowledge. A of these approaches include social history, which explains the causes and meaning of historical events, compresses the history using timescales and makes comparisons. A history teacher must be flexible in using various methodologies to convey historical knowledge without diluting its significance. We aim to equip potential future history teachers with the ability to use different methods to teach history in a fun, engaging and meaningful manner. Using various approaches is beneficial, as it incorporates different learning styles and theories. Therefore, this chapter is informative for teaching, learning and professional development. Including content such as histories for whom, in Chapter Four, is interesting, as it creates a question of identity and whether the elaboration of this piece of content is relevant and significant within a South African history education context. One's position, given shape by the context of history, and how that position came about,

examining economic history, political history, women's history, and disability history. This aligns with the concept of change and continuity in the second-order perspective. The importance of this concept lies in reflecting on and examining the evolution of history and the possibilities of the future. The second-to-last chapter of the contents explores the significance and reasons for learning about historical events. Exploring the importance entails investigating the evidence of the time, who and what were involved, and how relevant it is to be examined in the current context, considering the construction of views on how history shapes one's thoughts and feelings. However, in this chapter, the historical icons investigated and the events they were involved in are predominantly focused on, as the study of Asia and Middle East history is referred to as 'Orientalism' in the book. This kind of content may seem far-fetched for use in a South African history classroom; however, it can help contextualise the relevance and importance of South African history. The images and textual elaborations on historical events, such as wars, are creative, as they effectively represent what the text mentions. The speech bubbles highlighting the animated characters make it easier to comprehend the information. The idea of including religion as part of the history of why, could have been more inclusive of other faiths, rather than focusing solely on Christianity, especially when teaching this content to a classroom with diverse cultures and religions. Learners might get the impression that one religion's principles and evolution are more critical than those of another, which limits the development of multi-perspectivity and historical thinking skills and reasoning.

The last chapter focuses on everyday history, which views history not just as an academic subject, but as an inescapable, everyday part of our lives. The authors compare different narratives on a singular aspect, which shows the power of history in its relatability to everyday life. An example from the book is George Washington, the United States' first president, being described as "a great general who secured America's independence from Britain" or "the owner of over a hundred enslaved people". Every day, history reminds us that everything currently in existence has been developed or created from somewhere. One of the interesting examples to show the practicality of everyday history is the image of a child climbing a tree. The question concerning this text is whether children have always liked climbing trees. This is an activity that children are exposed to daily, allowing them to interact with and have fun learning about history. The graphics in this chapter resemble the South African landscape to some extent, which can be an effective way to scaffold learners into everyday history. Exposure to everyday history is also described as fun, as previously mentioned. One can have fun with history in several ways, both consciously and subconsciously, through gaming, documentaries, historical monument objects such

as statues and field trips. The authors finish the contents with an intriguing open-ended question: Is there an end to history? This prompts the reader to revisit the definition of history and what constitutes it.

Conclusion

The educational book 'History for Beginners' is quite informative and has excellent, practical knowledge that one can use for teaching and learning history, as well as for professional development. The colourful images and simplified explanations in the texts make it engaging for learners. The content is not overwhelming for learners or individuals without prior knowledge of history. Although the book explores major themes such as history education, including colonialism, slavery, the Holocaust, and the Industrial Revolution, the content appears significantly limited in terms of its inclusion of South African history. It, therefore, creates a gap in maintaining a balanced level of knowledge acquisition of both local and international history in a South African history classroom. The authors also refer to the history of religions; however, the content on religion is selective and does not include other common faiths that might be important for making the classroom inclusive and promoting the development of historical thinking skills and multi-perspectivity.