

ARRT Nonfiction Genre Study
History, War, Politics
April 7, 2022

What is history?

- Narratives: We seek to understand the past by determining and ordering 'facts'
- Study of people, actions, decisions, interactions and behaviors.
- History's primary purpose is to stand at the center of diverse, tolerant, intellectually rigorous debate about our existence

How is history told?

- Chronologically
- Through the stories of human relationships and lives
- Through the description of specific things and their use/presence in the historical record
- Authors also use a variety of writing styles and story lengths, from the most objectively factual to more provocative, from epic to brief, or from rigorously sourced to more anecdotal

What types of history?

- Historical Explanation
- History of War and Military history
- Historical Biography
- Pivot Points in History
- Social and Cultural History
- Disaster History
- Micro-History: authors examine very specific people, places, or things, and relate their stories as a new way in which to view the grand sweep of history

Why do we read history?

- To indulge curiosity
- Real life stories can be as exciting as fiction
- Bridges connections between events that have taken place
- Personal or emotional connection with the subject matter
- To be inspired, touched, moved, or entertained
- Makes history come to life.
- To learn something new, be challenged intellectually, or be exposed to new ideas.
- Transports you to another time or place.
- Vicarious experiences

Sure Bet Authors

Stephen Ambrose	Rick Atkinson	Thomas Cahill
Ron Chernow	Timothy Egan	Antonia Fraser
Martin Gilbert	Bill O'Reilly	Nathanial Philbrick
Stacy Schiff	Barbara W. Tuchman	Simon Winchester
Lawrence Wright	Howard Zinn	

Trends in History

- Micro-histories / “One Event” Books
- Anniversaries – (World Wars, Right to Vote etc.)
- Broad & diverse spectrum of perspectives, experiences, and cultures
- Regional stories that have been overlooked nationally.
- Authors that readers will follow – whatever time period their next book features
- Graphic novels

Resources for Titles

- LA Notable Book lists
- Andrew Carnegie Medals for Excellence in Fiction and Nonfiction
- Book Riot non-fiction lists
- National Book Awards
- National Book Critics Circle Award
- New York Times Notable Books (yearly)
- Pulitzer Prize
- The Ten Best History Books of (the year) – Smithsonian Magazine

Appeal of Political Books

- Seeking specific authors
- Keep up to date on political issues in the country & globally
- Reinforce own beliefs
- Learn a broad range of viewpoints, opinions, & perspectives
- Learn how to speak to (or argue with) people with opposing viewpoints

What did we read?

From Russia with Blood by Heidi Blake: true crime/history, quick pace

The Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine by Serhii Plokhy: academic, slow pace, detailed, engaging narration

Gulag Archipelago by Aleksandr I. Solzhenitsyn: dense, Russian history

Four Lost Cities by Annalee Newitz: life and death of four ancient cities (Pompei, Cahokia, Çatalhöyük, and Angkor), long term histories of the cities, what life was like, what we can learn from them, comparison to modern day environments, interviews with experts

-watchalike: *Life After People* (PBS)

How to Read a Dress: A Guide to Changing Fashion from the 16th to the 21st Century by Lydia Edwards: microhistory, accessible, short

-see also: *How to Read a Suit*

Bomb: The Race to Build-and Steal-the World's Most Dangerous Weapon by Steve Sheinkin: YA, creation of atomic bomb, interesting, accessible, easy to read

United States of Socialism by Dinesh D'Souza: read for "other side" perspective, far right, combative tone

Discrimination and Disparities by Thomas Sowell: conservative but less controversial, factual, fast read

Watergate: A New History by Garrett Graff: in-depth, definitive narrative, dramatic, compelling, scandals, 700 pages = commitment, good narration

-for readers new to Watergate, start with Woodward's *All the President's Men*

The Woman They Could Not Silence by Kate Moore: women's social history, little known history, local appeal-IL, easy to read

Ancestor Trouble by Maud Newton: memoir of researching family history through genealogy and DNA, genetics, intergenerational trauma, gripping

-see also *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot

Guns of August by Barbara Tuchman: WWI history, well-researched, 600+ pages = commitment, Pulitzer Prize winner, get to know "characters"

Travels with George by Nathaniel Philbrick: memoir of travels around New England following G. Washington's travels

-see also *Assassination Vacation* by Sarah Vowell

The Nineties by Chuck Klosterman: microhistory, records huge cultural shifts, some dry parts

The Doctors Blackwell: How Two Pioneering Sisters Brought Medicine to Women and Women to Medicine by Janice P. Nimura: history of women in medicine, social history, science history, flawed humans, not very likable "characters, fascinating, good narration

-see also *Girls of Atomic City* by Denise Kiernan

The Great Influenza by John M. Barry: history and politics, well-known title

Peril by Bob Woodward and Robert Costa: nonpartisan, forthcoming subject, interesting

1776 by David McCullough