

The history canon



Following the success of our [Life Canon](#) project, which looked at the 10 essential books for flourishing in the modern world, we will be producing a series of Canon lists examining the best books in specific topic areas - from history to philosophy. We've already published the [well-being canon](#), and presented below is the history canon - 10 essential books to help you gain perspective on history.

As before, the list is not meant to be a presentation of the great cultural works of our time, but a set of accessible and interesting books that provide perspective, ideas and inspiration.

If you can't see the list, login or sign up now - it's free and it takes less than a minute to do it!

1. Herodotus - [The Histories \(Oxford World's Classics\)](#)

Herodotus was called the 'father of history' by Cicero. This book charts the historical background to the Persian Wars, and along the way considers the cultures and people involved in them.

2. Edward Gibbon - [The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire \(Wordsworth Classics of World Literature\)](#)

Regarded as a masterpiece of English historical writing, this book takes the reader through the history of Europe from the second century AD to the fall of Constantinople in 1453.

3. Sir Stephen Runciman - [A History of the Crusades: Volume 1 - The First Crusade and the Foundation of the Kingdom of Jerusalem \(Penguin History\): The First Crusade and the Foundation of the Kingdom of Jerusalem v. 1](#)

The story of the Crusades and the road towards them from the early history of Europe and the Middle East and the founding of Islam.

4. Winston S Churchill - [A History of the English-Speaking Peoples, Volume 1: The Birth of Britain](#)

In the years leading up to the Second World War, Churchill wrote as one of his means of earning a living. This is an interesting exploration of the events that made this nation.

5. Barbara Tuchman - [A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century](#)

Barbara Tuchman explores the world of fourteenth century France where we witness the contradictions, the decline and ultimately the self-destruction of the age of chivalry.

6. JM Roberts - [The New Penguin History of the World](#)

A wide-ranging and very readable overview of world history. If you've read [What on Earth Happened?... in Brief: The Planet, Life and People from the Big Bang to the Present Day](#) and now want a more detailed overview of history, this is an ideal next step.

7. Simon Schama - **Citizens: A Chronicle of The French Revolution**

A popular history of the French Revolution and the events that led up to it.

8. Eric Hobsbawm - **Age of Extremes : The Short Twentieth Century 1914-1991**

A fascinating and wide-ranging history of the twentieth century, and a useful starting point for a history of this period.

9. Edgar Snow - **Red Star Over China**

An important account of the revolutionary movement in China, which highlights some of the complexities and diversities of Chinese society and culture.

10. Anthony Beevor - **Stalingrad**

Operation Barbarossa - an invasion of Russia that was supposed to take the German army to the gates of Moscow - was one of the key mistakes Hitler made in the Second World War. Antony Beevor's thoughtfully researched compendium recalls this epic struggle for Stalingrad.