



The World in the Time of Leonardo da Vinci; The World in the Time of Marie Antoinette

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

4

These are handsome books for secondary students: fascinating, well written (for the most part), and produced with an excellent eye for organisation and design. More than any other world history for children that I have seen, they succeed in giving an overall view of developments across the world at a particular time.

Each book is introduced by a short chapter on a significant figure in the history of western civilisation; although the significance of a great artist and scientist like da Vinci is different from that of Marie Antoinette, the representative, and victim, of a failing political order. The choice of figures illustrates the foci of the series; which uses thematic chapters, like Famous Rulers and Leaders, Discovery and Invention, and The Creative World, to bring together and compare developments across different geographical areas and cultures.

The consistent arrangement of the volumes in the series, whose six books run from Tutankhamun to Abraham Lincoln, allows the reader to trace the history of a country like Japan over a number of centuries and at the same time consider it in the context of other societies.

Each volume is relatively thin: and there is more than a hint of a prolific author recycling material. One book can have space for no more than an introduction to any particular area or people. And it is still Euro-centred history. But, all that said, the non-European world is so knowledgeably and appreciatively drawn, particularly in the sumptuous use of indigenous arts and artefacts, that a world of many cultures and viewpoints, each with distinct preoccupations and achievements but in continuous interaction, clearly emerges. This is an excellent corrective to the parochialism of much National Curriculum history.

My main disappointment with the books is that they have no bibliography. When so many subjects are merely touched on and, hopefully, readers are left wanting to know more, they should have help and encouragement.

Running Order:

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