



Books That Changed The World

James Andrew Taylor

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In "Books that Changed the World" Andrew Taylor sets himself the challenging task of choosing and profiling the fifty most important and influential books in the history of the world. He has selected books from every field of human creativity and intellectual endeavour - from poetry to politics, from fiction to philosophy, from theology to anthropology, and from economics to physics - to create a rounded and satisfying picture of how 50 towering achievements of the human intellect have built our societies, shaped our values, enhanced our understanding of the nature of the world, enabled technological advancements, and reflected our concerns and dilemmas, strengths and failings. In a series of engaging and lively essays, Andrew Taylor sets each work and its author firmly in historical context, summarizes the content of the work in question, and explores its wider influence and legacy. A fascinating and richly informative read, and a clarion call to delve deeper into the library of great books, "Books that Changed the World" is a thought-provoking and stimulating read, and the likely cause of many an impassioned debate.

Books That Changed The World Details

Date :

ISBN : 9781847246028

Author : James Andrew Taylor

Format :

Genre : Nonfiction, History, Writing, Books About Books, Reference

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From Reader Review Books That Changed The World for online ebook

Damaskcat says

I can imagine that any list of the books which changed the world is going to produce different reactions in every reader. I found this book an interesting read as it does more than just give information about the book itself but also attempts to explain how and why each book produced major changes.

Here are the books you might expect to find in any list like this: Einstein on relativity and Darwin on the origin of the species; the Bible and the Koran; Freud on the interpretation of dreams and Primo Levi on surviving concentration camps; De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and James Joyce's *'Ulysses'* - not to speak of Austen's *'Pride and Prejudice'* and Dickens' *'A Christmas Carol'*.

With many of the fifty books I found myself nodding in agreement but with others I was questioning why this book and this author instead of others? Why Primo Levi and not Viktor Frankl? Why Freud and not Jung? Surely it was the telephone itself which had the effect on communications and not the first telephone directory itself?

This is a thought provoking read and perhaps one for book clubs to consider as I could imagine it might well produce a lot of discussion on which books should have been excluded from or included in the definitive list of the fifty books with the most influence on the world. I received a free copy of this book for review purposes.

Stephen King says

Fascinating book. How many had I read? About 12-15 of them. How many had I heard of? 48, I think. But I learnt something new about all of them, and the choices themselves were very revealing. I'm sure other people (and certainly other nationalities) would query the choices. No Brecht? And in terms of books that changed the world (although not, of course, for the better) where is *Mein Kampf*? Sure to provoke plenty of discussion, I really enjoyed this.

Eva says

Impressive list with which I would mostly agree. But... are the spoilers necessary?

C B says

Short write-ups about 50 major books, most of which I'm now old enough to know I will never read. The entries are not especially engaging, certainly nothing got pushed up my must-read list based on what is written here. An OK time-killer when you don't have time to get immersed in a more sustained book.

Becky says

Read this for a university project about the power of the written word and the impact it's had on society, economy, politics, religion etc., and I've been looking into lots of different texts from different eras to see the ways they have altered our world and whether the world would be the same without print (novels, posters, leaflets etc). This was a really helpful addition to my research and I have dog-eared it, sticky tabbed it and annotated it and I'm looking forward to referring back to it to draw the information from it. This is a great read regardless of whether you're reading it for pleasure or for research - I enjoyed reading this and I learned a lot from it. I've definitely added a good chunk of knowledge to my repertoire thanks to this!

Mandy says

Originally published on Unravellations.

I'm not sure what made me pick up this book, so different as it is from my usual reading. However, it wasn't a bad choice at all. *Books That Changed The World* is basically a comprehensive list of books that have asserted a great influence on thought and literature, and Andrew Taylor also provides concise and relevant background information regarding the time period and culture that the book was written and published in. He does not center his list around books of literary importance, also including those of scientific, philosophical and political importance.

I like that he also disclaimed in his introduction that this list was, of course, subjective and that it was *his* own take of what were the most influential books in history. If this disclaimer had been missing, I would have things to say about the subjectivity and Eurocentric view of history the book posits. In any case, he also provides evidence of the influence that each book enjoys and how it has altered humans' way of thinking over time.

Confession: I did skip past certain books that I wasn't interested in, particularly the ones on economics but also some others. Nevertheless, I gleaned plenty of interesting facts and cleared up some of my own misconceptions about certain books (especially the Greco-Roman classics which I am very unfamiliar with) along the way. For example, I never knew that the *Kama Sutra* was actually an unillustrated volume of text, and much like the rest of the world, I had thought it only to be some kind of kinky sex manual. I was enlightened on this point. I did not know also that before William Harvey's groundbreaking work on hemology, men thought that an infinite supply of blood was made from the liver. I also learned that William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge paved the way for poetry as it is written today, an intimate way of looking at human experience, and that before *Lyrical Ballads* was published, poetry were usually story-like epics dealing with philosophy, religion or history, such as in *Iliad* or *Paradise Lost*.

The only complaint that I have, I guess, isn't really much of a complaint - I was spoiled for *Madame Bovary* before I even read it! :(If there are any books on the list that you have yet to read and want to remain un-spoilt, I would recommend that you skip its relevant chapter in this book. Taylor provides a short synopsis of each book's plot, which may reveal important plot points.

Contents:

1. Homer - *Iliad* (c. 8th century)
2. Herodotus - *The Histories* (c. 5th century BC)
3. Confucius - *The Analects* (5th century BC)
4. Plato - *The Republic* (4th century BC)
5. The Bible (2nd century BC - 2nd century AD)
6. Horace - *Odes* (23 - 13 BC)
7. Ptolemy - *Geographia* (c. AD 100 - 170)
8. Mallanaga Vatsyayana - *Kama Sutra* (2nd or 3rd century AD)
9. The Qu'ran (7th century)
10. Avicenna - *Canon of Medicine* (1025)
11. Geoffrey Chaucer - *The Canterbury Tales* (1380s-90s)
12. Niccolo Machiavelli - *The Prince* (1532)
13. Gerard Mercator - *Atlas, or, Cosmographic Meditations* (1585-95)
14. Miguel de Cervantes - *Don Quixote* (1605-15)
15. William Shakespeare - *First Folio* (1623)
16. William Harvey - *An Anatomical Study of the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals* (1628)
17. Galileo Galilei - *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* (1632)
18. Isaac Newton - *Principia mathematica* (1687)
19. Samuel Johnson - *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755)
20. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe - *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774)
21. Adam Smith - *The Wealth of Nations* (1776)
22. Thomas Paine - *Common Sense* (1776)
23. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge - *Lyrical Ballads* (1798)
24. Jane Austen - *Pride and Prejudice* (1813)
25. Charles Dickens - *A Christmas Carol* (1843)
26. Karl Marx - *The Communist Manifesto* (1848)
27. Herman Melville - *Moby-Dick* (1851)
28. Harriet Beecher Stowe - *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852)
29. Gustave Flaubert - *Madame Bovary* (1857)
30. Charles Darwin - *On the Origin of Species* (1859)
31. John Stuart Mill - *On Liberty* (1859)
32. Leo Tolstoy - *War and Peace* (1869)
33. New Haven District Telephone Company - The Telephone Directory (1878)
34. Sir Richard Burton (translator) - *The Thousand and One Nights* (1885)
35. Arthur Conan Doyle - *A Study in Scarlet* (1888)
36. Sigmund Freud - *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899)
37. The Protocols of the Elders of Zion (1905)
38. Wilfred Owen - *Poems* (1920)
39. Albert Einstein - *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory* (1920)
40. James Joyce - *Ulysses* (1922)
41. D. H. Lawrence - *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928)
42. John Maynard Keynes - *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936)
43. Primo Levi - *If This is a Man* (1947)
44. George Orwell - *Nineteen Eighty-four* (1949)
45. Simone de Beauvoir - *The Second Sex* (1949)
46. J. D. Salinger - *The Catcher In The Rye* (1951)
47. Chinua Achebe - *Things Fall Apart* (1958)
48. Rachel Carson - *Silent Spring* (1962)
49. Mao Zedong - *Quotations from Chairman Mao* (1964)

51. J. K. Rowling - *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997)

One thing that I realised from reading this book, however, is that there is usually great resistance and controversy whenever a new revelation is made that contradicts everything that people at that time thought to be true, as in the case of medical experts denouncing William Harvey for his discovery of the way blood is circulated, or the Catholic Church's anger and rejection of Galileo's heliocentric theories on astronomy, or even the ban on D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, the overturning of which paving the way for the modern attitude to sexual openness.

It makes me question the things that we consider "controversial" and defying reason in our time and age. Would they one day also become known as works of genius or progressive thought, and the rest of us derided by posterity for our backward thinking?

Annukka says

Pikakelauksella läpi kirjallisuuden historian merkkiteoksia. Yhdestä kirjasta kiinnostuin niin paljon, että taidan sen lainata kirjastosta. Ja yhden kirjan oli itse lukenut kokonaan ja toisesta pätkiä.

Tämä kirja oli ensimmäinen laatuan minulla: kirja, jossa on listattu 50 maailman x asiaa. En täysin tyrmää muotoa tämän perusteella, mutta en ihastunut ikiajoiksiaan tähän kirjatyyppeihin.

Val Penny says

Andrew Taylor is a British author who was born in Stevenage, England on 14 October 1951. He is best known for his crime novels, which include the Lydmouth series, the Roth Trilogy and historical novels such as the best-selling *The American Boy* and *The Anatomy of Ghosts*. Taylor has been nominated for several prizes and had won many more including the Cartier Diamond Dagger, CWA New Blood Dagger, the Martin Beck Award and CWA Ellis Peters Historical Dagger Award. So when a writer of this calibre produces *Books That Changed The World*, I take notice of his opinion. It is particularly useful now that I have taken over leading the local book group from my friend, the respected author, Evelyn Hood. What a set of shoes to fill!

So, in *Books that Changed the World* Andrew Taylor sets himself the task of choosing and profiling the fifty most important and influential books in the history of the world. He has selected books from every field of human creativity and intellectual endeavour and covers genres from poetry to politics, fiction to philosophy, theology to anthropology, and economics to physics. In doing so the author has created a rounded and satisfying picture of how fifty towering achievements of the human intellect that have been important to building societies, shaping values, enhancing understanding of the world, enabling technological advancements, and reflecting concerns and dilemmas, strengths and failings.

Andrew Taylor sets each work and its author firmly in historical context, summarizes the content of the work in a series of engaging and lively essays. He also questions, and explores the works wider influence and legacy. *Books that Changed the World* is a fascinating and informative read.

None of the inclusions will really surprise the reader. Of course, they include *The Bible* and *The Qur'an*, I

was not surprised to see Quotations from Chairman Mao included too. The inclusion of the Telephone Directory amused me as I do not consider it a book, as such I suppose Samuel Johnson's Dictionary of the English Language also falls into this observation. However, their significance cannot be denied. I agreed with the inclusions of Charles Darwin's Of The Origin of Species and The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money by John Maynard Keynes. There is also no dispute about the First Folio of William Shakespeare's plays nor the Poems of Wilfred Owen, War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy or The Catcher in the Rye by J.D. Salinger. However, I was surprised to see reference to J K Rowling's Harry Potter, but not the Tolkien's The Hobbit and Silent Spring by Rachel Carson but not Kahlil Gibran's The Prophet.

However, I am really not complaining. It was wonderful to have the opportunity to delve deeper into the library of great books, Books that Changed the World is a thought-provoking and stimulating read, and the likely cause of many an impassioned debate in book clubs and beyond. I highly recommend it.

Deborah Pickstone says

An interesting collection and thoughtful inclusions (and, one has to assume, exclusions) to this list of 50 influential books. Naturally, the MOST influential books in the world's history can never be quantified, only qualitatively proposed. However, I think the collator's justifications for his list were pretty sound. I was personally delighted to see The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen included as both influential in the more clear-eyed view of war that underpinned the pacifist movement and as an outstandingly talented poet. As he died at 20 and left only one slim volume of poetry what could he have written had he lived? For me, that triste thought applies to a number of exceptionally talented artists who died young in that war or in the influenza epidemic that followed - Egon Schiele being another.

But I digress.....at which I am so skilled in doing! Worth a read. If you think there are books that have been missed out - or SHOULD have been omitted, I'd be very interested to discuss it! You can find his list here <http://www.greaterbooks.com/taylor.html>

Mandy says

A wonderful book for any bibliophile! Andrew Taylor tells the always fascinating stories of the 50 books he considers have been the most influential in our history, from the beginning of written literature to the present. From poetry to philosophy, physics to politics – not ignoring the first Phone Book, which is a volume I would never have thought of as being influential, but, apparently is! – he explores how books have shaped our world. Of course, it's a subjective selection – how could it be anything else? But that's the joy of books like this, or indeed of any list of books. Each reader will agree or disagree or bridle or applaud – but above all think and consider and learn. I did all those things, and this is a book that I will no doubt dip into on many future occasions.

Al Bità says

As Taylor points out in his introduction, any list of "significant" books which might be considered to have influenced the development of the World, would invariably give rise to argumentation and debate. Taylor admits that different people would insist on other inclusions, but he decides what *he* believes to be the 50

most influential books. And to be fair, he does a reasonable job of at least making the reader aware of wider interests than just literature as such.

Taylor manages to cover quite a range in his choice of books: literature, yes, but also science, medicine, politics, propaganda, biology, social sciences, etc. The title, author and significance of the particular work are provided in easy to read potted summaries, occasionally including excerpts from the works cited. Obviously, in covering 50 works in little over 300 pages, one should not assume that one is going to get any detailed analysis; but Taylor does give his reasons for his choices, and often enough includes cross-references which an attentive reader will appreciate (and might also explain why certain works were included).

One should also be aware that, apart from a few references to other cultures, most of the entries relate to Western writings, and the influence, especially in the last few centuries, when such works were eventually translated into English. The entries, however, are provided in chronological order, and Taylor is not so foolish as to intimate that they influenced only the West. The value to Western readers is that the list provides the interested person to follow up any particular subject with comparative ease, if so desired.

In general, this is an eclectic and easily accessible introduction to a number of important texts which, for better or for worse, have played significant roles in the thinking and actions of much of humanity throughout our history.

Brian says

And one that didn't. Short overview of the contents of each, with an even shorter analysis of how each changed the world. The Bible? OK. Catcher in the Rye? Um...

Jennifer says

The author offered an interesting selection of books. While some of these books did not seem to effect society in the same sense he did. Also, I felt his jump from 1964 to 1997 (and other areas) was to great loss to his selection. Many books that had came to mind were not included while socially popular books were (even if they brought very little insight or information to society).

Suad Shamma says

This is a really interesting book, and pulls together a very solid collection of influential reads throughout history. Some I agreed with, and others not so much. I was a bit confounded at why some books were included while others weren't, and how some books made the list in place of others.

I loved the Greek and Roman history, although at one point it felt a bit repetitive - Homer, Herodotus, Plato, Horace etc. I wasn't too fond that instead of going by his actual name Ibn Sina he went with Avicenna. Some books I hadn't really heard of and I was a bit confused as to why he included them such as the Sorrows of Young Werther and Lyrical Ballads, and I definitely wasn't a fan of all the economy books, but all in all I appreciated the effort.

I was a little surprised he included Harry Potter on there and not Lord of the Rings. I didn't think he needed to put in the Atlas and Geographia, but I did like the Dictionary and the Telephone Directory being on there because you wouldn't expect them to be.

An interesting read to say the least.

Victoria says

I took this out of the library more because I wanted to see what the 50 book are rather than to read it from cover to cover. I doubt I will read it all the way through but I have dipped in and out of it, reading bits that catch my eye.

Of course, the 50 most influential books are going to be subjective. I was intrigued by this selection and on the most part, agreed with it. I think the one people will find most surprising is the Telephone Directory. I think this was an inspired choice - one that I would not have thought of in a million years and yet makes so much sense. I had never really thought about how I take the directory for advantage before.

Most of the other choices were obvious - The Bible, the Qu'ran, Dictionary, Communist Manifesto, Uncle Tom's Cabin, The Interpretation of Dreams and so on.

One I would possibly disagree with is Harry Potter - I know it sold a ridiculous amount but whether it has changed the world...hmmm...I'm not so sure. It is difficult to have such a modern one in such a book - only time will tell.
