

Summer reading guide for World History

This Fleeting World: A Short History of Humanity

By David Christian

You are responsible for acquiring this book. It can be found in PDF format for free on the web, or you can purchase your own hard copy.

Reading Guide

This Fleeting World is your launch pad for a year of historical exploration; these questions and suggestions will help to guide you. Feel free to meander through the book at your leisure, lingering on the “thought experiments” or following a tangent of an idea or link that interests you within this guide. The first thing you’ll notice about *This Fleeting World* is that it moves fast! But don’t worry; it’s not meant to tell you everything you need to know about human history. Rather, this book provides broad brushstrokes, noting the most significant “threshold moments” that changed the way we have lived on Earth.

- There are essentially 2 **parts** to this summer assignment:
 1. Comprehension questions for each of the 4 sections of the book.
 2. Vocabulary for each of the 4 sections.

Prequel: Before the Beginning

Comprehension Questions:

1. How did planets form, and what was Earth like in its first 500 million years of existence?
2. Christian describes life as “a new form of complexity.” How did oxygen and photosynthesis cause life to begin on Earth?
3. Eventually, multi-celled organisms emerged from water, to land, and eventually (about 7 million years ago) into human ancestors. What were some stages in the development to our species, *homo sapiens*?

Terminology/Vocabulary. Provide a brief explanation of the words below. Use Google, Wikipedia etc. if necessary

Cosmology	The Big Bang	Quarks	Fusion
Interstellar space	DNA	Natural selection	Photosynthesis
Homo sapiens	“Lucy”		

Beginnings: The Era of Foragers (250,000-8,000 BCE)

Comprehension Questions

4. What are some leading hypotheses (informed theories) about how our species emerged? How are humans different?
5. What was the relationship among human foragers and the environment/nature, and how was it different from our relationships to other humans today and to our environment?

Terminology/Vocabulary. Provide a brief explanation of the words below. Use Google, Wikipedia etc. if necessary

Paleolithic	Archeology	Animism	Creation myth
Indigenous	Kinship	Migration	Extinction

Acceleration: The Agrarian Era (8,000 BCE—1750 CE)

Comprehension Questions:

6. Why can the Agrarian Era be considered a time of acceleration (speeding up)?
7. What changes to human life were caused by settled agricultural development?
8. Where did cities first emerge, and what was earliest urban life like?
9. What were some of the most influential faith systems that developed during this time?

Terminology/Vocabulary. Provide a brief explanation of the words below. Use Google, Wikipedia etc. if necessary

Agriculture Overpopulation Global climate change
Irrigation Epidemics Prehistory Imperial state
Faith system

Our World: The Modern Era (1750-present)

Comprehension Questions:

10. What are the major features and trends of the Modern Era?
11. What were the main causes of humanity's revolution from agrarian societies to modernity?
12. Why is the 20th century considered a century of crisis?

Terminology/Vocabulary. Provide a brief explanation of the words below. Use Google, Wikipedia etc. if necessary

Democratic government Nationalism Commercial society
The Enlightenment Industrialization Consumerism
Capitalism Communism

Periodization in World History

Comprehension Questions:

13. What is periodization?
14. What are some of the THEORETICAL, ORGANIZATIONAL, EHTICAL, and TECHNICAL problems of periodization in World History?
15. Why are the periodization labels ANCIENT, MEDIEVAL, and MODERN problematic?