Very Short Introductions online

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Freemasonry: A Very Short Introduction
Andreas Önnerfors

Freemasonry is one of the world’s oldest, most widespread voluntary organizations. With a strong sense of liberation, moral enlightenment, cosmopolitan openness, and forward-looking philanthropy, freemasonry has attracted some of the sharpest minds in history and created a strong platform for nascent civil societies worldwide. With the secrecy of internally communicated knowledge, its clandestine character, the enactment of rituals, and elaborate use of symbols, freemasonry has also opened up feelings of distrust, along with allegations of secretiveness and conspiracy. Freemasonry: A Very Short Introduction introduces the organization, rituals, and symbols of freemasonry, navigating through the prevalent fictions and conspiracy theories. It also sheds light on the participation of women in freemasonry.

Garden History: A Very Short Introduction
Gordon Campbell

Gardens take many forms and have a variety of functions. They can serve as spaces of peace and tranquillity, a way to cultivate wildlife, or as places to develop agricultural resources. Globally, gardens have inspired, comforted, and sustained people, and many iconic gardens have inspired great artists, poets, musicians, and writers. Garden History: A Very Short Introduction embraces gardens in all their splendour, from parks and vegetable gardens to ornamental gardens, and takes the reader on a globe-trotting historical journey through iconic and cultural signposts of gardens from different regions and traditions. It concludes by looking to the future of the garden in terms of global warming and human innovation.

The Harlem Renaissance: A Very Short Introduction
Cheryl A. Wall
The Harlem Renaissance was a cultural awakening among African Americans between the two world wars. It was the cultural phase of the “New Negro” movement, a social and political phenomenon that promoted a proud racial identity, economic independence, and progressive politics. The Harlem Renaissance: A Very Short Introduction identifies the issues and strategies that engaged writers, musicians, and visual artists alike. It introduces key figures such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay, and Jean Toomer, along with such signature texts as Home to Harlem and Their Eyes Were Watching God; photographer James Van Der Zee and painters Archibald Motley and Laura Wheeler are also mentioned.

The History of Childhood: A Very Short Introduction
James Marten

The History of Childhood: A Very Short Introduction describes the differing experiences of childhood across time and place, focusing on conflict, change, war, reform, and the issues and conditions that have shaped childhood throughout history. Childhood is a constantly shifting concept; the age at which a child becomes a youth and a youth becomes an adult has varied by class, religion, ethnicity, place, and economic need. From the rules of Confucian childrearing in twelfth-century China to the struggles of children living as slaves in the Americas or as cotton mill workers in Industrial Age Britain, this VSI shows that the lives of children reveal important and sometimes uncomfortable truths about civilization.

Magic: A Very Short Introduction
Owen Davies

Magic: A Very Short Introduction describes the many manifestations of magic — the supernatural, superstition, simple illusions, religious miracles, and fantasies of the imagination. It explores the ways in which magic, as an idea and a practice, has been understood and employed over the millennia. The controversy, conflict, and debate magic has caused is highlighted and the relationship between magic and science is examined. This VSI concludes that magic is perhaps an inherent aspect of being human, that we all have engaged at some point in ‘magical thinking’, and that magic continues to pervade the popular imagination — and will do for the foreseeable future.
Sport is big business, international in nature, and the focus of much media and cultural attention. Sport: A Very Short Introduction charts the history of sport, from its traditional origins in folk football and cock fighting to its position as a global phenomenon today. Looking at a variety of sports from team games such as rugby, cricket, and football to games for individuals such as golf, tennis, and skiing, it considers how these first emerged and captivated the interest of ordinary people, and how sport has been transformed within our daily lives. This VSI also explores the relationship between sport and class, gender, commerce, identity, and ethics.