Throughout history, individuals have recorded their own lives and experiences. These personal writings provide an understanding of the ways in which lives have been lived, and the most fundamental accounts of what it means to be a self in the world. Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction defines what is meant by ‘autobiography’, and considers its relationship with similar literary forms such as memoirs, journals, letters, and diaries. Analysing the core themes in autobiographical writing, including confession, conversion, testimony, romanticism, and the journeying self, this VSI discusses the autobiographical consciousness (and the roles played by time, memory, and identity), and considers the relationship between psychoanalysis and autobiography. It also explores the themes of self-portraiture, photography, and performance.

Biography: A Very Short Introduction

Hermione Lee

Biography: A Very Short Introduction looks at the origins and development of biographical writing. Why do certain people and historical events arouse so much interest? How can biographies be compared with history and works of fiction? Does a biography need to be true? Is it acceptable to omit or conceal things? Does the biographer need to personally know the subject? Must a biographer be subjective? This VSI considers the cultural and historical background of different types of biographies, looking at the factors that affect biographers and whether there are different strategies, ethics, and principles required for writing about one person compared to another.

Voltaire: A Very Short Introduction

Nicholas Cronk
Voltaire (1694–1778), best remembered as the author of Candide, is one of the central actors of the European Enlightenment. Voltaire: A Very Short Introduction explores Voltaire’s remarkable career, his most important works, and demonstrates how his thinking is pivotal to our notion and understanding of the Enlightenment. It examines the nature of Voltaire’s literary celebrity, demonstrating the extent to which his work was reactive and practical, and therefore made sense within the broader context of the debates to which he responded. It concludes by looking not only at Voltaire’s impact in literature and philosophy, but also at his influence on French political values and modern French politics.