

The question 'why study history' is one that all students of the subject are asked at some time, and there is certainly more than one answer. History has a **fundamental relevance to our modern society** and it is important for historians to encourage the public to actively explore the past. It **provides key skills** that can be used in many fields outside that of history and it creates a cultural identity in both nations and in individuals.

We can learn direct lessons from history, events do repeat themselves and therefore there are rules that can be drawn from the past to tell us how to do things better. History has an **undeniable relevance to the modern world**. Pre-twentieth century history is all too often dismissed as irrelevant to today's society when in fact it has often had a profound influence. Without studying the past we could not even begin to understand, for example, where the roots of the conflict in Ireland lie or how the Church of England came to be formed. As E.H.Carr said, historians must, "**master and understand the past as the key to understanding the present**". The study of history also helps show **what is important to people** themselves. Evans says that, "**virtually everything of importance to contemporary humanity now has a written history**", this is significant as it enables us to understand **what has interested and inspired certain people**.

The **use of television and fiction** has done much to cause the popularisation of history and whilst it is of course important that the public have an understanding of the past, there is a danger of oversimplification and the emergence of pseudo-historians. Jordanova says that the result of this is, " a desire for simple answers and for clear moral polarities". It is the job of the historian to study history and to work alongside the public to encourage a more **critical approach to the subject**.

There is a **very human need to understand one's roots and origins** and this is achieved through the study of history. It supplies what Jordanova calls a "**collective identity**", countries, organisations and classes have a sense of pride at their own tradition. America, for example, celebrates its Independence Day, it is something that every native identifies with because it is part of his or her history. Many people trace their family trees back for centuries or research the lives of their ancestors, and this is all done to develop a sense of their own identity. The study of history can therefore **unite an entire nation** or provide a **feeling of belonging** in one individual.

The study of history helps **develop key skills** that can be used in a variety of fields. The historian has the, "ability to **embrace complexities while making sense of them**, and to think flexibly about diverse phenomena at distinct analytical levels"(Jordanova), these are skills which are certainly transferable to any working environment. We must also not be too pompous to admit that there are few other subjects that so engage the imagination in the way that history does. G.M.Trevelyan wrote that the historian is compelled to study because of, "**his own curiosity to know what really happened long ago in that land of mystery which we call the past**". However, it would be wrong to suggest that the study of history develops complete **objectivity**. It is of course something that the historian strives to achieve. *(Some historians for all their protestations of objectivity, are very much influenced by their strong beliefs however much they try to avoid modern day assumptions)*. So although the historian may aim for objectivity, it is not a skill the study of history can be said to develop with the same success as it can the **critical and analytical approach**.

Ultimately, people study history because **they love the subject**. While historians may disagree over content they generally share a passion for the past. **History's relevance to modern society is profound** both for explaining why things are as they are and for encouraging cultural identity. Those who study history play a key role in portraying 'proper' history to the public and the skills that they develop can easily be put to use in everyday life itself.