WHY HISTORY MATTERS

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Why study History? Will people care about what happened long ago? History is the study of the past. What does it matter to study history for people living in the present? The people who are living in the present, plan for their future in order to have a better life. Then why think about things that have happened and moments that have passed. Any subject of study needs justification: its advocates must explain why it is worth attention. Every branch of knowledge has a purpose. If a particular branch of knowledge does not serve any purpose, it is of little use. History too serves some purpose and the importance of the subject depends upon the purpose it serves. It is essential for people to have a working knowledge of what happened in the past. All human beings are practicing historians. As we go through life, our life story is presented to others. One of the greatest benefits of studying history is that it allows us a chance to learn where we came from. It helps us discover the amazing things about the past. There is a joy in the realization of the complexity of the past. Historical joy lies in the solving of mysteries. The greater joy is to detect the most logical explanation of why things turned out the way they did. Thus, when historians ask questions like: How and why did cities emerge? How did different political systems evolve? How did people create the sort of economic system needed to sustain a complex civilization? How did a society's religious beliefs arise and evolve and influence daily life? How and why did civilizations like the Greeks produce brilliant cultures? Why do empires and civilizations decline? And why do peoples and nations go to war? They are asking perennial questions, questions applicable not just to a specific society but to all of humanity in any given place or at any given time. The people of the past are those who came before us, and it is interesting to see how some of the thoughts, attitudes, and practices of today can differ so drastically from those throughout history. There are many events that are decisive in our life history. We live our lives and we tell our stories to others. This is as natural as breathing. The meaning of ‘History’ refers to
'the past'; or 'the study of the past'. The geographers and geologists study about the past and the present of the globe; the biologists and zoologists study about the biological past and the present; the astrophysicists study about the astronomical past and the present. Sometimes people say that humans do not learn from the past. I do not agree to that. Human beings definitely learn from the past – and that is why it is studied. People certainly do not learn from the future. And the present is so fleeting that everything that is learned in the present has already passed into the past by the time it is consolidated. What has happened a minute ago becomes History. History is a link between the past and the present because people act now, in the present, based on lessons learned in the past, from history. For example humans discovered that fire was warm and felt good about it. But they also learned that fire could hurt them and could destroy objects. The decisions individuals and groups make in the present reflect knowledge gained through history. If we do not have a systematic knowledge of History, then we will draw pictures of the past from cultural traditions, from collective memories, from myths, rumours, songs, sagas, from political and religious teachings and customs, from families, friends, and from every form of human communication. People do learn, in other words, from a combination of resources that are assimilated both consciously and unconsciously. But what is learned may be patchy or confused; or it may be simplified and biased. A good educational system should help people to study History more formally, more systematically, more accurately and more critically. By that means, people will have access to a great human resource, compiled over many generations, which is the collective set of studies of the past, and the human story within that. History helps us understand change and how the society we live in came to be. We need to learn our past in order to define ourselves today. Communities speak languages that are inherited from the past. They live in societies with complex cultures, traditions and religions that have not been created on the spur of the moment. People use technologies that they have not themselves invented. So there is a link between the past and the present. Understanding the link between the past and the present is absolutely necessary for a good understanding of the condition of being human. It helps us to understand who we are and what our place in the world is. The past causes the present, and so the future. That, in a nutshell, is why History matters. It is not only useful, but it is essential.

Summary: Because humans are rooted in time, people do by one means or another pick up ideas about the past and its link with the present, even if these ideas are sketchy or
uninformed or outright mythological. But it is best to gain access to the ideas and evidence of History as an integral part of normal education.

Given that all people are living historians, how can we all best learn about the long-unfolding human story in which all participate? History is a study of human behaviour both in the past and in the present and future. There is a great deal of connection and relevance between what exists in the past and what lies in the future. The belief is that there is an inextricable link between the both. By understanding the past one can better understand the present and the future. The career of the historian is a demanding one, requiring strong commitment, intellectual curiosity, self-discipline, and perseverance. It can also offer priceless rewards: professional autonomy, intellectual achievement, social status, and meaningful work.