Emma Welch, "Entry on: Horrible Histories (Series) by Dominic Brigstocke, Steve Connelly, William Terence Deary, Chloë Thomas", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Hanna Paulouskaya. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1513. Entry version as of November 08, 2026.

Dominic Brigstocke , Steve Connelly , William Terence Deary , Chloë Thomas

Horrible Histories (Series)

United Kingdom (2009)

TAGS: Achilles Aeschylus Aesop Aesop's Fables Alexander the Great Antoninus Pius Aphrodite Archimedes Ares Aristotle Artemis Asclepius Athena Athens Avaricum Caesar Caesarion Caligula Cato the Elder Cerberus Claudius (Emperor) Cleopatra VII Constantine Cronus / Kronos Delphic Oracle Diana Diogenes Egypt Gallic Wars Gladiators Graeco-Persian Wars Greek History Hadrian Hannibal Hector Helen Hippocrates Janus Jupiter Marathon Mark Antony Mars Menelaus Mercury Minerva Mithras Neptune Nero Octavian Olympic Games Ouranos / Uranus Paris (Trojan Prince) Plato Pliny the Elder Pluto / Plouton Praetorian Guard Punic Wars Pyrrhus of Epirus Pythagoras Roman Baths Roman History Saturn Scipio Africanus Socrates Sparta Syracuse Theagenes of Thasos Thebes Tiberius Trojan Horse Trojan War Venus Vercingetorix Vesuvius Xerxes Zeus



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General information	
Title of the work	Horrible Histories (Series)
Studio/Production Company	Lion TV, Citrus Television
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2009
First Edition Details	*Horrible Histories*. Directors: Dominic Brigstocke, Steve Connelly, Chloë Thomas. Brodcast 16 April 2009 – 4 August 2014.
Running time	26 minutes per episode, 69 episodes in total over 5 series
Official Website	Horrible Histories – CBBC – BBC (accessed: January 17, 2022).

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Available Onllne	BBC iPlayer – Horrible Histories (accessed: September 16, 2022).
Awards	2010 – AIB Award: Best Children's Factual Programme or Series, *Horrible Histories*; 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 – BAFTA Children's Award: Best Comedy, *Horrible Histories*; 2010 – BAFTA Children's Award: Best Performer, Jim Howick; 2010 – BAFTA Children's Award: Best Writer, The Writing Team of *Horrible Histories*; 2010, 2011 – British Comedy Award: Best Sketch Show, *Horrible Histories*; 2010 – Prix Jeunesse International Award: Best 7–11 Non-Fiction, *Horrible Histories*; 2010 – Royal Television Society Award: Best Children's Programme, *Horrible Histories*; 2011, 2012, 2014 – Kidscreen Award: Best Acting, Cast of *Horrible Histories*; 2011, 2014 – Kidscreen Award: Best Kids Non-Animation or Mixed Series, *Horrible Histories*; 2011, 2012, 2014 – Kidscreen Award: Best Writing, The writing Team; 2012 – Rose d'Or Award – Best Children's Programme: *Horrible Histories*; 2013 – Royal Television Society Craft & Design Award: Best Tape and FIlm Editing: Entertainment and Situation Comedy, *Horrible Histories*.
Genre	Comedy films, Comedy sketches, Musicals , Television comedies, Television musicals , Television series
Target Audience	Crossover (children, young adults)
Author of the Entry	Emma Welch, University of Roehampton, emma.welch1510@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk Hanna Paulouskaya, University of Warsaw, hannapa@al.uw.edu.pl

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Creators



Dominic Brigstocke (Director)

Dominic Brigstocke is a director who works mainly in comedy, on both television and film productions. He has worked on many of the various *Horrible Histories* productions and adaptations. He directed episodes of series 2–5 of the *Horrible Histories* 2009–2014 series.

Bio prepared by Emma Welch, University of Roehampton, emma.welch1510@gmail.com



Steve Connelly (Director, Producer)

Steve (Stephen) Connelly is a director, producer and writer who works predominantly in comedic television programmes. He directed episodes throughout the *Horrible Histories* 2009–2014 series.

Bio prepared by Emma Welch, University of Roehampton, emma.welch1510@gmail.com



William Terence Deary , b. 1946 (Author)

Terry Deary is a bestselling British children's author. He is also a professional actor and singer, and has written for the stage, television, radio and film. He was born in Sunderland, England, UK. His father was a butcher and he worked in the shop as a boy. He attended Monkwearmouth Grammar School, which he hated. In his mid-

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twenties, he worked as head of drama in a comprehensive school, an experience that shaped his way to engage with children: 'I wrote my own curriculum – I was able to tell my students things that were relevant to them. I was able to explore their thoughts, their feelings and way of communicating, and I learnt a hell of a lot from them' (Preston 2013). Now he is a prolific British author, also known as an actor and a writer of popular non-fiction and TV, theatre, radio, audio and new media scripts. Terry Deary is the creator of the hugely popular *Horrible Histories* book series, which includes Groovy Greeks and Rotten Romans. In 2009 CBBC Television launched a Horrible Histories TV series. A set of Horrible Histories theatre plays have also been created in collaboration with Birmingham Stage Company, and a film is planned. Terry Deary's other fiction incudes the The Fire Thief trilogy, a comedic retelling of the myth of Prometheus, and True Time Tales; both have been adapted and will be televised – True Time Tales as a children's animation created by Canada's Eggplant Media. His 2010 novel Put Out the Light (published by A&C Black) won the 2012 Sheffield Children's Books Award. Deary has published over 300 books, spanning the genres of fiction and non-fiction and both child and adult audiences. His books have sold over 30 million copies worldwide and have been translated into 40 languages, and in 2012 he was listed as the tenth most borrowed author in British children's libraries.

Terry Deary's Best Ever Greek Legends develops the concept in his Greek Legends (Twisted Tales series, 2004), and Best Greek Legends Ever (2009).

Sources:

Preston, Richard, "Horrible Histories: 20 years of entertaining children", *The Telegraph* (February 21, 2013), available at telegraph.co.uk. (accessed: August 15, 2019).

Official website (accessed: August 15, 2019).

Sample of relevant interviews:

telegraph.co.uk (accessed: August 15, 2019)

theguardian.com (accessed: August 15, 2019)

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timeoutdubai.com (accessed: August 15, 2019)

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk and Giacomo Savani, University College Dublin, giacomo.savani@gmail.com and Miriam Riverlea, University of New England, mriverlea@gmail.com



Chloë Thomas (Director, Producer)

Chloë Thomas is a director and producer who works mostly in television, for a variety of different genres. She directed episodes of series 1 of the *Horrible Histories* 2009–2014 series.

Source:

Official Website (accessed: September 16, 2022).

Bio prepared by Emma Welch, University of Roehampton, emma.welch1510@gmail.com

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Additional information

Casting

Acting:

- Matthew Baynton,
- Simon Farnaby,
- Sarah Hadland,
- Martha Howe-Douglas,
- Jim Howick,
- Lawry Lewin,
- Alice Lowe,
- Laurance Rickard,
- Ben Willibond.

Voices:

- John Eccleston,
- Jon Culshaw,
- Jess Robinson,
- Dave Lamb.

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs

- *Horrible Histories* (2001–2003 series)
- *Horrible Histories* (2015 TV series)
- *Horrible Histories Gory Games*
- *Horrible Histories* with Stephen Fry
- *Bill*
- *Horrible Histories: The Movie – Rotten Romans*

Summary

A sketch show based on the books of the same name by Terry Deary, focussing on many aspects of history not just the Classical areas. Each episode includes parodic songs teaching children about aspects of history, with both live-action and animated sections often working in conjecture to form the full picture of the sketch. Each sketch is accompanied by the narrative character Rattus Rattus who is used as an accuracy marker for the jokes within the series.

The show takes a non-linear format with each episode covering a broad range of history non-chronologically, although the show makes it clear what era of history and what part of the world that each

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sketch occurs. The range of history the show covers spans from the stone-ages to the 20th century, the shows classically focussed segments are centred around the Grecian period of the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars, and the Roman period of the Julio-Claudian emperors, although there are many deviations from this.

The classical mythology that is covered focuses a great deal on the Trojan War, although once again there are multiple deviations.

Analysis

The TV show is a critically acclaimed adaptation of the *Horrible Histories* books at their most engaging. The sketches are often based around fake advertisements* or popular television programmes reimagined in a historical setting,** to inform the viewer on aspects of historical life or myth.

Myth is also covered in various ridiculous situations, whilst staying true to the stories, in a way that is important to children, for example the sketch of the story of Helen of Troy is reimagined in the format of a comic strip.*** This makes it clear to children, aside from the warnings before segment by "Rattus Rattus", that this is not a historical fact but rather an ancient story. Often the episodes focus more on aspects of general ancient life and habits on Classical Myth though.

There have been many controversies surrounding the actual accuracy of the show,**** often in terms of its level of historical accuracy and the focus that it puts on the more humorous aspects of history.***** If a fact has been misreported within the books, then it is highly likely that the fact will also be misreported within the TV show, which means that the issues with the books dealing with the classical world, namely *Groovy Greeks* and *Rotten Romans* book carry over to the show.

Although there are controversies, the show is a fantastic starting point for children to become interested in history. It fosters intrigue, and a large majority of bare bones facts are placed within the songs, making them a fun learning tool. Considering that the songs are also parodic in nature, they are also very catchy making them which further increases their educational merit. Notably there is the Spartan parody song of *High School Musical*, which covers aspects of the Spartan school system, such as the Artemis Orthio and that stealing was

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regarded as a good thing as long as you were not caught.****** There is also a Roman parody of the song *Bad* by Michael Jackson, which covers an argument by the Emperors Commodus, Elagabalus, Commodus, and Nero over who was the worst Emperor.*******

Although the series presents a largely simplified view of history, there is a clear effort put in to cover the 'nastier' sides of history. Often the show uses the narrations by Rattus Rattus to make clear to the younger audiences the reason they are showing the horrible parts, and the nastier parts are often treated more seriously than would be expected of a comedy show aimed at children.

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* Series 1 Episode 9, 06:50–09:13: Roman Gods Helpline.

** Series 2 Episode 3, 00:38–02:43: I'm a Christian get me out of here.

*** Series 1 Episode 7, 04:55–08:02: Helen of Troy.

**** BBC rapped over Horrible Histories Florence Nightingale sketch – BBC News, (accessed: January 17, 2022).

***** E.g. Dan Snow wrote in the Guardian: "It's wonderfully exciting to watch. It has such a great sense of the past. It's fun, harmless stuff. But it isn't a serious look at the past. It's one step above Blackadder, but that's fine: the Victorians fictionalised their history. We shouldn't try to dress it up as brilliant history. For example, the Four Georges song is great, but George III was only mentally ill for a short period of his reign. It plays to stereotypes, but it's fantastic as entry-level history." How Horrible Histories became a huge hit | Culture | *The Guardian* (accessed: January 17, 2022).

****** Series 2 Episode 3, 12:12–14:10: Spartan School Musical.

******* Series 3 Episode 7 24:15–27:35: "Bad" Emperors' song.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

Achilles Aeschylus Aesop Aesop's Fables Alexander the Great Antoninus Pius Aphrodite Archimedes Ares Aristotle Artemis Asclepius Athena Athens Avaricum Caesar Caesarion Caligula Cato the Elder Cerberus Claudius (Emperor) Cleopatra VII Constantine Cronus / Kronos Delphic Oracle Diana Diogenes Egypt Gallic Wars Gladiators

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	Graeco-Persian Wars Greek History Hadrian Hannibal Hector Helen Hippocrates Janus Jupiter Marathon Mark Antony Mars Menelaus Mercury Minerva Mithras Neptune Nero Octavian Olympic Games Ouranos / Uranus Paris (Trojan Prince) Plato Pliny the Elder Pluto / Plouton Praetorian Guard Punic Wars Pyrrhus of Epirus Pythagoras Roman Baths Roman History Saturn Scipio Africanus Socrates Sparta Syracuse Theagenes of Thasos Thebes Tiberius Trojan Horse Trojan War Venus Vercingetorix Vesuvius Xerxes Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	History Humour Knowledge Religious beliefs

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