

Letters from Mr. J B Fact Finder

Joe W. Boyd

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The entries of the encyclopedic Letters from Mr. J B Fact Finder are educational tidbits on a myriad of subjects.

Varied and light, the topical essays of Joe W. Boyd's *Letters from Mr. J B Fact Finder* gather interesting historical information together.

The book's short chapters are written as personalized letters to a close audience. Each letter concerns the origins and history of its subject; these include Hershey's chocolate, railroads, breakfast cereal, Mozart's career, and Wrigley's gum. Facts about the subjects are gathered in bullet point form, such as that Mozart "started playing in public at the age of 6," or about how William Wrigley set out to sell soap, switched to baking powder, and found gum most popular.

Akin to blog posts, these entries also align themselves to periods in the year, touching on holidays including St. Patrick's Day and Valentine's Day; some are best read in their corresponding months. Mentions of "this week" and "last week" imply a larger seasonal arrangement; indeed, the seasonal entries come in chronological order, beginning in January and ending with Christmas and its time period. Nonetheless, nonseasonal topics, including computers, Tupperware, and films, are scattered among these otherwise timely entries.

Brief, lighthearted introductions of the topics precede each entry; many of the entries themselves reduce to recitations of dates, percentages, and other data, though. The result is that events are relayed in a straightforward, structured manner, and that the related commentary is light. There's a focus on making topics seem humorous, too, though many of the book's jokes are insensitive and outdated: the Soviet Union is said to have "failed as a nation" because of its law against chewing gum; during its discussion of George Washington, the book asserts that "no real man would want to wear a wig." These asides couple with awkward sentences, misplaced modifiers, malapropisms, and grammatical errors to impede the text's delivery.

That the book comes without sourcing further undermines it, especially when it comes to claims such as that "80% of all pictures on the internet are of naked women" and that "15% of U.S. women send themselves flowers on Valentine's Day"—assertions that beg to be backed up. Untrue claims, such as that Martha Washington is the only woman whose image has been featured on a piece of US currency, make the book less credible, too.

With a curious tone and a sense of wonder, the entries of the encyclopedic *Letters from Mr. J B Fact Finder* are educational tidbits on a myriad of subjects.

AIMEE JODOIN (December 15, 2021)

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