

Rockin' the Boat: 50 Iconic Revolutionaries

Jeff Fleischer

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Fleischer shows teens the ancestors of their nonconformist mindset in this informative and humorous historical guide.

Rockin' the Boat: 50 Iconic Revolutionaries from Joan of Arc to Malcolm X, by Jeff Fleischer, harnesses the rebel spirit of teens in order to slyly teach some history.

The book covers the life and accomplishments of fifty radicals throughout history. Although many have since earned mainstream status, each was an underdog in their time who found serious fault with the status quo. Ordered chronologically, each of the headings features the years and location of the person's life, and the opponent (empires, institutions, ideas) they railed against. The list features familiar names (George Washington and Martin Luther King, Jr.) and those possibly less familiar (Guy Fawkes and Ho Chi Minh).

The strong point of this book is Fleischer's understanding of his audience; his grasp of history is impressive as well. Teens are tired of textbooks that shelter them from the realities of the world, so he provides controversy and faces brutality, disenfranchisement, and disillusionment head on, giving the facts behind what teens already suspect: history and social change are complicated. Teens also love intriguing facts, so the sidebars are full of them—did you know a Hollywood film company filmed some of Pancho Villa's battles? Teens will make a clever joke, any time, any place, so the captions have a dash of humor ("Sitting Bull sits bullishly in this portrait from 1885")—but the more straightforward captions ("Chavez in 1972") leave teens looking for a punch line.

For focusing on only fifty people, the book has a fairly well rounded scope. It's slanted toward American history and Western history overall, making it relatable for American teens, but it also provides glimpses into other parts of the world. Nine women and forty-one men leaves a bit to be desired, but that's more the fault of history and culture than Fleischer's. He makes a point to offer tough-as-nails heroines like Cleopatra and Harriet Tubman.

The short but insightful chapters balance the attention span and thirst for knowledge of middle-school and high-school learners.

MELISSA WUSKE (Summer 2015)

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