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From School Library Journal

Starred Review. Grade 4-7—This collection of lively tales demonstrates the broad base of individuals who make up our country and the slow accretion of incidents that create a heritage. Starting with the colony of Saint Caroline, founded by French Huguenots near what is today Jacksonville, FL, in 1565, the short tales proceed chronologically to the election of 2000. Along the way, readers move through sections entitled Settlement and Colonies (1565-1778), A New Republic (1791-1863), Expansion and Invention (1867-1899), Becoming Modern (1900-1945), and Brave New World (1946-2000). The tales are pulled from politics and government, social and religious life, recreation and science. Students will hear about personalities as various as John Chapman, Carrie Nation, Typhoid Mary, Babe Ruth, and Maya Lin. An excellent classroom resource, the stories are a perfect way to fill the odd three or four minutes, and the book's organizational structure ties in well with more comprehensive titles, such as Robert D. Johnston's *The Making of America* (National Geographic, 2002). The selections are cross-referenced into Story Arcs so that readers can follow historical threads, such as immigration or science and technology. The lively prose is matched by numerous soft color illustrations. A grand way to introduce children to the history of their country.—Ann Welton, Grant Elementary School, Tacoma, WA

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## Review

“This lively and engaging collection of stories recounting American history is a wonderful gift not only to the children of this country but also their parents. I can’t wait to share it with my grandchildren.”

–Tom Brokaw

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American history comes alive in these 100 true stories that define our country.

This magnificent treasury tells the story of America through 100 true tales. Some are tales of triumph—the midnight ride of Paul Revere, the Wright brothers taking to the air, Neil Armstrong’s first steps on the moon. Some are tales of tragedy—the fate of the Donner Party, the great fire in Chicago, the eruption of Mount Saint Helens.

There are stories of inventors and athletes and abolitionists and artists. Stories about struggling for freedom—again and again, in so many ways.

With full-color illustrations on nearly every page and short, exciting stories, this book is perfect for browsing by the entire family. Notes at the end of each story direct readers to related stories. And a guide to thematic story arcs offers readers (and teachers) an easy way to follow their particular interests throughout the book. A treasure trove of a book that belongs in every home!

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

70 of 73 people found the following review helpful.

Ignite a history-loving fire

By Chris Barton

Jennifer Armstrong and illustrator Roger Roth's new book makes me feel dang near obsolete. Since I got hold of a copy, it has ignited in my seven-year-old a history-loving fire much stronger than anything I've managed to spark in the past couple of years of trying.

The premise of "The American Story" is simple: 400-odd years of U.S. history told through 100 stories (starting with the founding of what became St. Augustine, Florida) spread out over 358 pages. Armstrong mostly sticks to the "true tales" promised on the cover, though she does include the legend of John Henry as well as the commonly told story of the creation of the potato chip, only to dismiss that telling as hoey.

What she doesn't do is stick to the stories readers might expect. There's no Christopher Columbus and no 9/11, as she ends her narrative with an optimistic take on the 2000 election. In between, there's no Gettysburg Address, Black Tuesday, Pearl Harbor, D-Day, March on Washington, Lee Harvey Oswald, or Space Shuttle disaster.

Instead, Armstrong offers a magnificent mish-mash of stories both familiar and obscure. (Nobody in my house had ever heard of Boston's Great Molasses Flood of 1919, but we're glad we have now.) She connects them throughout with often surprising post-story notes glancing backwards or ahead, such as the one tying Jonas Salk's polio vaccine back to Pocahontas' death from smallpox. The ethnic and cultural balance she brings to the proceedings is eye-opening as well.

As big an undertaking as this was for Armstrong (she gets bonus points for writing the first children's book --

as far as I know -- to identify Mark Felt as Deep Throat), Roth had his work cut out for him, too. His illustrations grace every story, and his style manages to be at once sober enough for the serious tales (such as the one about the Johnstown flood) and cartoonish enough for the lighthearted ones (e.g. Ben Franklin's failed attempt to electrocute a turkey).

There's no better taste of what you'll find in this book than the adjacent stories from 1981 and 1982: "Pac-Man Fever" and "The Wall." The former delights in how a nation went bonkers over so simple a game and ushered in a new era of popular entertainment. In the latter, Armstrong offers a breathtaking description of the Vietnam memorial while Roth reflects the text with an equally powerful image spread over two full pages. Like the Wall itself, "The American Story" is a monumental work.

34 of 34 people found the following review helpful.

Stretched out on the floor reading for hours

By E. Hanson

I can't think of a better way to introduce young people to history's pleasures and their country's past than to read this engrossing book. History is best when it's not a dry exercise in recounting dates and names but when it becomes a living art that tells us something about the past and about ourselves, about what it means to be human in a way that we recognize as part of our own lives. Armstrong's narratives, drawn from all periods of American history, are full of facts, yes, but it is what the author does with these realities that lifts this book to the level of art. This brilliant writer has the ability to bring to life stories as familiar as that of Benjamin Franklin and as little known as the invention of the potato chip (what's more American than that?) with a narrative verve and sense of detail that makes history exciting for children and really kindles their imaginations.

38 of 40 people found the following review helpful.

Sloppily researched.

By KBR

After looking for a good overview of American history, I thought I had found one in this book. However, one of the first stories I happened to turn to detailed how Sacheen Littlefeather declined Marlon Brando's Academy Award on his behalf and the story came with a wildly inaccurate postscript, saying Sacheen Littlefeather was actually a "Mexican actress." Not only is this patently false, it could have easily been verified with a couple of phone calls -- Sacheen Littlefeather is still alive, for pete's sake. If the writer was this sloppy with facts that could so easily be verified, what else in this book is wrong?

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