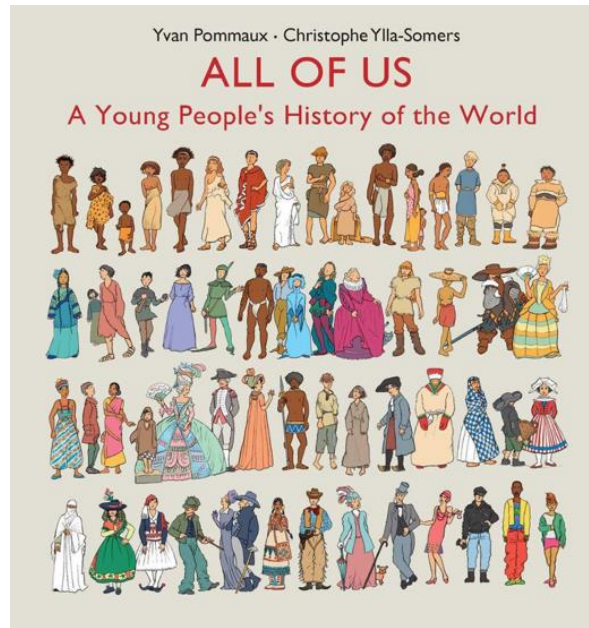


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Review of *All of Us: A Young People's History of the World*
Written by Yvan Pommaux and Christophe Ylla-Somers
Translated from the French by Anna Lehmann

Adult/Educator Reviewer: Nupur Kittur
Athens, Georgia
Student Reviewer: Lila, 2nd grade



Ylla-Somers C., & Pommaux, Y. (Illustrator). (2019). *All of us: A young people's history of the world* (A. Lehmann (Trans.)). New York, NY: NYR Children's Collection.

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Adult Review: Nupur Kittur

The very first sentence in this book is “We do not know the beginning of our history, and we will not know its end” (p. 6). *All of us- A Young People’s History of the World* is a non-fiction book written in the first person plural and it attempts to fill in that space and summarize the known history of humanity. It is an engaging and inclusive history of ordinary women, men, and children who lived on earth, and is not written with an emphasis on kings, queens, and conquerors like most history books are. With detailed illustrations and narrative texts, each page contains a wealth of information about how human life has changed over thousands of years.

In this book, the authors keep track of the time in history by noting the year at the top of most pages using the B.C. and A.D. system. The story starts at -3 million years with *Homo erectus*, the hunter gatherer, and ends in 1900 with the end of the second world war and the start of the cold war.

One concept that immediately engaged my eight-year-old daughter is that *Homo sapiens* (wise human) evolved in Africa, and as we ran out of space and game to hunt, humans migrated and populated the world. She was amazed to learn that when we go back far enough, we are all from Africa. Other fascinating concepts include the fact that at the same point in history, there were parts of the world that had complex civilizations while other regions were still populated by hunter gatherers. Even though this isn’t necessarily an easy book to read, children will learn many interesting things about history on every page.

This book will be irresistible to curious elementary aged kids. It provides some answers to the big questions of who we humans really are, where we came from, and how did we get to be here today. It is incredible to consider that the world we see today did not always exist as well as ordinary things that we take for granted, (e.g., farming, written language, and the

concept of money were inventions that happened in the relatively recent past). For instance, my daughter was very surprised to learn that the number zero was invented in India around -350 years. It is difficult to imagine a time when the concept of zero did not exist.

The language used in this book is sometimes more complicated and convoluted than it needs to be. For instance, here are two sentences from a page about the Chinese civilization: “These zealous servants of the state passed down values they hoped would elevate and unite the people. To achieve this, they strove to create a complex organization that awaited only the invention of paper and printing to prove its effectiveness” (p. 41). This writing is rather dense and academic, and may need to be explained in simpler terms to the younger elementary crowd.

Another thing to consider is that human history is complicated and full of gruesome events. The book does not sugar-coat this and covers themes such as war, slavery, and genocide without flinching. Here is a sentence from the paragraph about the Aztec civilization: “They offered to the sun the blood of a sacrificial victim, like this prisoner of war, who lies on a sacrificial stone, his still-beating heart in an ornate vessel” (p. 63).

Taken as a whole, this book is a wonderful opportunity for children to get a birds’-eye view of human history and gain some understanding of our complex world and how it came to be. This is a book that will grow with the child and remain relevant and thought-provoking for years. The lesson that all humans have a shared past and that our similarities outweigh our differences has perhaps never been more important as it is today.

Student Review: Lila

