100 Diagrams That Changed the World: From the Earliest Cave Paintings to the Innovation of the iPod

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A collection of the most important ideas, theories, and concepts of all time

100 Diagrams That Changed the World is a fascinating collection of the most significant plans, sketches, drawings, and illustrations that have influenced and shaped the way we think about the world. From primitive cave paintings to Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man to the complicated DNA helix drawn by Crick and Watson to the innovation of the iPod, they chart dramatic breakthroughs in our understanding of the world and its history. Arranged chronologically, each diagram is accompanied by informative text that makes even the most scientific breakthrough accessible to all.

Beautifully illustrated in full color, this book will not only inform but also entertain as it demonstrates how the power of a single drawing can enhance, change or even revolutionize our understanding of the world. With its iconic images and powerful explanations, *100 Diagrams That Changed the World* is perfect for readers of *The History of the World in 100 Objects*, and is the ideal gift for anyone interested in culture, history, science or technology.

100 Diagrams That Changed the World: From the Earliest Cave Paintings to the Innovation of the iPod Details

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From Reader Review 100 Diagrams That Changed the World: From the Earliest Cave Paintings to the Innovation of the iPod for online ebook

Rob Slaven says

As is the usual preamble, I received this book as part of a GoodReads giveaway.

For most purposes this rather brief tome is serviceable as a coffee table book. Each entry is given one page devoted to the diagram with a half page of text to describe it. In general the author does a good job of choosing his topics and while most are already familiar to any individual of average erudition there are some new tidbits to be gleaned. As a book to be read from cover to cover it does become somewhat daunting because the author's text is often very brief and very high level and one can never quite settle into any particular topic before being shuffled off rather quickly to the next. The chronological ordering of the book is exactly what one would wish for in such a work and the full breadth of history has considered.

On the constructive side of my observations it seems evident that the author had some difficulty coming around to 100 'diagrams' for inclusion. Many of the entries can only marginally be called diagrams at all (or the diagrams are really only secondary to the significance of the achievement being documented) while others are of dubious significance to begin with. The idea that a sketch for the iPod should appear in a book alongside Copernicus and da Vinci is, in this reviewer's opinion, an affront to any reasonable view on how we could what is significant and what is not in the grand scale of history. Lastly in this vein the text at times seems rushed and perhaps suffers from over-editing. The chosen textual format is so short that no real background can be properly conveyed and the reader suffers a bit from whiplash.

In summary, this book would make a reasonable addition to the coffee table but cannot be considered for any serious reading. It would have been better served as a book containing half as many diagrams but with much expanded text.

Jenn says

The diagrams are great, the writing is not.

Richard says

I expected to like this book a lot more than I did. The premise is interesting, as is much of the content. But there was a lot in this book that could have been better.

First, the font. Each diagram has a one or two sentence introduction. The font is in light gray, making it very difficult to read without much brighter lighting than I usually require. It's almost as if the publisher doesn't expect the reader to read the semi-hidden text.

Second, I'd say some of these diagrams didn't really change the world. The Nazca Lines are interesting, but to this day no one knows what they mean. So how is that world changing? I could cite a few other examples.

Third, and more importantly, the author sometimes doesn't do a very good job at explaining the diagrams themselves. For example, The Porphyrian Tree has 18 1- or 2-word nodes in Latin. Would it have been too much for the author to translate those so the reader gets a better idea of what the diagram is saying? I realize each diagram is allotted only a few short paragraphs, but I think the author could have been more informative within the constraints of the format of the book.

The author's focus seems to shift between presenting diagrams that changed the word and illustrations of events that changed the world. As an example of the latter, he includes a map of Chernobyl's radioactive fallout. While the Chernobyl disaster clearly changed the world, I'm not convinced that the map itself was a key element. Maybe I'm being a little nit-picky here, but it just leaves me wondering what was the criteria for selecting the diagrams for this book? If Chernobyl's fallout map is included, why not the map of the D-Day invasion, for example? Just wondering.

A few of the author's opinions are historically suspect. On the Vostok 1 page, he asserts that Sergei Korolev's death in 1966 was the reason that the US beat the USSR in the race to the moon. Such a statement begs for some substantiation, something the book's format doesn't permit.

An interesting footnote: The ARPANET and World Wide Web pages don't mention Al Gore's contribution.

It might sound like I didn't like this book at all. That's not the case. Mostly, the diagrams are well-chosen and the short descriptions often synopsize the diagrams and their context well, given the format limitations. But for me, it became a chore to finish this book. And I generally like reading history. So, I had to rate it only 2 stars.

Ray Duncan says

Bought this book based on a mention by Maria on Brainpickings. Not particularly impressed with it. Most of the diagrams did not "change the world." Many have no any historical significance except as curiosities, such as the medieval manuscript written in as-yet-undeciphered code. The writing is uninteresting. I'd pass on this. Get Tufte's first book -- "The Visual Display of Quantitative Information" -- if you want a captivating book about diagrams and graphics.

Gabriel says

Lovely illustrations and concise descriptions - almost too concise. I could have used more explanation for some of the more complicated concepts. I'm not sure about the selection of some of the items - does a relief sculpture really count as a "diagram"? Does an atlas of London really count as having changed the world?

Philip says

Well... "Diagrams" might not fit for all 100. Also, "That Changed the World" doesn't fit for all 100. All in all, though: not a bad book.

This was the first book of diagrams (or anything remotely like it) that we read for the Jordabecker Book Club. Fuzzy - the guy who picked it - is an artist, so he was (as usual) thinking outside the box.

(He's got some good stuff. You should check it out.)

...Wait a second... I can basically force you to check it out:

It was worth it. I know you feel the same way...

As for the book, there were a lot of interesting diagrams. A lot of the diagrams only loosely fit into the "diagram" category. I wouldn't have considered cave drawings(view spoiler), or triple spirals (view spoiler) "diagrams." ...But then, I'm hardly an expert.

I did learn quite a bit. For instance, I loved what I learned about the Voynich Manuscript, having co-invented a fairly accessible, yet difficult code with my college roommate. (We have yet to meet someone who could break the code. ...Though most people simply don't have the time for our nonsense.) So, even if the Voynich Manuscript isn't technically a diagram, nor did it change the world, I'm glad I read about it.

Mostly, I was pleased to find topics I teach. My students write in Cuneiform with play dough. Check it out. We talk about the Ancient Egyptians *while* writing in Cuneiform... Seriously, if they learn one thing from our curriculum, it's Cuneiform.

So I was taken by the Assyrians, and Phonecians, and Egyptians, and the... well, you get the point.

Kyle, another Jordabecker Book Clubber made the comment, I wish it would have been the 50 Diagrams That Changed the World, or maybe the 25... and that they would have gone in depth a little bit more for each one.

I probably agree. Although, then it might not be as good of a coffee-table book as it is. (Now, if I just need to get a coffee table.)

Cynthia Corral says

I was really disappointed in this book and just can't give it more than 3 stars.
My review is basically what everyone else is saying:

First, a great many of these "diagrams" did little to nothing to change the world. 100 "most interesting" diagrams might have been a better title.

Second, not enough information about each "diagram". I liked the concept of two pages for each subject: one for the picture, one for information. But the information pages were not always very informational. Each page contains the NAME, then a summary in a font color so light that with or without my glasses I had to hold the book up to my nose to read it (WHO OKAYED THIS FONT COLOR???). Then on average only half the page is spent on the information - not enough room to explain some of these things. And finally up to a third of the page is left blank for a little blurb that describes the diagram... really just a summary of the summary.

All of this on a single page: Title, Summary of information, Information, Summarized Summary. It's wasted space instead of enough info.

For some of these things, even if the object changed the world, the diagram did not. Drawings of an iPhone or the old Apple computer did not change the world. Diagrams of the insides of the iPhone or original Apple would have been more appropriate.

I did learn two things:

1. Emoticons have been around since 1881!
2. Flat-pack furniture was invented by Gillis Lundgren for IKEA in 1956.

The rest of the book, Meh. An amazing concept that was wasted.

Donna says

I don't know if these diagrams changed the world, bu this is an interesting book about diagrams that are meaningful in history. The book is an enjoyable read, and I learned a lot from reading it. The book also provided impetus to look into further into the diagrams in the book.

Robert says

One Hundred Diagrams is my kind of “synopsis,” a book that features 100 diagrams that aided in the evolution of both our culture and our technology. I resonated with Scott Christianson’s summaries as they touch on two of the three themes I explored in my 2004 work, *A World Perspective through 21st Century Eyes*.

These two themes included society's cultural evolution through the centuries and our first steps in the technological evolution of the most recent decades. Like me, Christianson covers ancient Greek, Roman, and Inca civilizations with a number of diagrams. With respect to humanity's biological evolution over the millennia, the third theme I explored, Christianson gives a nod to Watson & Crick for their seminal drawing showing the structure of human DNA.

I liked much of the later-era diagrams he presented, such as Volta’s battery. As I noted in *A World Perspective*, the new science of electricity appeared with this new energy-producing tool, forever changing the lives of individuals, and hence their society. The science of chemistry matured with its newfound language and 'states of matter' to find immediate impact with people's personal and working lives. Dmitri Mendeleev’s periodic table is one of the “100 diagrams” too.

Biology, we know, evolved from a static plant and animal classification to a dynamic field of inquiry, jump-started by Charles Darwin's groundbreaking work. Christianson provides ample back story with the diagrams he unearthed related to Darwin’s theory and more.

Pick up *One Hundred Diagrams* and enjoy the quick read. I think it provides great background before reading *A World Perspective* next.

Keep on reading!

Laura says

Taken me a while to finish, but loved it - ESP those that are purely innovations in visual display, not secondary, like the first bar chart and the history map and Florence Nightingale's rose chart and my fav Taccola's first exploded view. Loved Micrographia and by innovation the first bacteria; really so much in here! But gee, could have been double in size. Type is smaller than the Times and captions done in light grey. Double size images would be better too.

Lauren W says

Many other reviews have said what I'll say. I'm not sure all of these diagrams have changed the world, there are some that have and others that are just important from a historical context. I enjoyed the quick description of each of the diagrams but found myself wanting more and wanting a better grasp of the bigger picture.

Andy Gagnon says

This book is an engineer's dream and a reminder that sketching something on paper is a powerful tool.

Kate says

Not just for history buffs, the pages of 100 Diagrams prove that great achievements have humble, human beginings, often etched out by hand with a series of simple shapes. The drawings range widely in beauty, whimsy and mathematical precision. Christianson aptly illustrates where art and science have served as catalysts for each other throughout history, and he does it through telling the stories of the individuals involved. He also includes the big-picture implications of what these diagrams meant to all of humanity, such as the Brooks slave ship, which "seemed to make an instantaneous impression of horror upon all who saw it."

The fact that the first workable machine gun was concieved by an English lawyer, that emoticons were first used as typographical symbols in an American magazine in 1881, and that the first iconic double-helix diagram we use today was rendered by an accordion-playing woman will now add to my understanding of how we got here, but 100 Diagrams leaves something to be desired when it comes to modern innovations. For instance, Steve Jobs is given two entries, one for the Apple Computer and one for the iPod, but Bill Gates is not mentioned once. Although DNA discovery is covered, there is no further discussion of modern advances in genetics. Robotics is also absent. As wonderful as it is to have so many hallmarks in one digestible book, it would serve well to show just how much the diagrams and ideas have accelerated during our present century.

Katherine Collins says

If you are a history buff, you will like this book. If you are a visual learner, you will like this book. If you are

both, you will LOVE this book. It is exactly what the title implies, 100 miniessays centered around diagrams that had mega-impact. Each one is fascinating in its own right, and when lined up all together there is another layer of insight: you can see some ways in which our visualization of new ideas has shifted over the centuries, and, importantly, how in many other ways, the power of a simple sketch is remarkably constant, from the Chauvet cave drawings to the initial iPod design.

Juliana says

As an Infographic nut I love this wonderful little book, Scott Christianson's *100 Diagrams That Changed the World* . Each diagram includes a photo or reproduction starting with the Cave Drawings done 30,000 years ago in France all the way to a diagram of the iPod. In between you'd be quite surprised to learn that the first bar chart was created by William Playfair in 1786 (or at least I was). Or that the first exploded view diagram was created by Mariano Taccola way back around 1450.

I was very pleased to find not only the expected entries by da Vinci and Descartes, but a diagram from my personal hero Ben Franklin for his bifocals. I was surprised to learn that Bacteria was first diagramed by Leeuwenhoek back in 1683. 1683! There are some interesting call-outs like for Ikea's Flat-Pack Furniture (1956) which makes me want to curse when I read it, and even Carl Sagan's Pioneer Placque which shipped out into space in 1972.

My only beef with this book lays in the design itself. Seriously--what is up lately with graphic designers not being able to design for print? Each entry has a couple introductory sentences which are printed in such a light gray as to be unreadable in the evening by a person over their forties. It has to be readable folks! That is the point!
