

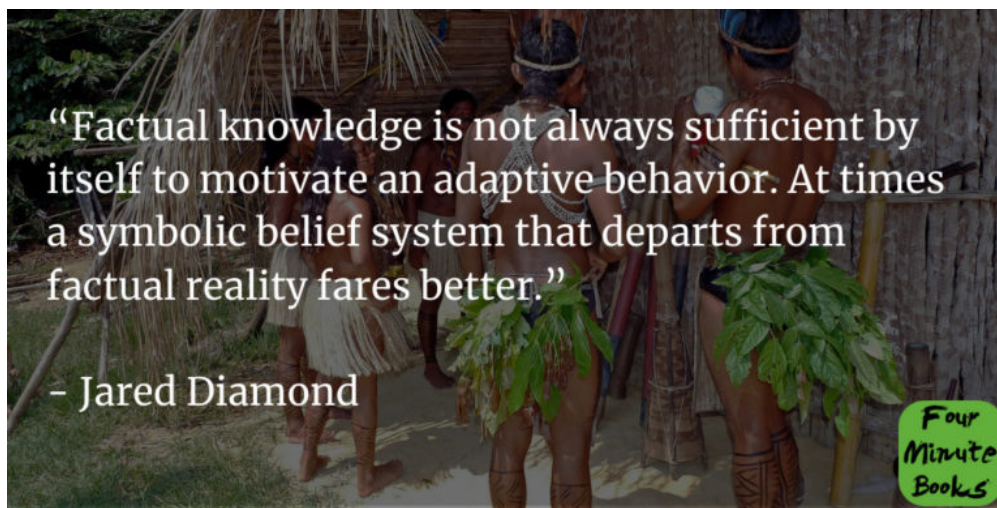
# The World Until Yesterday Summary

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**1-Sentence-Summary:** *The World Until Yesterday identifies some of the most valuable lessons we can learn from societies of the past like hunter-gatherers, including how to resolve conflicts better, more effective ways to raise children, how to stay healthier for longer, and much more.*

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



Around 11,000 years ago, our human ancestors shifted from their hunter-gatherer lifestyle to an agricultural one. With this change came a dramatic increase in food availability and other technology that helped the population explode. Soon, cities were born. Along with cities came governance and many other aspects of society we now recognize.

Life became easier, but that doesn't mean that there haven't been new problems that society has faced. These days, when things go wrong in society, we tend to look for new ideas or technologies to solve them. But how often do we look to the past? If we did, we might be able to learn a thing or two from what worked for people before farming and urbanization.

In *The World Until Yesterday: What Can We Learn from Traditional Societies* by Jared Diamond, we take a fascinating look into what we can learn from traditional societies. Though we benefit greatly from modern conveniences, there are valuable things we can learn from societies of old about how to do everything from raising kids to settling disputes.

Here's the book summarized in just 3 lessons:

1. We can get a good idea of what traditional societies were like because there are still some in parts of the world.

2. Humanity could learn a lot about how to resolve conflicts and raise children.
3. The difference between our lifestyle and a traditional one has meant we have very different health concerns.

Here we go!

## **Lesson 1: If you want to get an idea of what a traditional society functioned like, you can look to the ones that are still around today.**

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When we talk about hunter-gatherer peoples, you might think this kind of society is long gone. But actually, there are several traditional societies still living with this sort of lifestyle, and they are still living mostly as they did 11,000 years ago.

Hunter-gatherer tribes still around to this day include the Siriano Indians of South America and the Andaman Islanders in the Bay of Bengal. They have bands of less than a hundred people and are typically egalitarian and democratic. **They don't need a formal type of leadership since everyone knows each other, and they can make decisions as a group in face-to-face discussions.**

There are also tribes that are made up of a few hundred people such as the Inupiat in Alaska. Some of these tribes practice farming or herding, but it's usually on a smaller and simpler scale.

Lastly, there are chiefdoms, such as the Chumash Indians of North America. They are made up of thousands and even hundreds of thousands of people and are closer to modern society. They have a centralized form of leadership that collects funds from members and redistributes them around the community. In a chiefdom, the chief's family is at the highest level of society.

The difference between all of these shows that there is an entire continuum that spans from hunter-gatherers to modern states like our own. The author chooses to focus mainly on hunter-gatherers because they are the most different from our society, so we stand to learn the most from them.

## **Lesson 2: If we look to traditional societies, we can learn important lessons on how to resolve conflicts and more.**

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When there is a dispute in a traditional society, they emphasize the importance of restoring a peaceful relationship between two parties. This way, they can continue to live together in a close-knit society.

To do this, the offending party shows they sincerely regret what they've done. They also typically offer something for compensation. They give this a validation of their regret.

In contrast, in modern societies, disputes that aren't resolved in private end up in court. When you look at the court system, you can see that it isn't about re-establishing a peaceful relationship, rather, most of the time relations get worse after court. **The main thing we can learn here is that our modern court system should try harder to help parties reconcile after a dispute.**

We can also see fundamental differences in child-rearing. Kids in traditional societies typically receive more care from people who aren't parents. They can be aunts, uncles, grandparents, siblings, or even older playmates. This diverse group of social influences creates a more socially capable child.

Children in these societies are also given adult-like roles at earlier ages. For example, Bolivian Siriono Indians begin shooting with a small bow and arrow at three, and at eight, they accompany their fathers on hunting trips. Most children who grow up this way are both happy and resourceful.

### **Lesson 3: Modern lifestyles have given rise to a variety of health problems that traditional societies never knew.**

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As far as health goes, modern societies are generally better off. But that doesn't mean we don't have anything to learn from our ancestors' way of life.

In today's world, we are plagued by other diseases that traditional societies didn't know: non-communicable diseases. These are things such as kidney conditions, diabetes, heart diseases, and cancers. A whopping 90 percent of Europeans, Americans, and Japanese will succumb to a non-communicable disease like this.

The main reason we have these new afflictions is because of the modern lifestyle we live. **Think about it, we are extremely sedentary compared to a traditional society where people spent all day hunting, foraging, and doing other work.** Most of us spend our days in front of some sort of screen.

What's more, most of us have unhealthy diets. Whereas a hunter-gatherer ate mostly fiber and protein, our diets are full of fat, carbs, and sugar. In just the last three hundred years, the average sugar consumption for a person in the US and England has increased almost fortyfold.

We also have three to four times more salt in our diet than a hunter-gatherer, putting us more at risk for high blood pressure. High blood pressure increases your risk of many non-communicable diseases. Most of this excess salt is from pre-packaged foods.

We have modern medicine. Now we just need to learn from these traditional societies to limit our intake of salt, sugar, and alcohol. That way we can have the best of both worlds.

## The World Until Yesterday Review

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*The World Until Yesterday* is really interesting. I never really thought to look back to older societies and learn from them. Even if you aren't particularly into history, you'll probably enjoy the takeaways you can find here!

## Who would I recommend The World Until Yesterday summary to?

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The 34-year-old who always hated learning facts in history, the 61-year-old that wonders if all the recent technological advancements are actually making all parts of life better, and anyone that wants to get more out of history than mere stories.