Scientific superstar

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Using scientific history as a medium to popularize science.

How many potential superstars of science go by, living their life unknowingly that their contributions to science could had changed the world, had they only found their passion for science?

The general opinion is that science is unintresting and useless for the majority. It is often associated with sitting behind a desk listening to a teacher's monotonous monologue, wondering what use you will ever have of that information. This false label is one of the things that Bill Bryson tries to correct with his bestselling "A Short History of Nearly Everything", and he is very successful at that.

The combination of witty writing together with extraordinary personalities and mind-boggling facts makes it easier than ever to learn about science. Bryson's use of language is a strict difference to the stringent mathematical language we are used to from school. By avoiding mathematical expression and formal definitions Bryson widens the scope of potential readers, making science available to the masses.

Bryson writes in the book that *"There seemed to be a mystifying universal conspiracy among textbook authors to make certain the material they dealt with never strayed too near the realm of the mildly interesting and was always at least a long-distance phone call from the frankly interesting."* This is a central problem with a lot of today's literature that is being used in compulsory school. The solution is to popularize science and one way of doing that is by introducing scientific history to make learning more relatable. "A Short History of Nearly Everything" could be seen as a rough guide to science and can be used to introduce the subjects. This could help to wash away the poor view of science that young people have.

The extraordinary, often bizarre, men and women behind scientific advancement makes their discoveries more interesting and way more memorable. This is the effect of bryson mixing in history with science. A person, that before reading only was a name, take shape in your head as bryson thoroughly describe not only their contributions to science, but also everything from their looks to their crazy habits. Also minor characters are introduced with more than their name, an example of this is bryson introducing one of the first pioneers of aviation: *"In France, a chemist named Pilatre de Rozier tested the flammability of hydrogen by gulping a mouthful and blowing across an open flame, proving at a stroke that hydrogen is indeed explosively combustible and that eyebrows are not necessarily a permanent feature of one's face."*

However, using history to teach science is a double edged sword. Adding even more facts to an already fact-crammed subject needs to be done with care. Without balance it is fairly easy to get overwhelmed by all that is being said. This happens from time to time in "A Short History of Nearly Everything" but only remembering ten per cent of all the facts in the book would already broaden the reader's view by a lot.

Scratching on the surface of many subjects is what makes the book recommendable to read in early school. After reading it you would have a better idea of what scientific subjects that you find most interesting and thus the book serves as a gateway to higher learning. Reading interesting popular science can inspire young people to a career in science, young people that would otherwise never find their passion for science.

Introducing scientific history as a medium to popularize science can be one way of achieving this. It might be hard to strike the right balance between how much facts you can write about and how interesting you can make it but Bryson manages it for the major part of the book. However, popularizing science is a well-worth goal. If this method could inspire another einstein,the effort would be all worth it.