

= Horrible Histories (2009 TV series) =

Horrible Histories is a British children 's sketch comedy television series , part of the children 's history franchise of the same name based on the books written by Terry Deary . The show was produced for CBBC by Lion Television with Citrus Television and ran from 2009 to 2013 for five series of thirteen half @-@ hour episodes , with additional one @-@ off seasonal and Olympic specials , before a return in 2015 with a sixth series under a new format with cast . The show is still running with Series 7 continuing in 2016 Horrible Histories Revival .

The TV show carries over the graphic style and much of the content of the Horrible Histories book series . It maintains the franchise 's overall irreverent but accurate focus on the dark , gruesome or scatological aspects of British and other Western world history , spanning from the Stone Age to the post @-@ World War II era . Individual historical eras or civilisations are defined and named as in the books , with sketches from several different time periods combined within a single episode . Live @-@ action sketches ? which often parody other UK media or celebrities ? and music videos are intercut with animations and quizzes . The starring troupe are Mathew Baynton , Simon Farnaby , Martha Howe @-@ Douglas , Jim Howick , Laurence Rickard and Ben Willbond , alongside a large supporting cast headed by Sarah Hadland , Lawry Lewin and Dominique Moore . The black rat puppet " host " , Rattus Rattus , appears in short bridging segments , explaining the factual basis for each sketch .

The creative team was largely recruited from the mainstream adult UK comedy scene . They took inspiration from such quintessentially British historical @-@ comedy classics as Blackadder and the Monty Python films . The series was a critical and ratings success , eventually gaining a wide all ages audience through its non @-@ condescending and inclusive approach . It has won numerous domestic and international awards and has been named among the greatest British children 's television series of all time .

In 2011 , a spin @-@ off game show , Horrible Histories : Gory Games , was launched on CBBC . In the same year , the original show was repackaged for main channel BBC One as Horrible Histories with Stephen Fry , with Fry replacing the puppet rat as presenter .

= = Background = =

Horrible Histories is based on the British children 's historical @-@ comedy book series by Terry Deary , first published by Scholastic UK in 1993 and since expanded into a multimedia franchise . The books and subsequent spin @-@ off materials are intended to pique young children 's interest in history via short , factually based but humorously told anecdotes highlighting aspects of the subject not usually covered in more traditional educational sources .

LionTV executive producer Richard Bradley , whose company had previously produced several adult history @-@ themed programmes and whose son was a fan of the Horrible Histories books , was the initial driving force behind a new TV adaptation . Deary was initially sceptical , having had a negative experience with the 2001 animated series , which had only loosely incorporated his concept . He finally agreed to the new project on the condition that it be explicitly " horrible , funny and true " . While disclaiming any active role in developing the subsequent series , he would eventually contribute to the writing as well as appearing in several small roles .

The producers were determined that the show be respectful of audience expectations for the Horrible Histories brand , maintaining its familiar visual style and content as far as possible . Early concepts for bringing it to the screen involved framing or interpretive devices , including a ghostly train carrying children into the past , or a wizard storyteller to act as their guide . Eventually Bradley with producer / director Dominic Brigstocke concluded that the material was strong enough to stand on its own , so they developed , in consultation with CBBC executives , a live @-@ action sketch @-@ comedy showcase . Once the writing was underway , the producers further discovered that sticking as closely as possible to the historical truth made it easier for them to find the humour within it . They then introduced a comedy style relying on parodies of familiar modern media conventions as a means of making these historical details more immediately accessible .

To do the material full justice , Brigstocke and series producer Caroline Norris used their industry contacts to put together a creative team consisting mostly of veterans of the adult UK comedy community . The BBC readily agreed to this cross @-@ demographic experiment . They also approved the adoption ? insofar as was possible in a programme aimed at young children ? of the core franchise precept of " history with the nasty bits left in " , which frequently involved " gross @-@ out " -style bodily function humour and comic violence .

The new creative team , while avoiding references aimed specifically at adults , was determined not to adapt the humour to children or otherwise patronise their audience . Instead , they sought to make the best use possible of the material . Norris said that her goal was " to make a show that people would say was too good for children ... we started out with really high ambitions . " To that end , adult historical satires such as Blackadder and the Monty Python films were shown at the first writers ' meeting to demonstrate the proposed tone , and these influences would be visible throughout the show 's run . Once the first series had aired and it was realised that the overall approach was working well , the creative team built on and significantly expanded the scope of the comedy elements for the second . This trend continued through each subsequent series . The net result was a show that immediately appealed to young children while also gaining the increasing respect ? and viewership ? of older audiences .

= = Format = =

The divisions by historical era or civilisation in the book series are carried over in the TV show , focusing on events in or directly affecting Great Britain and (to a lesser extent) the larger Western world . The Inca and Aztec empires are also featured in later series . Sketches are grouped under these divisions , named as in the books , beginning with the Savage Stone Age and including among others the Cut @-@ throat Celts , Awful Egyptians , Groovy Greeks , Rotten Romans , Vicious Vikings , Measly Middle Ages , Terrible Tudors , Gorgeous Georgians and Vile Victorians . The timeline for the most part ended at the Woeful Second World War . During the fifth and final series the show featured a handful of significant post @-@ WWII (or " Troublesome Twentieth Century ") events , including the civil rights movement and the Space Race between the US and the USSR . The most recent event referenced was the 1969 Apollo 11 Moon landing .

Each named division has its own title card that appears before each sketch (or group of sketches) set in that era or civilisation , along with a short introductory animation featuring a period @-@ appropriate character . Throughout each sketch , small pop @-@ up signs are used to affirm the truth (or otherwise) of any particularly implausible @-@ seeming concepts mentioned onscreen . The live @-@ action material is intercut with short animated sketches , quizzes and interludes with puppet " host " Rattus Rattus (performed by John Eccleston) , who addresses the viewer directly as a presenter , commenting on and clarifying the factual basis behind the humour .

Sketches were filmed en masse and then cut into episodes by the producers based on creative rather than chronological or other educational considerations , in the manner of a more traditional sketch @-@ comedy series . They often fall under a recurring banner ? usually with its own short title sequence ? but otherwise vary widely in length , visual style and approach . Many are recognisable parodies of other popular media or celebrities , in formats ranging from spoof commercials to mock TV shows , newscasts , magazines , video games and film trailers . Notable parody inspirations included Masterchef , Wife Swap , Come Dine with Me and The Apprentice . " Horrible Histories Movie Pitch " , in which historical figures pitch their life stories to a panel of Hollywood producers played by League of Gentlemen actors Mark Gatiss , Steve Pemberton and Reece Shearsmith , used the format of a commercial campaign for Orange mobile reminders .

The show also created several popular recurring characters and concepts , notably " Stupid Deaths " , in which a skeletal , platinum @-@ blond Grim Reaper amuses himself while processing souls for admittance to the afterlife by forcing candidates from throughout history to relate the embarrassing details of their demise . HHTV News ' Bob Hale and his eccentric @-@ but @-@ erudite in @-@ studio reports provide a broader picture on historical events (such as the Wars of the Roses and the French Revolution) , in a style reminiscent of presenter Peter Snow . The " Shouty Man " , a parody

of a typically ebullient infomercial host (like Barry Scott) , pitches unusual historical products .

= = = Music = = =

Original music plays a significant role in the show and its popularity ; " Music from Horrible Histories " was chosen as the 2011 theme of the BBC Proms ' annual children 's concert . Alongside various short intro themes and commercial jingles , each episode and each special contains at least one longer comedy song centred around a particular historical figure or theme and performed by the cast in appropriate character .

In the first series , the songs generally had no particular satirical slant , and were often intercut with sketches from the same era . However , after the creative team noted the critical and popular success of the major exception (" Born 2 Rule " , which featured King Georges I & IV performing in the style of a boyband) the decision was taken from the second series onwards to continue in that vein . Historical concepts were matched to a diverse range of modern musical references , and the results were showcased as self @-@ contained music video parodies . The thirteenth episode of the second and each subsequent series was retooled as a " Savage Songs " special , featuring a compilation of that series ' outstanding videos .

The songs have since become among the most critically and popularly acclaimed elements of the show , especially among its adult audience . Commentators cite the apt cleverness of the various historical / musical parody match @-@ ups , and the complexity and skill with which the musical elements are executed . Principal composer Richie Webb confirms that the songs became more sophisticated as a result of the show 's increasing popularity with older viewers , as well as the demands of increased visibility online . Many of the videos have earned standalone popularity on YouTube .

The videos tend to run about three minutes , with two significant exceptions . " The English Kings and Queens " , from the third series , lists all of the British monarchs since William the Conqueror , using a Chas & Dave @-@ inspired cumulative format . The creative team wrote the song to challenge the show 's young audience , after noting that the same youngsters had been inspired to memorise lyrics to previous songs . " We 're History " , styled as a grand finale for the show 's final episode , uses stock footage from across the show 's run to revisit every major era it ever featured in turn .

= = Content and educational value = =

No formal educational method was applied to the production , and no attempt was made to follow the official UK National Curriculum for primary school history . The show 's creators were acutely aware of educational possibilities , but ? in line with Deary 's overall mandate for the franchise ? saw their basic role as popularising history , inspiring further curiosity about the academic subject rather than attempting to teach it seriously . The show 's effectiveness in this respect was endorsed by historical scholars , including presenter Dan Snow . Writing in The Independent , Gerard Gilbert notes that Horrible Histories is part of an extensive British black @-@ comedy tradition not only in adult but also in children 's programming . In later series , as usable material from the books began to run out , there was a progression towards more sophisticated , adult sketches in terms of both creativity and educational content , as the show began relying on material that their younger viewers would be less familiar with .

Throughout , emphasis was placed on meshing comedy with the demands of historical accuracy , as defined by the mainstream scholarly consensus on the topic . This stance sometimes encompassed traditionally accepted if not actually well @-@ documented anecdotes , such as those involving Caligula . All the material used on the show was vetted by production assistant and self @-@ described " tyrannical pedant " Greg Jenner during both writing and filming ; he says that he has counted only eight errors out of more than 4 @, @ 000 facts presented over the course of the show 's run . Costuming and makeup were likewise painstakingly recreated based on primary historical sources where available .

When an error was discovered , the effort was made to correct it whenever possible . This process is perhaps most noticeable in the evolution of a song featuring the four Hanoverian King Georges : lyrics in the original 2009 video incorrectly saying that George I had " died on the loo " were correctly reassigned to George II for the song 's reprise at the show 's 2011 BBC Prom concert .

Taking cues from what Deary describes as his " seriously subversive " attitude towards the mainstream British history education model meant that the show inevitably incorporated sociopolitical comment . Perhaps most explicitly , Scots @-@ Jamaican nurse Mary Seacole was deliberately championed in both a sketch and later song as a forgotten heroine in the shadow of Florence Nightingale . The activities of African @-@ American activists Harriet Tubman and Rosa Parks were also showcased , as was ex @-@ slave boxer Bill Richmond . According to Norris , a desire to include more women 's stories was hampered by the traditionally male @-@ dominated viewpoint of historical records . The show did make an attempt to counteract this by giving showcase songs to the British women 's suffrage movement and women 's work on the British homefront during WWII , and wherever possible highlighting strong @-@ willed , dynamic female figures , including Queen Victoria , Elizabeth I and Boudicca . Religious controversies , class divisions , the ethics of conquest , and labour conditions were likewise touched on .

The association with a proven and popular children 's brand focusing on potentially sensitive subjects enabled the TV series to deflect any serious controversy regarding the same subjects , as they had demonstrably already been presented to children without any ill effects . Senior writer Steve Punt said that there were in fact very few complaints regarding the initial series ' content , adding that " everyone was very relieved " . The producers did consider some topics intrinsically unsuited for an irreverent comic treatment , as for instance the Holocaust or the harsher details of slavery , and avoided them accordingly . Norris has described her personal criteria for age suitability as whether she would be nervous watching it with a ten @-@ year @-@ old . While BBC executives in large part were willing to concede the requirements of reflecting historical realities , some topics , notably suicide , needed careful handling to avoid potentially negative impact on younger viewers . The show sometimes acknowledged particularly emotive subject matter (the WWI Christmas truce , for example) by following up the sketch not with a joke , but a more sombre elaboration of the less comedic details .

= = Production = =

The TV series used the Horrible Histories brand , logo and associated trademarks under licence from publisher Scholastic Books . It was produced for the BBC by LionTV and Citrus Television , with post @-@ production being handled by Platform Post Production . Under series producer Norris and directors Brigstocke , Steve Connelly and Chloe Thomas , each series of thirteen episodes took approximately one year to produce . The process included several months of research into the historical facts , two to three months of writing , eight weeks of filming both on location and at London 's Twickenham Studios , and three to four months of post @-@ production .

At first the sketches were derived almost exclusively from the books , whose multimedia approach , consisting of short anecdotes interspersed with cartoons , diaries , newspaper articles and recipes , proved easily adaptable to the screen either as raw material or creative inspiration . In later series , as usable material from the books and other obvious sources began to run out , concepts were drawn from more standard historical texts under Jenner 's supervision . He and fellow researchers read through many different studies and picked out suitably quirky , intriguing snippets , which were then pitched to the writers for development .

Inspiration for the music videos came from many different sources , and input from all members of the show 's creative team was encouraged . With the exception of " A Gorgeous Georgian Lady " , adapted by Deary from his book *Gorgeous Georgians* , all songs were original to the series . Once Jenner and Norris had finalised the subject matter and music genre , lyrics were commissioned from the writing team , usually Dave Cohen . These were rewritten as needed under Norris ' supervision to ensure as much factual information as possible was included . Webb then composed and recorded each song 's instrumental track at Noisegate Studios , hewing as closely as possible to the

style of the genre or artist in question . The finished vocal and backing tracks were later returned to Noisegate for post @-@ production by Webb and colleague Matt Katz .

The 2D animated sequences were directed by Tim Searle of Baby Cow Animation , based on Martin Brown 's illustrations for the books . They were voiced by Jon Culshaw and Jess Robinson along with various regular cast members . Video game @-@ styled sketches were achieved using a mix of 3D animation and live @-@ action green @-@ screen footage . Properties frequently were modified foodstuffs , with melted chocolate bars standing in for excrement and soup for vomit .

Each series debuted in the UK in April or May from 2009 to 2013 , and on international channels including Canada 's BBC Kids , Malaysia 's NTV7 , The Philippines GMA Network , and Australia 's ABC3 . Six special episodes , comprising a mix of new and existing material around a single theme , were broadcast in the UK . " Horrible Christmas " (aired in 2010) was followed by a " Sport Special " (July 2012 , to coincide with the 2012 London Olympic Games) and a " Scary Special " (autumn 2012 , themed around Halloween) . " Ridiculous Romance " (themed around Valentine 's Day) aired in February 2014 ; the " Frightful First World War Special " aired later the same year , as part of the BBC 's commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of WWI .

In autumn 2011 , the BBC edited footage from the show 's summer Prom concert into an hour @-@ long TV special (" Horrible Histories ' Big Prom Party ") , featuring specially shot linking sketches . In addition , standalone sketches hosted by Stephen Fry , as well as a special " Bob Hale Report " , were produced as part of the 2012 Sport Relief benefit programme . In the same year , several sketches were commissioned as part of the BBC 's live television coverage of the Diamond Jubilee of Elizabeth II , to be performed on Tower Bridge , but due to time constraints only one was aired .

The producers decided to cease full @-@ time production after the fifth series , citing concerns around the increasing difficulty in finding suitable historical material . However , the possibility of further specials marking important historical or holiday milestones has been discussed .

In 2015 , the BBC announced that the Horrible Histories concept would be revived in a new format , focussing on the life and times of a single historical figure per episode . The rebooted series was again developed by LionTV and will involve a largely all @-@ new production team and cast , while still retaining Jenner as lead historical consultant and many of the original series 's writers . In addition , original stars Farnaby and Howick will return in limited roles .

== = Cast == =

The cast members were recruited from sketch and character comedy , having previously had roles in Gavin & Stacey , Peep Show , The Thick of It and The Mighty Boosh TV series among others . Several of the writers and researchers also occasionally appeared in front of the camera , including Punt , Jenner , George Sawyer and Susie Donkin , while actors Mathew Baynton and Ben Willbond sometimes contributed to the writing . Laurence Rickard was recruited solely as a writer , but found himself part of both the senior writing staff and starring cast after creating the character of Bob Hale , whose extended , convoluted monologues proved impossible to hand over to anyone else .

Individual sketches and songs were cast by the production team , sometimes acting on input from the show 's stable of performers themselves . While certain roles naturally lent themselves to a particular actor , Norris said that confidence in the entire cast 's ability was such that the producers also experimented with casting against type . The demands of filming thirteen episodes ' worth of material in the same timeframe as a standard six @-@ episode sketch show , while coping with the many complex makeup and wardrobe changes required , resulted in casting also being partially dependent on the logistics of moving a performer from one character to another . Recurring characters were if at all possible played by the actor who had originated the part , leading to the development of several signature roles , as for example Baynton 's Charles II , Jim Howick 's Shouty Man , Rickard 's Bob Hale , Willbond 's Henry VIII , Martha Howe @-@ Douglas ' Elizabeth I and Simon Farnaby 's Death .

The performers were allowed to improvise provided that they maintained factual accuracy . Howick said that improvisation was actually often necessary due to the rapid @-@ fire pace of filming , which left very little time to prepare for individual roles . On the other hand , both Rickard and

Baynton suggest this enforced spontaneity may have ultimately worked to enhance the comedy , not least by preventing the jokes from becoming over @-@ rehearsed .

Six performers (Baynton , Howick , Rickard , Willbond , Howe @-@ Douglas and Farnaby) were credited as main or starring cast throughout the show 's run ; a seventh , Sarah Hadland , left after the second series but returned with an " also starring " credit for the fourth and fifth . The initial sextet appeared from Series 2 onwards as the standard face of the show at premieres and other press opportunities , and performed as a troupe for such peripheral events as the show 's BBC Prom concert . They became a particularly close @-@ knit group both personally and professionally . Eventually this led them to continue working together after Horrible Histories ceased full @-@ time production , creating , writing and starring in the TV series Yonderland and feature film comedy Bill .

The supporting cast varied considerably by series . Those performers with additional speaking parts are listed below :

The show has attracted several special guest stars . In the fourth series , Gatiss , Shearsmith and Pemberton of The League of Gentlemen joined the show , playing the panel of Hollywood producers for the " Movie Pitch " sketches . Shearsmith said , " Mark and I independently thought it was just a brilliant show that works on a number of levels ... There 's not a weak link in the team here and it 's an honour to be asked to be part of it " . Other featured guests included :

Alexei Sayle (Series 2 , Arabic healer , " Historical Hospital ")

Tanni Grey @-@ Thompson (Series 2 , herself , field reporter for " HHTV Sport ")

David Baddiel (Series 2 & 3 , storyteller Vincenzo Laroff , " Scary Stories ")

Chris Addison (Series 4 , two different " Historical Apprentice " candidates)

Amir Khan and Jermain Defoe (Series 4 , as themselves in Sport Relief sketches)

Al Murray (Series 5 , various roles , notably the drummer for the Smiths @-@ inspired Charles Dickens music video)

= = Reception = =

Horrible Histories was immediately , and almost universally , greeted with critical enthusiasm . On its debut , Alice @-@ Azania Jarvis of The Independent described the show as " fun , filthy and genuinely engaging , in a peer @-@ to @-@ peer way . " Harry Venning in The Stage approved the " seriously funny , beautifully performed and endlessly inventive sketches " along with " plenty of crowd @-@ pleasing fart and poo gags . " By the second series , the show 's cross @-@ generational appeal was beginning to attract significant attention from adult media . Naomi West of The Daily Telegraph characterised the first series as " boundary @-@ pushing " , suggesting that " the bold decision to approach the series in the same way as an adult show has been the key to its success ... [it] delivers more laughs than most post @-@ watershed comedies . " James Delingpole in The Spectator likewise recommended the show to viewers of all ages , saying that " Even though there are vast quantities of entirely gratuitous fart , bottom and wee wee jokes , the cumulative effect ? bizarrely ? is one of dumbing up rather than down . " Discussing the first two series in the The Guardian , television writer Jesse Armstrong said that " Hit shows are very difficult to achieve . You need to have everything just right ? that 's what 's so terrifying . But Horrible Histories has a great cast and brilliant writers . They 're also blessed with great source material . The tone is perfect and it is done in a non @-@ patronising , engaging way " .

Clare Heal of the Daily Express , in her review of the third series , praised the show 's " spot @-@ on spoofs of modern telly " and agreed that " There 's no particular target audience but pretty much anyone of any age will find something in there for them " . Kerrie Mills of PopMatters rated the first three series 9 / 10 , opining that the show " does also provide evidence , edgewise between the falling bodily fluids , of a sharp comic intelligence ... in fact , it might just be one of the most successful original comedy shows to appear in years . " Stephen Kelly of The Guardian argued that the fourth series had definitively transcended its roots to become not just " the best show on children 's television ? it 's one of the smartest comedies on TV " , performed by an " astonishing cast ... so superb that even special guest stars such as Chris Addison can look slightly out of their depth . " In an article discussing the League of Gentlemen troupe 's appearance in the same series , the Radio

Times ' Gareth McLean agreed that " despite nominally being a children 's programme , Horrible Histories is one of the best sketch comedies on TV " , adding that " ultimately , comedy performers relish [the] madcap , sometimes deliciously silly exuberance , which , thanks to the show 's razorsharp writing , educates as well as entertains . " Graeme Virtue of The Scotsman called the League 's reunion a " coup " for the series : " While Gatiss 's American accent was pretty duff , the bickering spark between the three Gentlemen remained . "

In her review of the fifth series , Deborah Ross of the Daily Mail wrote of her sheer pleasure in watching the show without her children , calling it " still unfailingly brilliant and funny and silly , without ever losing its sense of purpose ... There just isn 't anything else on TV that can match it for ideas , writing and performance . " Sarah Dempster of The Guardian agreed , adding that " Four years into its ingenious ' making history look less crap ' operation ... HH remains true to its aim , with meticulously harvested historical data + roaringly well @-@ observed pop culture pastiches = seemingly infinite heritage lolz . " Writing in The Independent , Grace Dent commended the cast in particular , saying that the show " has the distinct feel of a group of bright , young , erudite , writery @-@ actory sparks having a tremendously good time . " Venning of The Stage reiterated his praise of the show , adding that " it also has the courage to tackle potentially controversial events head on " , specifically citing the song featuring African @-@ American civil rights activist Rosa Parks as retelling her story in a " clever , concise and accessible way without trivialising it . "

= = = Historical accuracy = = =

Most criticism of the show revolves around the accuracy and presentation of its factual content . The TV series , like the books , has been used by educators as a classroom aid and was endorsed by UK Education Secretary Michael Gove as useful for spotlighting " neglected periods of history . " However , writing after the final episode , Simon Hoggart in The Spectator noted that " There has been some whipped @-@ up controversy about Horrible Histories " , adding that " where the books make a rudimentary attempt to teach history as a series of interconnected events , the television show is basically gags , chiefly about defecation , gluttony , murder and torture . It 's quite amusing , though whether it will pique an interest in the subject , or ? as some say ? merely encourage children to learn more about defecation , gluttony , murder and torture , we cannot know . "

More specifically , in September 2014 , responding to a complaint from the Nightingale Society , the BBC Trust determined that the show had breached editorial guidelines in the sketch highlighting the controversy surrounding Mary Seacole 's role in nursing history . In this sketch , Florence Nightingale says that she rejected the Jamaican @-@ born Seacole 's application to Nightingale 's Crimean nursing corps because it was open to " British girls " only . This was held to be imputing racially discriminatory motives to Nightingale ? and thus implying them to be historical fact ? without sufficient proof . In response , the BBC pulled the offending sketch from their website and announced it would be removed from future showings of the episode .

In a 20th @-@ anniversary retrospective of the franchise in The Telegraph , David Horspool , the history editor of the Times Literary Supplement , defended the show 's overall viewpoint , saying , " There 's no particular reason why grown @-@ up historians shouldn 't like Horrible Histories too ... They simplify , and they have a definite point of view , but all historians are guilty of that to some degree . " He further said that " Getting children interested in the past isn 't necessarily easy , and Horrible Histories does it extremely effectively ? and those who come to history because it 's fun seem far more likely to stay with it in the long run . " Writing for entertainment website DorkAdore , Anna Lowman added that " Terry Deary had the fine idea of getting kids into history by giving the facts a human face and a joke or two ... The producers of the CBBC show have perfectly transferred Deary 's ethos to television . "

The recut for BBC1 with Fry as host drew particular criticism as to whether its educational methods were suited to an adult demographic . History Today editor Paul Lay called the idea " frightening " . Historian and Labour Party MP Tristram Hunt , while admitting that he had not yet actually seen the programme , voiced his concerns that the show 's content was not " challenging and stimulating " enough for the BBC , adding that " For children , Horrible Histories is an exciting aid to engage with

the guts and gore of the past , but there are more sophisticated , populist ways of getting people involved in history than this . I 'm in favour of populism , but there has to be a bit of depth to it . "

Other critics have taken a more lenient view . Historian and television presenter Dan Snow described the show 's modus operandi as " one step above Blackadder , but that 's fine ... it plays to stereotypes , but it 's fantastic as entry @-@ level history . " Writing in The Independent , Tom Sutcliffe noted that " As a grown @-@ up you might quibble with the fact that they don 't always distinguish between things that genuinely are true and the things that people would like to be (sadly , there 's no hard evidence that Aeschylus was brained by a tortoise dropped by an overflying eagle) " , but added that " children and adults alike should enjoy the gleefully anachronistic way in which the information is presented . " Dent in The Guardian , while conceding what she called the show 's " frankly slapdash , dumbed @-@ down approach to history " , also argued that " in Horrible Histories there are always serious messages lurking amid the silliness . "

= = = Ratings = = =

In its debut week of 15 June 2009 , the show topped the UK children 's TV viewing figures with 191 @, @ 000 viewers . The first series reached a viewing peak of 50 % of UK children aged 6 ? 12 , while the second was watched by 34 % of UK children aged 6 ? 12 , or 1 @. @ 6 million total . Throughout its run , the show routinely ranked at or near the top of the CBBC ratings , reaching a peak of 548 @, @ 000 viewers for Episode 10 of Series 5 .

= = Awards and nominations = =

Horrible Histories received numerous domestic and international awards and nominations , including several BAFTA Children 's Awards , two British Comedy Awards and a Rose d 'Or Award for Best Children 's Programme . It is the first children 's programme to win a British Comedy Award and four successive children 's BAFTAs , for Best Comedy . In 2013 the show was also named in a Radio Times poll of all @-@ time greatest British children 's TV series , and was cited at No. 8 in a similar Top 50 list presented later the same year by Channel Five .

= = DVD and online releases = =

All five series of the original show , plus the " Scary (Halloween) Special " , " Ridiculous Romance " & the " Frightful First World War Special " and " Horrible Christmas " have been released on Region 2 DVD by Zentertain for the BBC , both individually and as boxed sets .

Each series , as well as the " Scary Special " and " Sport Special " , are also available for download from the UK iTunes store . As of February 2014 , all episodes from Series 1 ? 3 were available for download to American audiences on Amazon.com " Instant Video " service .

= = Spin @-@ offs = =

In 2011 , a spinoff game show , Horrible Histories : Gory Games , was launched on CBBC . Likewise coproduced by Lion TV and Citrus , the show is co @-@ hosted by Dave Lamb with puppet Rattus Rattus and includes cameos from many of the parent show 's cast . As of 2013 , the show had aired three full series . For summer 2011 , the show was repackaged for adult Sunday @-@ night audiences as Horrible Histories with Stephen Fry , a six @-@ part " best of " compilation for main channel BBC One . The show featured a selection of sketches and songs from the first two series as chosen by the producers of the parent show , with Fry replacing the puppet rat as presenter .