Reading Guide: 
*Longitude* by Dava Sobel

1. Why was Neil Armstrong an appropriate choice to write the book’s foreword?

2. Have you visited Greenwich? Did you observe John Harrison’s clocks? Did you find them as impressive as Armstrong found them?

3. Were you familiar with the essential story of latitude, longitude, and time before reading *Longitude*? What surprised you, or what new elements of the story did you learn?

4. What is the significance of the 1740 voyage of the H.M.S. Centurion?

5. What do you think of the word “genius,” and do you think Harrison qualifies as a genius? Do you think the word is overused today? Who would you consider a genius today?

6. Do you like the way Dava Sobel describes Harrison? What about how she introduces and describes his archenemy the Reverend Nevil Maskelyne?

7. William Hogarth wrote of Harrison’s “sea clock” H1 that it was “one of the most exquisite movements ever made.” What invention today could we compare to H1 with a similar fascination? Is it still possible to be fascinated in the 21st century?

8. What happened in 1765, and how did it affect Harrison? Is Lord Egmont’s assessment that Harrison is “the strangest and most obstinate creature that I have ever met with” fair?

9. This past year we have placed much hope in science and innovation and “genius.” How has science changed in 200 years? How do we react to science and to scientists? What challenges do scientists face in the 21st century? Are they different from challenges in the past? How do they differ?

10. What books do you recommend on the history of science?

Author Biography

Books to Explore

Join Bill Bryson on an unforgettable exploration of scientific genius, discovery, and invention. Edited and introduced by Bryson, with original contributions from “a glittering array of scientific writing talent” (*Sunday Observer*) that includes Margaret Atwood, Richard Dawkins, and Neal Stephenson.

From *New York Times* bestselling author Edward Dolnick, the true story of a pivotal moment in modern history when a group of strange, tormented geniuses—Isaac Newton chief among them—invented science and remade our understanding of the world.

An illuminating guide to the scientific and technological achievements of the Middle Ages through the life of a crusading astronomer-monk.

Stephen Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution*, 2018
An authoritative account of the social history of the 17th century and early 18th-century strides in science.

Web Links to Explore

Royal Museums Greenwich, John Harrison, H1: [collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/79139.html](collections.rmg.co.uk/collections/objects/79139.html)


Bayou Bend/Rienzi Book Club
Join us for the next selection of the Bayou Bend/Rienzi Book Club in May: *The Poison Plot: A Tale of Adultery and Murder in Colonial Newport* by Elaine Forman Crane. For more information, visit [mfah.org/historybookclub](mfah.org/historybookclub).

MFAH Book Club
Art and literature meet here! Designed for both established book clubs and individuals interested in creating connections between literary and visual arts, the MFAH Book Club links works of literature to works of art from the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. The MFAH Book Club presents three selections per year. Each book is accompanied by a downloadable discussion guide and is featured on the MFAH Goodreads group: [mfah.org/goodreads](mfah.org/goodreads). For more information and resources, visit [mfah.org/bookclub](mfah.org/bookclub).

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