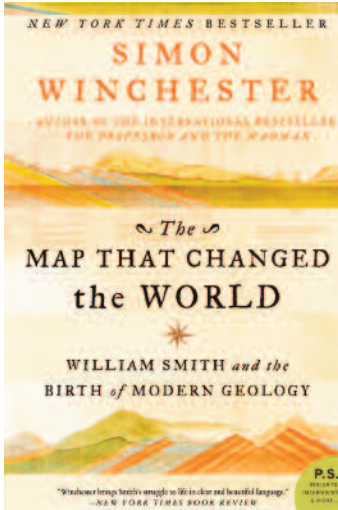


March 2016

Reading Guide: *The Map That Changed the World: William Smith and the Birth of Modern Geology* by Simon Winchester

1. Consider William Smith's early life. What disadvantages did he have to overcome?
2. What was 19th-century England like? What discoveries and cultural changes were taking place?
3. Explain the importance of the date of 4004 B.C.. Why was this date so important to Smith and his work?
4. How did Smith first find patterns in the fossils? What did the strata tell about how the earth's layers are arranged? How did Smith test his theories and what was his ultimate discovery?
5. Why didn't Smith get the recognition from his peers that he deserved? How was Smith treated by his fellow scientists? Why were they so opposed to him and his ideas?
6. One of the themes of Smith's story is triumph over snobbery. Smith was constantly outcast and viewed as dull and insignificant. He was even denied credit for his discoveries because of the "dirt on his hands." How did Smith deal with this in his professional life?
7. Creating the map was a huge undertaking both financially and professionally. What was Smith's motivation behind creating the map? Did he achieve what he set out to do?
8. How did Smith's discoveries lay the groundwork for other scientific research and theories?
9. Smith seemed to be constantly disappointed by life. A mad wife, meager background, persistent money problems, and legal troubles continued throughout his life, yet he always seemed to bounce back. Why was he so driven? How did Smith want to be remembered?
10. How has our world changed since the 19th century with regard to how society views scientific progress?

Author Biography

Simon Winchester is a British writer, journalist, and broadcaster who resides in the United States. Throughout his career at *The Guardian*, Winchester covered numerous significant events including Bloody Sunday and the Watergate Scandal. As an author, Winchester has written or contributed to more than a dozen nonfiction books and authored one novel, and his articles have appeared in several travel publications including *Condé Nast Traveler*, *Smithsonian Magazine*, and *National Geographic*.

In 1969, Winchester joined *The Guardian*, first as regional correspondent based in Newcastle upon Tyne, and later as Northern Ireland correspondent, which placed him around several events of the Troubles, including Bloody Sunday and the Belfast Hour of Terror.

After leaving Northern Ireland in 1972, Winchester was briefly assigned to Calcutta before becoming the American correspondent of *The Guardian* in Washington, D.C., where he covered news ranging from the end of Richard Nixon's administration to the start of Jimmy Carter's presidency. In 1982, while working as the chief foreign feature writer for *The Sunday Times*, Winchester was on location for the invasion of the Falkland Islands by Argentine forces. Suspected of being a spy, Winchester was held as a prisoner in Tierra del Fuego for three months.

Winchester's first book, *In Holy Terror*, was published by Faber and Faber in 1975. The book drew heavily on his first-hand experiences during the turmoil in Ulster. In 1976 Winchester published his second book, *American Heartbeat*, which dealt with his personal travels through the American heartland. Winchester's third book, *Prison Diary*, was a recounting of his imprisonment at Tierra del Fuego during the Falklands War and, as noted by Dr. Jules Smith, is responsible for his rise to prominence in the United Kingdom. Throughout the 1980s and most of the 1990s, Winchester produced several travel books, most of which dealt with Asian and Pacific locations including Korea, Hong Kong, and the Yangtze River.

Winchester's first truly successful book was *The Professor and the Madman* (1998), published by Penguin UK as *The Surgeon of Crowthorne*. Telling the story of the creation of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the book was a *New York Times* best seller, and Mel Gibson optioned the rights to a film version, likely to be directed by John Boorman.

Though Winchester still writes travel books, he has repeated the narrative nonfiction form he used in *The Professor and the Madman* several times and many of those books became best sellers. His 2001 book, *The Map That Changed the World*, focused on geologist William Smith and was Winchester's second *New York Times* best seller. In 2003 Winchester released *The Meaning of Everything*, another book about the creation of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, as well as the best-selling *Krakatoa: The Day the World Exploded*. Winchester was made Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) "for services to journalism and literature" in 2006. Winchester followed his book about Krakatoa's volcano with San Francisco's 1906 earthquake in *A Crack in the Edge of the World*. Winchester's *The Man Who Loved China* (2008) retells the life of eccentric Cambridge scholar Joseph Needham, who helped to expose China to the Western world. Winchester's latest book, *The Alice Behind Wonderland*, was released in 2011.

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