

J. Fred MacDonald. *The History Shoppe*. <http://www.thehistoryshoppe.com> (accessed February 12, 2010).

The question at the center of J. Fred MacDonald's e-book *The History Shoppe* is a familiar one for most history teachers. More often than not, students come to survey-level courses with the misconception that history is all about the memorization of obscure facts. MacDonald offers an alternative. The narrative begins when Scott Tennyson, a high school student who fancies himself the "King of History," unexpectedly stumbles upon a mysterious store called "The History Shoppe." Inside, he encounters an intriguing gentleman, Dr. Papadopoulos, who tells Scott that history is not about memorizing disparate facts, but rather about understanding and interpreting the past. Dr. Pop introduce his young student to a special machine, Clio, that transports its passengers into the production world of any film they choose. Scott visits Guernsey in the early years of World War II, explores the United States during the 1950s, and finds himself squarely in the middle of the political minefield that was the New Deal, as he seeks to formulate an answer to the question posed by countless history teachers: What is history?

Although there is nothing remarkable about the narrative itself, *The History Shoppe* succeeds admirably in its goal of illuminating professional history. It offers clear examples of how historians work (immersing themselves in sources, looking at a topic from multiple perspectives, trying to avoid moral judgment) in a straightforward style accessible to both the secondary and post-secondary student. Minor grammatical and spelling errors will give sophisticated readers pause, but they are not so prevalent as to distract from the larger point. Slightly more frustrating are historical inaccuracies, as when the story asserts that Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette died in January 1793, when the queen was in fact not executed until October of that year. A larger weakness, however, rests in the e-book's insistence on film as the ultimate historical authority; with few exceptions, Scott experiences history through film. While unsurprising (MacDonald is the president of a Chicago-based historical film archive), it remains slightly unsettling in light of students who regularly decry the reading of "boring old documents." While this reviewer has no problem with film as an historical source, and though the time-traveling Clio machine serves as a compelling metaphor for the immersive experience of archival research, the e-book's elevation of the visual record risks distorting the historical process, which remains primarily rooted in the written word.

Despite these issues, *The History Shoppe* provides many illuminating moments, as when Dr. Pop shows Scott an easy method to remember the myriad ways historians can approach a primary source; his acronym, STAMPIERE (social, technological, administrative, political, intellectual/cultural, economic, religious, external) is useful not just for Scott, but for the student-reader confronted with primary sources for the first time. The chapter entitled "Schools of Thought" explores the notion of competing interpretations of history through the lens of the New Deal, a topic relevant to the

modern student, living in the midst of an economic recession and regular political haranguing over the level of politico-economic intervention. Read in conjunction with some shorter articles on the topic, this chapter likely would prompt a lively discussion in contemporary classrooms. Finally, Scott's epiphany in the final chapter—his answer to the “what is history” question—offers seven discussion-worthy characteristics appropriate to any level, secondary or post-secondary. As such, *The History Shoppe* successfully simplifies the historical process without resorting to clichés (e.g. “Those who don't learn from the past are doomed to repeat it.”) and offers a convincing explanation of the methodological processes that distinguish historians from history buffs.

Georgia Highlands College

Jayme Akers Feagin