

Winston Churchill: A Penguin Life Study Guide

Winston Churchill: A Penguin Life by John Keegan

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Plot Summary

Sir Winston Leonard Spencer-Churchill (1874-1965) is one of the most famous leaders of the twentieth century, known primarily for leading the United Kingdom through World War II. He is also known for his famous speeches and prose, including his "We Shall Fight Them On The Beaches", "This Was Their Finest Hour" and "The Iron Curtain" speeches. Churchill is the Prime Minister of Britain from 1940 to 1945 and again from 1951 to 1955.

Churchill is also an important M.P. (Member of Parliament) in Britain, advancing important social reforms that lay the groundwork for Britain's welfare state, defending free trade and promoting balanced budgets at various periods in his political career. Starting as a member of the Conservative party he changes to the Liberal Party and then changes back again.

Churchill is a well-known writer, journalist and speech-giver prior to becoming Prime Minister. He writes several novels that are based on his experiences across the world as a soldier. He also writes several histories, such as his *The Second World War* (for which he wins the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1953), his *History of English-Speaking Peoples* and *My Early Life*, an autobiographical account of his youth.

As mentioned, Churchill is a well-known soldier who fights in India, the Sudan and the Second Boer War that not only gave him knowledge of the workings of the military but give him an unflappable sense of physical courage. He also briefly commands the 6th Battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers and serves as First Lord of the Admiralty on several occasions.

When Churchill dies, the Queen gives him a state funeral that is one of the largest funerals for a democratic leader in world history.

John Keegan's brief biography of Winston Churchill discusses all of these events and more. While many biographies of Churchill have been written, this one is short, accessible and could easily be read in a day. Keegan motivates the biography as an attempt to account, in short order, for a man that he grows up regarding as a reactionary but discovers is an extraordinary hero with the power to inspire a nation to survive in the face of great evil.

The book contains ten chapters that proceed methodically through Churchill's life. The first chapter explains Keegan's background with Churchill's memory and speeches and his role in history. The next nine chapters all cover a discreet period of Churchill's life, such as Chapter Two, which tells the story of Churchill's family and his youth, Chapter Four, which explains Churchill's period as a young M.P. from 1900-1910 and Chapter Nine, which discusses Churchill's role as a member of "The Big Three" leaders of the Allied Powers from 1941 to 1945.



Chapter One, Churchill and History

Chapter One, Churchill and History Summary and Analysis

When author John Keegan is growing up in post-war Britain, he regards Winston Churchill as a relic of a previous generation—once a great wartime leader, the man's Conservative Party represents the old capitalist, imperialist ways of the British Empire. For Keegan's generation, it is now time to mature, to turn towards the future, and leave relics like Churchill where they belong: in the past.

However, when Keegan comes to the New York City to study, he discovers a country on the rise. Unlike Britain, the United States is in its ascendancy and New York City displays the energy of that great rise to power. To pass the time, Keegan sometimes listens to records and comes across a popular American record of Churchill's wartime speeches. Churchill displays the energy of the British people and both electrifies and fascinates Keegan.

On further research, Keegan discovers that Churchill has an unbounded passion for the British and his conception of them as a stalwart, hard-working, freedom-loving people that will endure any hardship to retain their freedom and achieve victory. His force of personality allows him to impose this vision of the British upon the British themselves. Churchill is never a man for religion or even physical romance, but he is a deeply spiritual and moral individual disgusted by evil and inspired to fight it in the form of Adolph Hitler.

Keegan speculates that Churchill's lack of interest in many of the ways of the world leads to his fascination with history and prose. Undoubtedly Churchill cares more to create a good speech or a good turn of phrase than almost anything else in his life. He also composes a massive history of the English people that he is nowhere near completing prior to the Second World War but is far enough into his research that he has formed a vision of the British people powerful enough to pull a struggling people through its worst war.



Chapter Two, Family and Youth

Chapter Two, Family and Youth Summary and Analysis

Winston Churchill is in the line of the Duke of Marlborough that is, for generations, held by dishonorable and treacherous men. The wealth of the Dukedom is squandered on many occasions until his grandfather restores its good name. Winston's father, Lord Randolph Churchill, continues the reputation for some years, until his mind is destroyed by an ever-progressing syphilis infection. Churchill's mother, Jennie Jerome, is a rich American heiress who spends her marriage ignoring her sons (Winston and John), cheating on her husband and enjoying her wealth. As a result, Churchill's nanny, his "Morning Star" Mrs. Everest, takes on a motherly role.

Churchill's father could have been a great politician, or so thinks his son who writes his biography, but bad political alliances exile him from high political office early in his professional life and his mental decline makes it impossible for him to recover. Churchill's relationship with his father is one of disapproval. Churchill is a terrible student and gets into good schools only through his elite background. He is a sickly child and a poor athlete and so has great trouble qualifying for the British armed services when he applies. It is only through his military tutor, Captain Walter James that he learns enough through rote military learning to pass through.

Churchill is no fool, however. He has an unsurpassed skill at English history and a real power for English composition that grows with time. At school in the Sandhurst military school, Winston gets into shape and beats his infirmities so that he can, through his mother's social connections, get into the 4th Hussars, which takes Churchill to the Cuban War of Independence between Spain and the United States. While there, Churchill is shot at and avoids injury, but his exhilaration and thereafter fascination with military tactics will give him an impression of war that will shape his entire life.



Chapter Three, The Army, 1894-1900

Chapter Three, The Army, 1894-1900 Summary and Analysis

Churchill leaves Cuba a full member of the Hussars and might easily spend his career in that organization, retiring with wealth and esteem. However, he is uninterested. Instead, he decides to pursue journalism and politics along with his military service. He decides to go to India in 1896 to patrol the area against insurgents. In his off days in Bangalore, he reads voraciously though more non-fiction, history and logic than anything else. He even reads all the old British newspapers of note he can get his hands on for decades and decades before.

In 1897, Churchill gets involved with the Hussars in India in the Malakand Field Force fighting against a group of Muslim Pathans, locals who resent Indian and British attempts to control them. During the conflict he joins the 35th Sikhs to advance on a Pathan stronghold. Initially the assault goes poorly and Churchill is sent for reinforcements. Afterwards, he writes a book, *The Story of the Malakand Field Force*, about the incident to raise his profile; the book is a success.

Churchill's next experience in the army occurs under General Sir Herbert Kitchener who is leading a military expedition to the Sudan to reestablish British control over the Upper Nile. Kitchener does not like him but he eventually is able to join up and write a novel about it as well, *Savrola*, which does quite well in 1900. The prime minister, Lord Salisbury, reads Churchill's first novel and gets him into the Sudan leading the 21st Lancers. His tour as a Lancer becomes part of his legend even though the campaign goes poorly.

After the campaign, Churchill leaves the army and writes professionally, writing *The River War*, which is as successful as his first novel. He also briefly has a love interest, Pamela Plowden, but it is clear to her that Churchill is only interested in power and fame so she does not reciprocate.

Churchill is also in South Africa during the Boer War doing some writing. During the siege of Ladysmith, Churchill is captured and quickly escapes, an event that makes him famous in Britain. Afterwards, Churchill becomes an officer in the South African Light Horse as an unpaid assistant so that he can be both a writer and an army man. After several skirmishes he leaves the army again and publishes *London to Ladysmith via Pretoria*, which is as successful as his previous three books.

As a result of his army experience, Churchill will never doubt his physical courage and has first hand contact not only with death but with killing. While sometimes delighting in the glory and romance of war, he always understands its horrors.



Chapter Four, Parliament, 1900-1910

Chapter Four, Parliament, 1900-1910 Summary and Analysis

Churchill is finished with the armed services for the moment and is elected to the House of Commons on February 14th as a Conservative who benefits from the public enthusiasm for the Boer War. Churchill is giving powerful speeches at the time and despite the Conservative defense of the British Empire's expansion against the Liberals, Churchill is skeptical of continuing to expand British Imperial holdings at the expense of its commercial power and the risk of war with Continental European powers.

At the same time, Churchill is an ardent supporter of free trade at a time when it is becoming less popular with increased German and American economic power. He also increasingly comes to support anti-poverty policies. Both of these changes cause him to go over to the Liberal Party. While risky, Churchill wins his seat by a comfortable majority in January 1906. In 1908 Churchill becomes president of the Board of Trade, which lasts until 1910. He becomes familiar with those resisting British rule all over the world. While he admires the Irish Sinn Fein guerrilla leader Michael Collins and the Boers, he hates the pacifist Indian resisters, fighting independence until it comes against his will in 1947.

In May 1908, Churchill meets Clementine Hozier; he marries her in September. She has a high intellectual quality and strong character and while there is no spark at first, he is a great admirer of hers. Yet he also needs a wife for appearances as a young politician. "Clemmie" is wellborn but not an aristocrat. She is poor but she is incredibly beautiful, which bowls over Churchill. She often keeps life together for Churchill, serving as a counterweight to all his vices. They have five children, Diana, Randolph, Sara, Mary and Marigold (though Marigold dies at age three). They love their children dearly.

Keegan argues that Churchill is ahead of the curve when Lloyd George starts to defend expanded anti-poverty policy under the liberal banner. George supports a progressive tax, unemployment benefits and an early sickness benefit. George takes the credit for Churchill's early radicalism, a radicalism that will later be covered up by his wartime leadership.



Chapter Five, The Center of Events, 1910-1915

Chapter Five, The Center of Events, 1910-1915 Summary and Analysis

Churchill will turn from domestic politics to military affairs after serving briefly as Home Secretary. Germany has unwisely decided to become the dominant military state in Continental Europe and to challenge Britain for dominance on the high seas starting in 1900. In 1911 Churchill becomes First Lord of the Admiralty, determined to stop the German rise to Naval Power. Before he has opposed British naval expansion but now he fights hard for increased military spending and the building of new Queen Elizabeth class battleships.

Churchill has to fight for spending against Lloyd George who wants to spend more on schools and welfare. The political tensions increase. On August 4th, 1914, Britain is obliged by treaty to defend Belgium and so war against The Germans, Austro-Hungarians and Ottomans begins in earnest. He then focuses on the land war, despite his responsibility for the naval effort.. He is able to help the Belgians hold off the Germans at Dunkirk but he then organizes a direct attack on the Ottomans, which fails and hurts him politically due to a major loss at Gallipoli. He is eventually forced to retire and retreats to the country with his family.

However, Churchill grows tired of country life and on November 18th, 1915 leaves home as an Oxford Hussars major and goes to France where he is quickly given the offer to command the British Expeditionary Force (or BEF). He asks to join the Second Battalion Grenadier Guards on the front line and leads the Grenadiers in becoming a 'New Army' soldiers and engineers. He fights bravely and constantly risks his life. All the while he attacks his political enemies, losing many political friends. So, afterward Clemmie advises him to return to the Battalion, which he does for a mere two months. Afterwards he leaves the BEF for politics once more.

Churchill can arguably take pride in his military service. He shows no fear and proves himself to his men. Had he not departed for parliament when he did he might have felt obligated to continue leadership in the army; however, he feels a call to reconstruct his political life, a call his personality cannot resist.



Chapter Six, War and Peace, 1915-1932

Chapter Six, War and Peace, 1915-1932 Summary and Analysis

Churchill has to struggle to reconstruct his political career, as initially most in the House of Commons ignore him. However, when Churchill is cleared of wrongdoing for the incident in the Dardanelles in March 1917, things begin to change. Along with this, Lloyd George replaces Asquith as Prime Minister and Churchill and George reconcile. Churchill quickly becomes minister of munitions and then, two months after World War I ends, he becomes secretary of state for war and air.

This appointment leads him to become involved in supporting the Whites against the Bolshevik Reds in the Russian Revolution. From the outset Churchill is a staunch anti-communist, opposed to their leadership (Lenin and later Stalin) in every way save the extreme expediency of an alliance during World War Two. Churchill's entire sense of the goodness of England is opposed to communism.

Churchill also presides over the partitioning of Ireland into a Northern and Southern portion to help control the constant religious warring there. His negotiations with Michael Collins, men who share respect, go well. Churchill also has to struggle to handle the collapse of the Ottoman Empire between 1921-1922, particularly with the liberation of Greece and the negotiation of a peace treaty with Turkey.

By 1923, Churchill is no longer in office or parliament. The Liberal Party is collapsing, never to achieve power alone again. The Conservatives oust George and the Liberals. The Labour Party is taking many Liberal votes and politicians. Since Churchill is disturbed by their increasing socialism and friendliness to the Soviets, he decides to cross the aisle again and become a Conservative. Stanley Baldwin, the Conservative Prime Minister, immediately recognizes him as a political asset and makes him Chancellor of the Exchequer. As chancellor, Churchill fights hard for free-trade and the gold standard and resists expanding social and military spending, though none of his budgets are hostile to the working class, which puts him at odds with the Conservatives.

However, the Conservatives are defeated in 1929 and Labour elected. Churchill is not offered office and starts to protest earnestly against the rise of totalitarian politics in Germany. At the same time, he finishes his history of the First World War and *My Early Life* and goes on the lecture circuit to recoup his losses in the stock market crash. While in New York, he is hit by a car and seriously injured. However, Churchill survives and recovers, acquiring a contract to write an entire history of the English-speaking peoples, a work that carries a huge cash advance but that he will not complete for twenty years.



Chapter Seven, The Coming of War, 1933-1940

Chapter Seven, The Coming of War, 1933-1940 Summary and Analysis

Appeasement as a response to rising German power gradually takes form in the early 1930s, despite Churchill's constant protestations. He sees that the main issue for Britain is military, not economic, despite the Great Depression. Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and his cabinet are focused on shepherding a gradual industrial recovery. However, Hitler's seizure of power in 1933 leads to a growing threat. Germany quickly becomes the world's leading military power. Churchill fights to increase the size of the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, but he fails. The Chamberlain government leaves them with few funds.

Between 1934 and 1936, Hitler continuously disobeys the terms of the Versailles treaty and builds up the army. He dramatically increases the size of the Navy and creates the Luftwaffe. Churchill's protestations concerning these clear aggressive moves are downplayed and ignored by a government that wants to resist the possibility of another massive, devastating world war. However, behind the scenes, many military men risk their jobs to give Churchill private information about the growing dangers. The only thing that prevents Churchill from having even more authority is his public support for the unpopular proposed marriage of King Edward VIII to twice-divorced American, Mrs. Wallis Simpson.

Hitler's calls for a "Greater Germany" continue unabated. He quickly assimilates Austria into Germany, runs Slovakia as a puppet state and makes the Czech part of Czechoslovakia a Nazi protectorate. Churchill urges a strategic alliance with France and its Slavic allies to provide a counterweight to Nazi power but he again fails. He famously and publicly laments the fall of Czechoslovakia. His consistency and oratory begin to weaken the political leadership, and so military expenditures increase, with the Royal Air Force dramatically expanding. Thus the RAF expands in 1938 before Hitler takes over Czechoslovakia proper in 1939. Hitler's agreement with Stalin to divide Poland goes through that Fall and this triggers war with France and then Britain who has allied itself with Poland. Yet Poland quickly collapses, as does Chamberlain's government.

Once the war begins, Britain and France methodically mobilize but Germany does not attack in the winter. Hitler conquers Denmark and Norway and the Russians take Finland. The Allied Land campaign is not successful. Eventually a vote of no confidence spells the end of Chamberlain. Labour makes it clear that they will not serve under him. On May 10th, 1940, Chamberlain resigns and recommends Winston Churchill as his successor and his advice is constitutionally binding.



Chapter Eight, A Prime Minister Alone, 1940-1941

Chapter Eight, A Prime Minister Alone, 1940-1941 Summary and Analysis

Churchill has to quickly learn the ropes as Prime Minister but does so handily. He immediately sets up a daily routine and strict private security for military decision-making. He is truly a national Prime Minister, with leaders from Labour, the Liberals and the Conservatives in his cabinet. He does his best to strengthen the resolve of the French, despite the fact that the French army is completely collapsing. Churchill's speeches help inspire the British to believe that while the French may falter that they never will. Churchill's sense of British history allows him to construct the image of the British people as a proud, martial, moral and free people that have never bowed to a tyrant.

France eventually falls and Churchill hopes that the conquered peoples of Europe can be led to rebel against the Nazis. This is perhaps his worst mistaken assumption of the war because almost no one is willing to resist the Nazis. Those that do in Yugoslavia and Greece are ruthlessly suppressed, though they are able to create instability at the Nazi Empire's southern border that the Russians are eventually able to exploit.

Churchill constantly looks for ways to hit back at the Nazis, but focuses primarily on probing the periphery of the Nazi Empire, looking for weakness. The North African part of the war is essential to keeping Britain's ties to its Asian holdings open, though this is a small part of the war. However, due to fierce British fighting, Hitler has to put Operation Sea Lion, the invasion of Britain, on hold. He has decided to focus on Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of Russia and the suppression of rebellions in Yugoslavia and Greece. The British, meanwhile, dismantle the Italian "empire" in Ethiopia and Somalia, though Rommel will quickly provide a counterbalance in Libya.

All the while, Churchill is lobbying President Franklin Roosevelt of the United States to bring the United States into the war. Roosevelt only promises as much aid as he can give short of war, ultimately leading the United States Congress to pass the lend-lease act which allows the British to borrow supplies and pay for them after the war ends.

Churchill has to inspire the British as they are "standing alone" for the six months between January and June 1941. It is at this time that Britain suffers the most, that Churchill is the most depressed and that he gives some of his greatest speeches.

Things only change when Hitler declares war on the Soviet Union. Churchill publicly declares that they will aid the Russians but takes back not a single harsh word leveled against communism in the past. Churchill is not able to offer much help at first but

Hitler's decision to continue the invasion of Russian into the winter Churchill realizes would prove a mistake.

Japan's increasingly imperial aims in Asia are being fought by the United States through a series of trade restrictions, military maneuvers and embargoes, which ultimately lead Japan to bomb Pearl Harbor in December, 1941. That very day Churchill is convinced that the newly formed allies will win the war.



Chapter Nine, The Big Three, 1941-1945

Chapter Nine, The Big Three, 1941-1945 Summary and Analysis

Although the United States enters the war, victory is four years away and it will take some time for the United States to mobilize. The Allies suffer a few early defeats, particularly in the east. Due to the great power of the United States and the Soviet Union, Churchill is increasingly eclipsed in importance and does his best to hide it publicly. Churchill travels the world, putting great stress on his naturally weak physical form at an advanced age. In December 1941, Churchill has a heart attack and he has further trouble in 1942. The depression from losses in the war increasingly affect his health; particularly stressful is his attempt to dissuade the Americans from invading Europe as early as 1942.

However, by the end of 1942, things begin to turn around. Churchill replaces Gen. Auchinleck with General Montgomery, who is incredibly successful, routing Rommel in North Africa. By the middle of the summer of 1943, the Soviet Union turns the tide against the Nazis and Stalin is emboldened to demand more action from the Allies. The Americans, now dominant on the Allied side, push for Operation Overlord. Churchill resists, but only to the Allies' disadvantage. The Americans care only for defeating Hitler as quickly as possible and then turning towards Japan. Churchill's status among the Big Three only continues to decline. In early 1944 Churchill has another disastrous medical crisis, which many later speculate is due to the continued stress of his worry over D-Day. Most of the assault is planned between Eisenhower and Montgomery.

However, D-Day succeeds; eventually France is retaken and General de Gaulle returns triumphantly home. The success of Operation Overlord completely revives Churchill physically and emotionally. He will be ill again only briefly. His revival is visible as he can now travel. Roosevelt is decaying quickly and Stalin's fear of flying prevents him from traveling.

With Roosevelt's physical collapse, Churchill has to deal with Stalin directly, negotiating over the postwar future of Europe, but Stalin has the military upper hand. Churchill fights hard to maintain the freedom of Greece and he succeeds. However, at the Yalta Conference, Churchill realizes that most of Eastern and Central Europe will fall into Soviet hands. Roosevelt is near death and puts up no fight at all. On April 14th, 1945 he dies. However, the war will be over within five months. When victory is achieved, Churchill returns home in triumph and gives one of his great speeches thanking the British people for their ardent service to their nation.



Chapter Ten, Apotheosis

Chapter Ten, Apotheosis Summary and Analysis

After the war, Churchill is enormously popular, but politically he is seen as reactionary, as anti-worker and anti-welfare. In 1945, Clement Attlee and the Labour Party come to power. They create the National Health Service (which Keegan reminds us is partly Churchill's idea) and nationalize a huge range of industries (which Churchill bitterly derides as akin to fascist authoritarianism, an unpopular accusation at the time).

Churchill focuses soon after his defeat on finishing his six volumes of *The Second World War*. He completes them all by the astonishingly early date of 1951 when he turns 78. He makes \$1.4 million American for the rights to the books and wins the 1953 Nobel Prize for Literature. He also begins to speak out strongly against communism; his speaking out is criticized at the time, particularly by the United States. No one wants to exacerbate new political tension but Churchill thinks that Bolshevism is as bad as fascism.

Churchill also turns towards trying to create a European super nation-state and ally it with the British Commonwealth and the United States. He pushes for the foundation of NATO as well. Churchill also gives his greatest postwar speech at this time, denouncing Soviet expansion in Eastern Europe as creating the "iron curtain," thus setting the imagery and stage for the Cold War.

In 1950, Churchill still leads the Conservative Party and is very old at the time. He is in that year elected Prime Minister again though he promises to resign early and give over the reins of government to Anthony Eden. His remaining acts are to help ensure against a Third World War. The new young Queen Elizabeth II elevates him to a dukedom. However, in 1953 he has a stroke, paralyzing him on his left side. He still struggles to recover and eventually does. Afterwards he continues to write his *History of the English-Speaking Peoples*.

In November 1954, Churchill turns eighty. On April 5th of 1955, he resigns. Afterwards he spends his life in luxury, though he has serious strokes in 1956 and 1958 and breaks his hip in 1962. In 1965 he has a fourth stroke and dies on January 10th, 1965 at ninety years of age. The British people celebrate him at his funeral and forget all of the domestic political disputes he was involved in. His funeral is huge. The British people still have an enormous pride in him.

Keegan notes that Churchill is a complex man and that his relationship with his wife is close and important. Herself a fascinating person, Clemmie's only interest is in Churchill and keeping him going onward to his great purpose. Keegan also emphasizes that Churchill's role as an architect of the British welfare state should not be forgotten and that his ardent commitment to individual freedom should be recognized as prescient. He

is, of course, responsible for pulling the United States into World War II and is a spectacular writer and orator who pays obsessive attention to the written word.



Characters

Winston Churchill

Since *Winston Churchill: A Penguin Life* is a biography of Winston Churchill, he is obviously its most important character. In the book, nearly all aspects of Churchill's life are examined from his lineage to the events following his death. Little about Churchill is left unexamined.

Churchill's character traits come in for particularly close scrutiny; the most interesting and valuable part of studying Churchill seems to be understanding how he perseveres, despite physical ailments, an abiding depression and a severe level of stress that would have done in most normal men. Not only does he keep himself together, but he does so while inspiring a nation to fight against the most powerful military force in the world and arguably against one of the most powerful military forces in history.

Churchill, it is clear, wants power and fame. He yearns to make a difference and to be recognized for it. Many recognize him as ambitious early on and dislike or despise him for it. In fact, he loses a major love interest for this very reason. It is Churchill's sense of ability and destiny that leads him to encourage the British people as he does and it is his sense of history that gives him the ability to construct an image of the British people that draws them together and inspires them. His total resilience, creativity and hatred of losing that drives him forward.

Clementine Churchill

Clementine Ogilvy Spencer-Churchill, Baroness Spencer-Churchill, nee Hozier, lives from 1885 to 1977 and is the wife of Winston Churchill. Educated at home, Clementine is a naturally shy and solitary person. When she meets Winston Churchill, they are initially romantically uninterested in one another but Churchill needs a wife for his career. However, after they are married, they quickly develop a strong affection for one another.

Churchill always enormously admires Clementine for her intellect and social sense. She routinely advises him on personal and political matters and does her best to restrain his natural vices, which include drinking, gambling and hanging out with the "wrong crowd." She and Winston Churchill have five children: Diana, Randolph, Sara, Mary and Marigold, though Marigold dies at an early age. They love being parents, despite Churchill's constant absence.

Keegan paints Clementine Churchill as the strength behind Winston. Not only does she restrain him from vice, but she constantly encourages him and helps hold him together in times of stress. She also is one of the only people Churchill ever encounters who is wholly unafraid of him and who can criticize him with affection. Keegan emphasizes that both individuals have few close confidants but confide deeply in one another. They are



together emotionally and have trouble connecting with almost anyone else. In fact, after their children grow up and leave home, they do not maintain regular contact.

Randolph Churchill

Churchill's father who constantly pushes him to succeed despite harshly disapproving of his choices in many circumstances.

David Lloyd George

Prime Minister of Britain between 1916 and 1922 who guides Britain through the First World War. He is responsible for much of Churchill's rise to power.

Herbert Henry Asquith

Prime Minister of Britain between 1908 and 1916 who is responsible for Churchill's first positions within government.

Clement Richard Attlee

Leader of the Labour Party who is elected Prime Minister in 1945 following Britain's rejection of Churchill as a wartime leader. He is deputy Prime Minister under Churchill during World War II.

Adolf Hitler

The totalitarian dictator of Nazi Germany who is Churchill's historical nemesis.

Josef Stalin

The totalitarian dictator of Soviet Russia who Churchill reluctantly allies with during World War II despite despising his political philosophy and government. After the war, Stalin and Churchill fight over how to divide up post-war Europe.

Franklin Roosevelt

President of the United States during World War II and Churchill's American counterpart who is a close ally of Churchill's but resists getting the United States into the war before Pearl Harbor.

General Bernard Montgomery

Churchill's lead general during World War II.



Objects/Places

Dukedom of Marlborough

Churchill is an heir of the dukedom of Marlborough and writes a biography of one of his ancestors who holds the office.

Sandhurst Royal Military Academy

The military academy where Churchill goes to school.

The Second Boer War

Fought from 1899 to 1902 between the British Empire and two of the Boer republics in South Africa (the Transvaal Republic and the Orange Free State), this is a conflict in which Churchill is involved. He comes to respect the Boers later on.

World War One

The first great world war that lasts from 1914 to 1918 during which Churchill serves as Minister of Munitions and just after which he serves as Secretary of State for War and Secretary of State for Air. He is also involved in the Russian Civil War at the same time.

First Lordship of the Admiralty

In 1939 Churchill is made First Lord of the Admiralty and a member of the War Cabinet.

World War Two

Lasting from 1939 to 1945, Churchill is one of the defining leaders during this period, leading the United Kingdom to victory.

The Liberal Party

Churchill is a member of the British Liberal Party between being a member of the Conservative Party.



The Conservative Party

Churchill starts off in politics as a Conservative but leaves due to his stance on free trade, though he returns to the party when the Liberal Party begins to collapse. He leads the Conservative Party from the early forties through the mid-fifties.

The United Kingdom

The country that Churchill leads during the Second World War, during which he is Prime Minister.

Nazism

The national socialist ideology that is popular in the 1930s and 1940s in Germany and that gives rise to Adolph Hitler.

Communism

The internationalist socialist ideology that is embodied in the person of Josef Stalin during World War II and that is bitterly opposed by Churchill for his entire political life.

Speeches and Prose

Churchill is a master of the written word and writes very famous speeches, including the "We Will Fight Them on the Beaches" speech and "The Iron Curtain" speech.

History Books

Churchill writes history texts in multiple volume sets, including one of World War II and one of the history of English-speaking peoples.



Themes

Ambition

A crucial theme of the first half of Winston Churchill: A Penguin Life is that Winston Churchill is a man who loves power and has great ambitions to rise to great prominence. Each step in his life is clearly a stepping stone to the next as soon as he becomes socially, academically and politically aware early in his adult life. Serving in war gives him a sense of physical and emotional courage and a natural hatred of tyranny drives him to buck all the authorities he knows, and later all the dictators he encounters. Many people deride Churchill's obvious drive to rule, including M.P.s, who often find him insufferable. Churchill even loses a serious love interest over his love of fame.

Churchill is always eager to promote himself and writes extensively for this reason. He becomes particularly well-known early in his life for his books about his experiences in war prior to World War One and it is quite clear that Churchill relentlessly pursues reconstructing his political career whenever he suffers a setback in his reputation. Churchill also strives to maintain prominence even when he reaches the height of his power as Prime Minister. He hates losing to Attlee in 1945 and very much dislikes being eclipsed in prominence by Stalin and Roosevelt during World War II. Churchill's ambitions continue into old age, when he is Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative Party until 1955, when he is eighty years old.

Resilience

Churchill's ambition is closely tied to his total resilience in the face of challenges. Most surprising is Churchill's total physical resilience despite having a body naturally weak to physical ailments. He nearly dies on several occasions and continues to fight in old age despite having three strokes and becoming paralyzed on his right side for some time. He has a heart attack and is even hit by a car. Churchill suffers from regular depression, the most severe of which is caused by his anxiety leading up to D-Day and the implementation of Operation Overlord. One of Churchill's doctors once finds it absolutely incredible that any man, particularly in Churchill's old age, can handle his constant physical traveling, heart condition, tendency to stroke without fear and without slowing down, describing Churchill as obeying "no rules."

Churchill's resilience is also spiritual and moral. He refuses to ever be intimidated by Hitler and constantly taunts him. He challenges Stalin and refuses to back down save when he is absolutely forced. Despite political losses, he always bounces back with a plan to achieve power once again and he writes constantly and with great care, publishing dozens of books, some of them quite extensive undertakings. Churchill lives to over ninety years old and is active until the very end. He is always determined to win every battle he fights, particularly on behalf of the British people.



The History, Language and People of England

Winston Churchill is a great admirer of the British people and British history. This is true for his entire adult life. As a child, Churchill displays a great love of history and some ability, an ability that matures with time. He writes numerous historical texts, some quite lengthy. He writes a short autobiographical work about his early childhood called *My Early Life*. He also writes a history of his ancestor, the Duke of Marlborough. He publishes several books of his speeches and writes a massive six volume series called *The Second World War* that allows him to push his understanding of the Second World War and that wins him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1953. He writes numerous books about his experiences as a war correspondent and writes a large history of the English-speaking peoples.

Churchill's knowledge of British history helps him to generate a national image of the British people as lovers of freedom and opponents of tyranny, as resilient and willing to sacrifice for the common good. He helps the British people to adopt this image of themselves during wartime. He is also nearly obsessed with good prose and giving good speeches, always honing his writing and speaking craft. Thus, one of the most important themes of Churchill's life is his love of Britain, its people, history and the English language, the latter of which he is clearly a master.



Style

Perspective

The perspective of *Winston Churchill: A Penguin Life* is exclusively that of its author, John Keegan. Born in 1934, Keegan grows up, as he makes clear, thinking of Churchill as a reactionary Conservative who, while a great wartime leader, makes a poor peacetime Prime Minister. He notes that his perspective on Churchill changes substantially when he comes to the United States and starts to appreciate the United States' people's admiration for him, particularly when he hears a record of Churchill's wartime speeches.

In 1960, Keegan is made a lecturer in Military History at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, where Churchill also attended school, and helps to educate officers for the British Army for twenty-six years, becoming a senior lecturer. After 1986, Keegan leaves the academy and becomes a Defense correspondent and writes for *National Review Online* in the 2000s. Keegan has written twenty-three books to date. Due to Keegan's background as a military historian and as something of a conservative (*National Review Online* is a standard-bearer website in the American conservative movement), he undoubtedly regards Winston Churchill highly. The reader should be aware of this slant. Churchill is clearly deeply admired by the author and the level of criticism of Churchill is quite small in comparison to the undercurrent of praise. Keegan goes out of his way to dispel negative charges made against Churchill, arguing, for instance, that Churchill helped to put together Britain's welfare state.

Tone

The tone of *Winston Churchill: A Penguin Life* combines the historical and the adulatory. John Keegan is a British military historian who is a great admirer of British history, having written about it extensively. He clearly regards Churchill highly and it comes through in the text. This is particularly clear in the first chapter when Keegan describes how as he is coming of age politically, he and his generation see Churchill as a Conservative reactionary but that once he gets a more American perspective on Churchill he is able to break out of his ideological shell and appreciate Churchill for the great man that he is. The tone at this stage in the book is highly positive, particularly when Keegan describes being "electrified" by Churchill's speeches.

However, by and large the tone is an evenly-paced telling of the story of Churchill's life with little fanfare. The tone effectively lets the events speak for themselves, which are exciting and interesting enough on their own. The events of the book unfold in a logical order with little skipping in between periods in Churchill's life. While the structure of the book builds to a climax during Churchill's wartime leadership, the tone hardly climaxes at all. Again, Keegan writes as an impartial historian for most of the book despite writing on what is ostensibly an exciting subject with wide interest.



Structure

John Keegan's *Winston Churchill: A Penguin Life* is a short biography, only around two hundred pages. It is also a relatively simple biography, telling the story of Churchill's life in ten chapters divided into discreet periods of Churchill's life. Chapter One, *Churchill and History*, explains how Keegan becomes interested in Churchill and how his personal impression of Churchill differs quite a bit from a more informed historical picture. It also explains how history views Churchill generally.

Chapter Two, *Family and Youth*, gives some background on Churchill's ancestors and his parents, their marriage and Churchill's birth. It also discusses his childhood and teenage years. Chapter Three, *The Army, 1894-1900*, depicts Churchill's experience in the British Armed Forces. Chapter Four, *Parliament, 1900-1910*, takes the reader through Churchill's life as a relatively young M.P. in the British House of Commons and Chapter Five, *The Center of Events, 1910-1915*, explains the various positions Churchill occupied during World War I and soon thereafter.

Chapter Six, *War and Peace, 1915-1932*, covers the interwar period prior to Hitler's rise to power and the various different political functions and times and trials that Churchill endured. Chapter Seven, *The Coming of War*, shows how Churchill early on recognized the Nazi threat for what it was and pushed Britain to intervene. Chapter Eight, *A Prime Minister Alone*, discusses Churchill's eventful first year in power. Chapter Nine, *The Big Three, 1941-1945*, takes Churchill through the rest of World War II as one of the three leaders of the Allied Powers. Chapter Ten, *Apotheosis*, explains the remainder of Churchill's life following the war.

Quotes

"Conquer we must; conquer we shall." (Chapter 1, 6)

"This was their finest hour." (Chapter 1, 6)

"We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing-grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender."
(Chapter 1, 8)

"In 1895 Winston's future had no material foundation, and he was almost without social or family support." (Chapter 2, 23)

"Cuba, nevertheless, had introduced Churchill to war. His understanding of its nature was to ramify throughout the rest of his life." (Chapter 2, 34)

"We are all British here and we will see you through." (Chapter 3, 53)

"Ah, horrible war, amazing medley of the glorious and squalid, the pitiful and sublime, if modern men of light and leading saw your face closer, simple folk would see it hardly ever." (Chapter 3, 55)

"We shall make a fatal bargain if we allow the moral force which this country has so long exerted to become diminished, or perhaps destroyed, for the sake of the costly, trumpery, military playthings on which the Secretary of State for War has set his heart."
(Chapter 4, 59)

"It is clear in retrospect that the more radical social reformer of the two was Churchill, and that, had not the chance of politics drawn his career away into nonsocial fields, he might have gone on to carry his party even further toward the achievement of universal welfare, which was to be the single most important movement in British domestic affairs for the rest of the century." (Chapter 4, 73)

"The Conservatives wanted six, the Liberals wanted four; we compromised on eight."
(Chapter 5, 78)

"From 1932 onward he found a new cause: resistance to the rise of totalitarian politics in Germany." (Chapter 6, 109)

"This is only the first sip, the first foretaste of a bitter cup which will be proffered to us year by year unless by a supreme recovery of moral health and martial vigour, we arise again and take our stand for freedom as in the olden time." (Chapter 7, 125)

"That evening Winston went to Buckingham Palace and returned as prime minister."
(Chapter 7, 129)



"You ask: What is our policy? I will say: It is to wage war by sea, land and air with all our might ... You ask: What is our aim? I can answer in one word: Victory! Victory at all costs, victory in spite of all terror, victory however long and hard the road may be." (Chapter 8, 133)

"So we had won after all!" (Chapter 8, 150)

"This is your victory ... Everyone, man or woman, has done their best. Neither the long years nor the dangers, nor the fierce attacks of the enemy, have in any way weakened the independent resolve of the British nation. God bless you all!" (Chapter 9, 170)

"In war, resolution; in defeat, defiance; in victory, magnanimity; in peace, goodwill." (Chapter 10, 175)

"This astonishing creature obeys no laws, recognizes no rules." (Chapter 10, 181)

"They never asked the question, 'What shall we gain?' They asked only the question, 'Where lies the right?' It was thus that they marched away forever, and yet from their uncalculating exaltation and devotion, detached from all consideration of material gain, we may be sure that good will come to their countrymen and to this island they guarded in its reputation and safety, so faithfully and so well.' Occasionally and unintentionally men write their own epitaphs. Winston Churchill's tribute to the sailors-turned-soldiers of the RND may stand as his own memorial." (Chapter 10, 191-192)



Topics for Discussion

Discuss two personal traits that helped Churchill become a great national leader that he clearly possessed from early on in his life.

How did Churchill's relationship with his wife help him to accomplish the great tasks he set for himself?

How did Churchill's time in the Army prepare him for being a Prime Minister during World War Two?

Which feature of Churchill's life most surprised you and why?

What do you think Churchill's greatest personal strength was? His greatest weakness? Explain.

What consistent political principles does Keegan attribute to Churchill in his political career? Do you think Keegan is right to see so much consistency in Churchill?

To what extent is Keegan's biography of Churchill even-handed? Is it too laudatory? Explain.