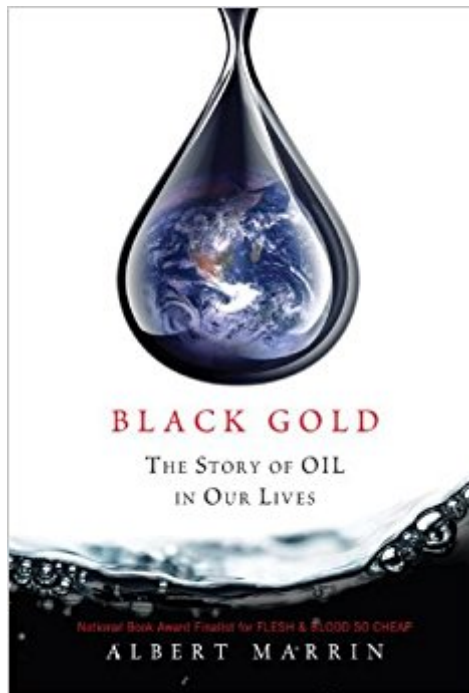




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Black Gold: The Story Of Oil In Our Lives



Synopsis

Oil is not pretty, but it is a resource that drives the modern world. It has made fortunes for the lucky few and provided jobs for millions of ordinary folks. Thick and slippery, crude oil has an evil smell. Yet without it, life as we live it today would be impossible. Oil fuels our engines, heats our homes, and powers the machines that make the everyday things we take for granted, from shopping bags to computers to medical equipment. Nations throughout the last century have gone to war over it. Indeed, oil influences every aspect of modern life. It helps shape the history, society, politics, and economy of every nation on earth. This riveting new book explores what oil is and the role this precious resource has played in America and the world.

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Customer Reviews

ALBERT MARRIN is the author of numerous highly regarded nonfiction books for young readers, including the National Book Award finalist *Flesh and Blood So Cheap: The Triangle Fire and Its Legacy*, *Years of Dust*, and *Sitting Bull and His World*. His many honors include the Washington Children's Book Guild and Washington Post Nonfiction Award for an "outstanding lifetime contribution that has enriched the field of children's literature," the James Madison Book Award for lifetime achievement, and the National Endowment for Humanities Medal awarded to him by

President George W. Bush.

1A FREAK OF GEOLOGYThe stuff we pump into our gas tanks is a freak of geology, the product of a series of lucky breaks over millions of years. --Tim Appenzeller
Of Earth and Living BeingsOil is not pretty. When it is taken from beneath the earth's surface, it is called crude oil, or crude for short. Although crude can be green, red, straw-colored, or chocolate brown, it is usually black. Because it is so valuable, in the late 1800s people in the industry nicknamed it "black gold." Since then, it has made fortunes for the lucky few and provided jobs for millions of ordinary folks. Thick and slippery, crude oil has an evil smell, giving off vapors that make eyes water and throats sore. Yet without it, life as we live it today would be impossible. Oil fuels the engines that move us and our goods from place to place. It heats our homes and powers the machines that make the everyday things we take for granted. Thousands of products, from drinking straws to plastic shopping bags, from plant fertilizer to computers and medical equipment, begin as crude oil. So do most school backpacks, knee guards--even the yellow "rubber" duck floating in your bathtub. Modern weapons such as tanks, aircraft, and ships are so much metallic junk without oil products to make them run. Oil influences every aspect of modern life. It has helped shape the history, society, politics, and economy of every nation on Earth. Nations have fought wars for black gold, and sadly, probably will do so in the future. Yet few who rely on this vital substance know much about it. What, exactly, is oil? How was it formed? When? Where?¹To understand oil, we must begin with a key rule of science: change alone is changeless. This may sound odd, but it is true. Nothing stays the same forever. Change governs everything in the universe, from distant galaxies, stars, and planets to tiny bacteria and giant whales--and us humans, too. Many changes in nature, such as the formation of mountains, happen too slowly for us to notice, unfolding over many lifetimes, even millions of years. When we do see rapid and sudden changes, they are usually bad for us. For example, the people of the Italian city of Pompeii had lived for generations in the shadow of Mount Vesuvius, a dormant, or "sleeping," volcano. In the year AD 79, the sleeper awoke with an outburst of flame and fury. Within hours, it sent clouds of hot ash and gas to choke over 20,000 people, nearly all of Pompeii's residents. Mountain ranges and volcanoes are features of the geology of the planet Earth. Geology is the science that studies the structure and history of the earth as recorded in the rocks. If you could slice deep into the earth, you would find that it is arranged in layers. Geologists--earth scientists--believe that the topmost layer of rock, or crust, is between four and forty miles thick. Earth's crust is like an eggshell broken into ten enormous slabs and numerous smaller ones. These slabs, called plates, float on a layer of partially molten rock called the mantle--that is, the layer of

rock between Earth's crust and core. Every continent and ocean floor rests atop one or more plates. Driven by heat currents from Earth's core, plates are always in motion, always changing position. Although the plates move slowly, just a few inches a year, their movements have shaped Earth's crust--and still do. Moving plates push against, slide past, and grind under one another. When two plates scrunch together, they trigger earthquakes that create volcanoes and mountain ranges such as the Rockies, Andes, and Himalayas. Yet not even a mountain range can resist the force of flowing water. Water is invincible. Given enough time, it will erode--wear away--the hardest rocks. Rushing rivers break off bits of rock. Carried downstream, these bits bounce along a river's bottom, or bed, further shattering into coarse gravel or grains of fine sand. Inevitably, rivers lose power as they run off from a continent and enter an ocean. In doing so, they drop the materials they carried, called sediment, into the coastal waters. Tides and currents move the sediment into deeper waters, far from shore. Settling on the ocean floor, it slowly builds up in layers that may become miles thick. As the lower, older sediment layers get buried deeper, the weight of the upper, younger layers compresses and hardens them, turning them to stone. These are the layers we see along the walls of deep cuts in Earth's surface, such as the walls of the Grand Canyon of the Colorado River. The mighty Colorado carved its canyon over millions of years, as it still does today. Life began in the oceans, thanks to the sun. Nearly ninety-three million miles from Earth, the sun, like other stars, is a glowing ball of hot gases. Most of the sun's energy, in the form of light, is lost in deep space. However, a tiny fraction reaches Earth, where it drives the weather by heating the atmosphere and oceans, fueling life. Ancient peoples worshipped the sun. For them, sunlight symbolized life, while darkness symbolized death--eternal night. Although the ancients could not explain why, modern science has shown how sunlight sustains life on Earth. From about 3.8 to 2.5 billion years ago, the first plants and animals developed in the oceans. Over millions of years, some of these changed, or evolved, in ways that allowed them to move onto the land. Every land plant and animal alive today has ancestors that once emerged from the oceans. Like their modern kin, the earliest life-forms were what scientists call self-feeders. These are green plants, which trap solar energy through photosynthesis--that is, the process of turning sunlight into chemical energy. Energy is the power to do work or to act. Green plants store chemical energy and use it to live, especially to turn it into food for themselves. Thus, they are self-feeders. Animals are other-feeders, or consumers. No animal can make its own food. To live, it must feed on plants, absorbing the chemical energy stored in them. Some animals, however, get their energy in another way. Carnivores, or flesh eaters, eat the plant eaters and other flesh eaters, too. Most living beings vanish after they die. Microscopic bacteria nearly always consume the remains of the dead, leaving no trace. We call this decay. Yet,

occasionally, some naturally preserved remains survive. These remains of ancient life-forms are fossils, from the Latin word *fossilis*, for "dug up." Generally, only the hard parts survive as fossils. These include bones, teeth, shells, and the woody parts of plants that became petrified, or turned to stone, by absorbing minerals from the earth. Other fossils are not the actual remains of an animal or plant at all, but imprints of them left in mud that hardened before decay set in. Studying fossils can help us understand what Earth was like in the distant past and how life-forms changed over time. But most of us have no use for such fossils in our daily lives.

This book was a requirement for my son's high school. He didn't WANT to read it, however he said it's surprisingly more interesting than it sounds.

Great book about the history of the world in the light of need for energy resources

A fantastic book! I will use it in my classroom this year.

It is written with a compelling story in CLEAR, CONCISE language so ALL can understand a complex story. All complex stories should be written this way.

Albert Marrin is a history professor who has written dozens of books for young readers. In *Black Gold*, he discussed the geology of fossil energy, emergence of the oil industry, geopolitics, oil wars, environmental impacts, and future challenges. I was intrigued by his perspective on geopolitics. Before World War One, the British navy scrapped many coal-burning warships and began building modern boats that ran on oil. This gave them a big advantage over the German navy. The era of industrial warfare had arrived. Nations with tanks, trucks, and planes could easily smash horse-powered enemies. America joined the war in 1917, and brought lots of oil. German ports were blockaded, their war machine ran out of fuel, and they were defeated. In this new era, for the first time, oil became essential for military success. Young Hitler grasped this, and so did the British. A primary objective of the Brits was to seize control of Middle Eastern oil, a yet-to-be developed treasure that made greedy gits giddy. They succeeded, invented new nations, and found obedient puppets to rule them (and loot them). Of course, wealth and power frequently turns decent people into obnoxious monsters. Troublesome puppets were replaced with new ones, Britain got very rich, and the Arabs and Persians developed an intense hatred of Brits. In World War Two, Hitler launched his oil-powered blitzkrieg, made a beeline for oily Baku, and planned to grab the

Persian Gulf. In this war, American oil once again came to the rescue. Germany and Japan learned the hard way that running out of oil is for losers. Everyone knows this today. U.S. presidents have poured trillions of dollars into maintaining control of oil, whilst jabbering about freedom, democracy, and weapons of mass destruction. For some mysterious reason, millions of Middle Eastern folks now loath and detest the U.S. In Saudi Arabia, the Wahhabis are a sect that perceives most of modernity as pure evil. They don't look fondly on the lavish lifestyles of the ruling Saud family. Marrin asserts that the government agreed to subsidize the spread of Wahhabi schools into other regions. In exchange for this funding, the Wahhabis agreed not to make trouble in Arabia but trouble anywhere else was OK. "In short, Saudi oil profits fueled terrorism. Russia now controls much of the natural gas that powers Europe, and Western powers are eager for an alternative, a pipeline from the Middle East that bypasses Russian control. It would be reasonable to conclude that the coming decades are not going to be a sweet celebration of love, peace, and happiness. Expect big drama as the age of hydrocarbons swirls the drain, climate change pounds the luckless, and Big Mama Nature hurls overshoot overboard. The rear end of Marrin's book was annoying. The book is intended for use in schools. He recommends that the U.S. should become energy independent as soon as possible. The best solution, he says, is a combination of fossil fuels and alternative energy • solar, wind, biomass, hydro, geothermal, nuclear (no mention of sharply reducing consumption). The assumption is that independence is possible, and that the consumer way of life will be free to continue down the path of mindless self-destruction. Teachers, librarians, and parents should have an above average understanding of energy issues before selecting books on the subject. These issues are going to have a staggering impact on the lives of the target audience, young readers. It's long past time to sit down with youngsters and have a highly embarrassing birds-and-bees discussion about the fact that the abundant energy bubble is going to turn into a pumpkin during the lifetimes. Preserving their ignorance seems cruel. In the book, readers learn that nuclear reactors can generate lots of electricity, but they occasionally barf large amounts of radiation all over the place. Therefore, it's very important to properly dispose of spent fuel because it's extremely toxic. Great idea! How? William and Rosemary Alley discussed this issue in *Too Hot to Touch*. They note that today "there are some 440 nuclear power plants in 31 countries. More are on the way. Yet, no country on Earth has an operating high-level waste disposal facility. Obama cancelled plans for the Yucca Mountain site, which was as close to perfect as is possible • after 25 years of research at a cost of \$10 billion. Because it was cancelled, spent fuel rods continue building up,

many of them temporarily stored in cooling ponds. If the circulating pumps for the cooling ponds stop, the water boils, the pool evaporates, and the rods are exposed to air, melt, and release radioactive gasses. The meltdowns at Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, and Fukushima were triggered by overheated fuel rods. Readers also learn that the U.S. has huge coal reserves, enough for 250 years at the current rate of consumption. To understand why this is a meaningless statement, watch one of the many versions of Albert Bartlett's famous lecture, Arithmetic, Population, and Energy on YouTube. Every student and teacher should watch it. Read Jeff Rubin's book, The Big Flatline. You'll learn that the production of top quality anthracite coal peaked in 1950, and grade B bituminous coal peaked in 1990. There is abundant grade C coal, lignite, which is especially filthy to burn. Since lignite is so low in energy, it cannot be shipped long distances profitably. It is absurd to use 100 calories of diesel to haul 100 calories of low quality coal. This is an extremely important issue • energy returned on energy invested (EROEI). The book doesn't mention this. EROEI is also highly relevant to oil. Rubin and others note that in the good old days of high-profit gushers, it was common to invest one calorie of energy to produce 100 calories of oil (100:1). By 2010, typical EROEI was about 17:1, and some are predicting 5:1 by 2020. Rising prices enable the extraction of difficult and expensive non-conventional oil and gas. At some point, declining EROEI makes extraction pointless, regardless of market prices. Consequently, most of the oil in Canadian tar sands will be left where it is. The EROEI of tar sands now in production is about 3:1, and 5:1 for shale deposits. Readers learn about renewable energy, like wind, solar, and hydro. See Ted Trainer's book, Renewable Energy Cannot Sustain a Consumer Society. Learn about the significant shortcomings of the various types of alternative energy. Discover why no combination of them will ever come anywhere close to replacing the energy now provided by fossil fuel. Discover why we will not enjoy a smooth and painless transition to a sustainable, renewable energy future. The education system, from grade schools to universities, seems to be largely committed to a "don't scare the children" strategy. We don't want to fill kids with despair about their grisly inheritance. Also, publishers want to avoid discussions that piss off poorly informed parents, or the politically powerful titans of industry. The publisher did allow Marrin to drop hints that there might be some trouble in the future. It's a touchy game. Sales can be harmed by too little reality, or too much. The book's takeaway message is that we have the solutions for our energy challenges, but we don't have a lot of time to fool around. Things will be OK, probably, maybe. Is that likely?

The author produced an interesting read of oil from discovery through the Iraq war. He tells the story of oil briefly, but with historically significant details. Unfortunately, he falls into the trap that scarcity will be the end of humanity, a trail traveled before by false prophets such as Paul Ehrlich who in 1968 claimed that hundreds of millions would starve to death and by the 1980 most of the world's important resources would be depleted. This trap is serious and casts some doubt on the veracity of other sources used for the book.

I am simply stunned by the magnitude in which oil touches our lives. It has been involved in every major conflict since it was first recognized as a useful product. The book takes you through the basics of geology and describes in clear and understandable terms how it is created and manufactured. Gives a great summary of its use in the wars....without it, things may have ended differently. I used to really despise the oil industry, but perhaps we should be a little more grateful for it, and despise the greedy politicians who have ruined nations because of their lust for power and prestige. This is a great book! 5 stars!

The author begins by telling the reader some interesting and valid facts about the history of the existence of petroleum on the planet and its ancient uses by man. But it then jumps to modern times when refining techniques were developed and begins to malign the men who were part of early exploration, drilling and refining. The author goes on to totally fabricate personal data from John D. Rockefeller's childhood and youth, making up details of his father's livelihood which are simply unfounded in truth. For a wonderful account of John D. Rockefeller, read the two volume account written by Allan Nevins written in 1940 which is full of first hand testimony, source material, and public documents and is carefully footnoted. This author's shameful perpetuation of myth regarding Rockefeller's character and life does nothing to promote the story of oil. The author describes John D.'s mother as a "long suffering housewife." I'm not sure what this comment does for the story of oil, but it has no basis in fact in the first place. She was very much in love with her husband, was very proud of the home she made for her family, and was devoted to being a good mother and pious example for her children. The author talks about the pollution and the waste involved in early exploration and drilling. AS IF slaughtering whales was not a messy business. With any new industry there will be mistakes, but cost and profit demand efficiency and good will from the consuming public. John D. Rockefeller's understanding of business and a strong desire to provide the poor with an affordable light source was his driving force, not greed. No doubt the guy

celebrating the oil strike in Pennsylvania who lit a cigar on the rig and blew himself and others up, might have wished he'd not done that, but others learned quickly from these kinds of mistakes and in a very short time whaling was a thing of the past and the petroleum industry was operating with ever greater care and providing millions of people around the globe the possibility of spending time with their families after sunset and supplying factories with dependable lubricants to operate machinery. Rockefeller was not "challenged" by Edison as is suggested in this book. At first only cities had wiring that made electric light a possibility for consumers. Millions around the world continued to depend on kerosene for many decades. The author begins to shift from world history to the false notion that oil will soon be an exhausted resource. Let me say this. When oil was first drilled for in Pennsylvania in 1857, geologists at the time thought the source would dry up quickly. Technological advancements have proven them wrong. Today's projections by some are likely to be as off the mark as they were 150 years ago. No one knows how long oil will be available for human use. NO ONE. The book ends singing the praises of windmills and solar power, both of which are ideas which have produced embarrassing results that include undependability and gross destruction of wildlife---the very thing "environmentalists" who demonize fossil fuels wave red flags over. In a nutshell, this isn't a history book. It's nothing more than total propaganda in 158 pages with WIDE margins and a LOT of negatively influential photographs.

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