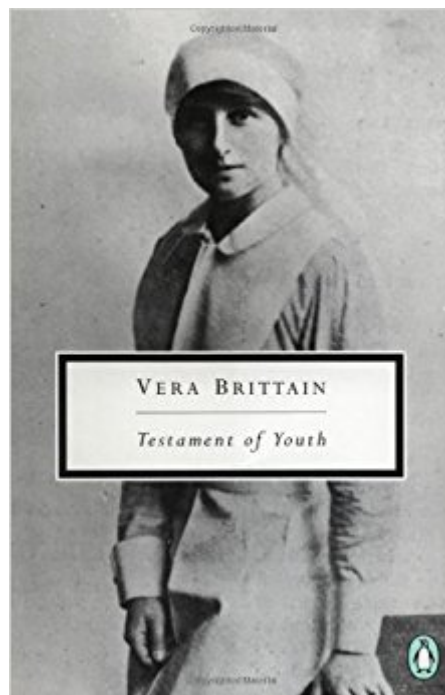


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# Vera Brittain: Testament Of Youth: An Autobiographical Study Of The Years 1900-1925 (Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics)



## Synopsis

A heartwarming portrait of a young woman's life in pre-1914 England and a heartbreaking record of the holocaust that followed.

## Book Information

Series: Penguin Classics

Mass Market Paperback: 672 pages

Publisher: Penguin Classics (September 1, 1994)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0140188444

ISBN-13: 978-0140188448

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 1.2 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 218 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #436,668 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #164 in Books > Biographies &

Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Military > World War I #2507 in Books > History >

Europe > Great Britain #4094 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Gender Studies

## Customer Reviews

When war broke out in August 1914, 21-year-old Vera Brittain was planning on enrolling at Somerville College, Oxford. Her father told her she wouldn't be able to go: "In a few months' time we should probably all find ourselves in the Workhouse!" he opined. Brittain had hoped to escape the Northern provinces, but the war seemingly dashed her plans. "It is not, perhaps, so very surprising that the War at first seemed to me an infuriating personal interruption rather than a world-wide catastrophe." Her father eventually relented, however, and she was allowed to attend. By the end of her first year, she had fallen in love with a young soldier and resolved to become active in the war effort by volunteering as a nurse--turning her back on what she called her "provincial young-ladyhood." Brittain suffered through 12-hour days by reminding herself that nothing she endured was worse than what her fiancé, Roland, experienced in the trenches. Roland was expected home on leave for Christmas 1915; on December 26, Brittain received news that he had been killed at the front. Ten months later Brittain herself was sent to Malta and then to France to serve in the hospitals nearer the front, where she witnessed firsthand the horrors of battle. When peace finally came, Brittain had also lost her brother Edward and two close friends. As she walked

the streets of London on November 11, 1918--Armistice Day--she felt alone in the crowds: For the first time I realised, with all that full realisation meant, how completely everything that had hitherto made up my life had vanished with Edward and Roland, with Victor and Geoffrey. The War was over; a new age was beginning; but the dead were dead and would never return. First published in 1933, *Testament of Youth* established Brittain as one of the best-loved authors of her time. Her crisp, clear prose and searing honesty make this unsentimental memoir of a generation scarred by war a classic. --Sunny Delaney

It would seem enough that Vera Brittain's autobiography is an honestly gut-wrenching love story, a haunting account of her romance with a brilliant young soldier who died at the front in World War I. *Testament of Youth* is her tribute to her beloved warrior, but it is also an insightful and beautifully written record of her world before, during, and after the war. As the book begins, Vera Brittain is a young woman determined to free herself from the constraints placed upon females in England. She longs for "a more eventful existence and a less restricted horizon." Ironically, soon after her hard-won acceptance at mostly-male Oxford, war begins, and the repressive English society is altered at its core. While the war cruelly robs Vera Brittain of her lover, her brother, her dearest friends, and her academic work, it also opens a new world for her, allowing her to leave her previously cloistered and chaperoned female enclave and to go alone to various foreign fronts as a nurse for wounded soldiers. She is a shrewd and intelligent observer of all aspects of the war, and her liberal use of passages from letters, diaries, and the poetry of her wartime contemporaries gives her story a directness and an emotional impact which obliterates the decades between then and now. In the end, this is a testament to a fiercely independent spirit and a strong, wise feminist who was not afraid. -- For great reviews of books for girls, check out *Let's Hear It for the Girls: 375 Great Books for Readers 2-14*. -- From *500 Great Books by Women*; review by Rebecca Sullivan

Overall I enjoyed *Testament of Youth*. I appreciated the author's sincerity and dedication and this personal view of WWI history. Ms Brittain's writing reveals her intelligence, intensity, and large vocabulary, and I was glad I read the book on Kindle so I could easily look up words new to me. Her writing style with long, convoluted sentences was tiresome and sometimes confusing but I realize in 1930's England this may have been standard. At the beginning of the book I grew weary of all the anger expressed by Ms Brittain. It is tragic her generation lost so much of their youth, but her anger at her conventional parents who had no books in their home seemed misplaced. I was surprised later in the book when Ms Brittain was overseas and she referred to letters with her Mother that

there was such warmth. Ms Brittain expressed her ideas on so many things, it would have been interesting to know about the improvement in their relationship. The book is rich with the daily and personal experiences of people from all walks of life during WWI. At the end of the book Ms Brittain is ready to begin a new life chapter. Her edges are softening and she's beginning to give up some control. I was so glad for this resolution for her and it was a timely end. But, oh, it would have been wonderful to learn more of this next stage in her life.

About knee deep into this. A woman both in and out of her time. She proves herself in her time by her writing style: Very correct and proper, always careful to prepare the reader for what is to come, so there are no surprises and the reading can at times get tedious. I find her out of her time in her advanced and well developed feminism (I'm a guy by the way). Her desire for an education and career above her desire for an advantageous marriage were radical even 50 or more years after she is writing. Positively scandalous in her time, although she does speak of some who share her views (even if she implies, or I inferred, or both, that those were mostly lesbians.) As I am reading the war is just getting under way, so I have yet to sample the book's best known anti war theme, but even now I can see it as a study of another time by a sensitive, active, first rate mind as it causes me to think about the slow rate of human progress. If you want the Cliff Notes version, see the movie.

I watched the movie from this book on TV one evening without knowing anything about it other than the movie description. I took to the story so that at the conclusion I went on-line to purchase my Kindle edition. The writing is excellent and of course the book contains much more detail than the movie which is what I'd hope for. Having said that I found that from about 75-80% in the story was becoming repetitious and somehow no longer held me. Still, even allowing for that, the book is well worth the buy if you have any interest at all in how life was and how it changed for a young woman in the early 1900s England. Born to upper middle class, Vera Brittain threw up her relatively privileged life and student days in Oxford to become a WW1 nurse, first in the UK and later shipped in submarine infested waters to foreign soils. The extraordinary brutality and horrific conditions of the so-called 'Great War' became the everyday nightmare of this lady of gentle breeding yet the experience and her resolve to see it through under circumstances in every respect foreign to her life are almost unbelievable and utterly admirable. A worthwhile read indeed. The Slope of Kongwa Hill: A Boy's Tale of Africa

Having just read a history of the First World War, and also visited, for the first time, Flanders and Ypres, Brittain's book is an excellent description, full of emotion, of how the war affected her personally and the generation of whom she became a spokesperson, but also what she chose to do about it. Written without question from her own context of class and period, it still transcends both of those and stands as an important work that asks questions that continue - and perhaps always will - to be relevant to us as individuals and as people. Worth reading.

Vera Brittain's experiences at Oxford and on the Western Front as a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD), render a fuller, more heartfelt portrait of the Great War and its psychological toll on the lives of soldiers, nurses, and civilians than Hemingway's overrated, and often tedious, "A Farewell to Arms." Brittain's autobiography includes her poetry and letters from her friends, lover, and brother. How disappointing that the Penguin editor neglected to translate the Latin poetry in the text. Archival photographs of Brittain and those she wrote of also deserved to be included. This testament is an invaluable addition to the literature of World War I, as well as a remarkable, diary-like account of a young woman's metamorphosis: The reader discovers how the war transformed Vera from an idealistic patriot to a discerning pacifist, from an obedient Victorian daughter to a modern independent woman. I especially enjoyed the later passages describing her friendship with Winifred Holtby, whose compassion and zest for life, helps heal Vera's brokenness. Together, they win Oxford degrees, find their first apartment in London, discover meaningful work as lecturers, attend peace conferences in Geneva and give speeches on behalf of the League of Nations, traveling throughout war-savaged Europe. Both young women bridge the chasm between aspiration and achievement when, after inches of rejection slips, they at long last publish their first novels. Though they carry their raw war identity close, never forgetting those they loved who died so senselessly, they gradually forge meaningful lives for themselves both professionally and personally, a testament to their courage and integrity and endurance. This elegy-driven memoir ends with a new beginning for Vera, which I will let the reader discover. Brittain's autobiography, not an easy read, is nonetheless a worthwhile book to give a teenage feminist on the cusp of becoming a woman.

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