

Transcript for A history of Voting – from Ancient Greece to the X Factor

Hey, guys! This video is on behalf of the British Council's LearnEnglish Teens website and their YouTube channel.

In today's video I wanted to talk to you about this book which I have recently revisited called *The Ancient Guide to Modern Life* by Natalie Haynes. And this is a book that is very dear to my heart because as a Latin university student I often get quite a lot of people asking me, 'Why do you study Latin? It's a dead language. It's not useful. What are you going to be after you study Latin?' Hold on! So are you telling me that the foundation for Western civilisation is useless?

What a lot of people take for granted is how much the Ancient Greeks and the Ancient Romans have shaped our Western culture today. Anything from our philosophy, to our literature, to our art, to our architecture, to even our governmental system. The very basis and values for the democratic governmental system which we have in the UK was actually invented back in 5th-century-BC Athens, and Natalie Haynes' book is very interesting because, as well as exploring other aspects of, erm, ancient civilisation, which has formed and shaped and continues to shape the Western civilisation today, she specifically focuses in one section about the governmental system. And whilst it has changed over time, she points out that fundamentally the values are the same; the values of equality and respect for one another, the right to exercise your voice and to be heard is still very much present in the modern day.

That said, the way that democracy is carried out and the system has changed a lot since the 5th century BC. Back in those days, men would gather at the Acropolis and they would listen to the arguments put forward and they would either vote for or against with a show of hands, so they would raise their hands and each hand would be counted. Of course, nowadays that's not possible. Could you imagine 8.6 million people gathered at Parliament in London with a raise of hand? That would take a very long time to count everyone, of course. So, nowadays, we have an MP who we elect and generally the theory is that the MP will act in our best interests and represents our values. If anything, democracy has gotten better. It has become much more inclusive. Back in the 5th-century-BC Athens, women couldn't vote and neither could non-Athenians who lived in Athens. The democratic system has even leaked into other aspects of our lives. Just look at reality TV shows. As Natalie Haynes mentions in her book, stuff like *Big Brother*, *X Factor*, *Britain's Got Talent* – all these shows that ask you to vote for your favourite celebrity or your favourite person on the show – is a form of voting. It's a form of exercising our opinions and our voice. So, with that said, why is it that political votes aren't as popular as, perhaps, say, the Eurovisions? Perhaps an explanation for this is that in these reality TV shows, people feel that their voices are heard and that they're taken into consideration. It's hard sometimes if you're like me, just one person out of 8.6 million people in London, not to mention the other 65-odd million people in the whole of the UK. It can feel like your voice might not be heard or that you might not make a difference with your vote, but I think it's important to always remember that you do have a right to speak and you do have a voice to exercise your opinions with.

I think it's important to remember that your voice is heard, that your voice does count. So, get involved with the voting, whether that's a political election or whether it's just the *X Factor*. You have the right to exercise your voice and you can make a difference by doing so, even though it might not seem so. Just because you're one fish in a big pond doesn't mean that you shouldn't exercise your voice and be heard.

So, I hope you've enjoyed this video. Please comment below if you've read Natalie Haynes book, erm *The Ancient Life to ... The Ancient Guide to Modern Life*, sorry, but if you haven't I would also recommend reading it. And if you are a Latin student or a Classicist, like I am, then definitely read it so you're armed with all the answers of why Latin and Ancient Greek should still be studied! As ever, comment below, let me know what you think about this video. Let me know what you have to say and exercise your voice and your opinion. I'll see you guys in the next one. Bye!