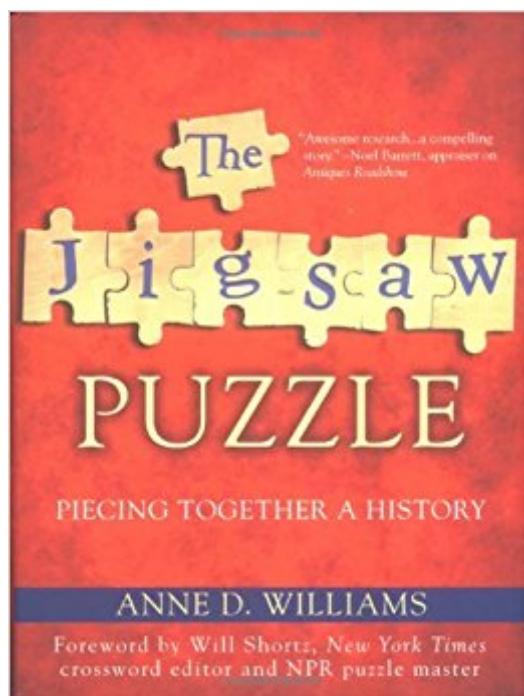


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# The Jigsaw Puzzle: Piecing Together A History



## **Synopsis**

Originally created as an educational tool for children in the mid-1700s, jigsaw puzzles developed into a national craze during the Great Depression. Today, the collecting and assembling of jigsaw puzzles continues to challenge new and experienced puzzlers alike with hidden messages, mysteries to solve, and a never-ending stream of challenges to conquer. Assembled by renowned puzzle expert Anne D. Williams, *The Jigsaw Puzzle* pieces together the origins of the beloved pastime that has enthralled people worldwide for centuries. The study also examines the minds of such famous puzzlers as Queen Elizabeth II, Bill Gates, and Stephen King.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Jigsaw puzzle collector and historian Williams covers every aspect of the game's development in this comprehensive history. "The jigsaw puzzle is still going strong as it approaches the 250th anniversary of its birth," the author writes. She then goes on to explain how jigsaws were advocated by the philosopher John Locke as an educational toy, used by Ellis Island physicians to ascertain immigrants' mental capacity and embraced by Americans who took them out of lending libraries to keep their minds off the 1930's economic depression. A particularly interesting time is the 1870s. Then, Williams writes, "two movements came together; women's handicrafts and fret-work." Women began making puzzles with small treadle-powered saws and selling them for profit and for charity; in this way, puzzles became an early catalyst for women's emancipation from the home. Other segments of the book detail puzzle creators and collectors and instruct readers on how to make their own puzzles.

Williams's writing, while never pedestrian, is not especially distinctive, and the scope of the book doesn't allow some of the more interesting characters to receive the fuller treatment their lives merit. For puzzle fans and friends, of which Williams convincingly insists there are still millions, this book will be a delightful past-time when an actual puzzle isn't available.

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Anne D. Williams is the leading American authority on jigsaw puzzles. She has written four books and more than fifty articles about the history, cultural aspects, use, valuation, preservation, and technology of jigsaw puzzles including *Jigsaw Puzzles: An Illustrated History and Price Guide*. Her research has taken her to the Library of Congress, the American Antiquarian Society, the New York and Boston Public Libraries, and the archives of puzzle manufacturers.

Loved the antidotes in this book! I signed up to give a talk to my discussion group about jigsaw puzzles and this was a great source. The book was redundant so I didn't give it a top rating, but the stories were interesting and humorous. Glad to have such a resource.

Just an extensive history of Jigsaw Puzzles. This book is so informative and amazing. A wonderful collection of information by Anne Williams. Anyone who is a Jigsaw puzzler will want to know this history and how they came about. I recommend this very highly.

The text of this paperback is the same as the Hardcover Edition. But the illustrations are in BLACK and WHITE rather than in color. To me, this is very disappointing. The book itself is wonderful, and deserves 5 stars, but buy the hardcover edition to get the color plates.

It bought this as a gift to accompany a jigsaw puzzle. It is an interesting and informative book and made the puzzle more fun.

Very informative well written book with a wealth off information in it. If you are interested in the history of puzzles this is one book to get.

Good history. Would have liked more on individual items but found the book enjoyable.

"On the face of it, a jigsaw puzzle is a ridiculous exercise in make-work and wasted time." This is the analysis of Anne D. Williams, and she ought to know. After all, she is in the opinion of puzzle-master Will Shortz "the world's foremost expert on jigsaw puzzles." She has built an academic career on jigsaws, and has one of the world's largest collections (around 8,000), and so can be counted to look at them as something more than ridiculous exercises. In *The Jigsaw Puzzle: Piecing Together a History* (Berkley Books), she has assembled (ahem - the puns about puzzles, frequent in this work, are surprisingly numerous) an appealing collection of what must have been a pastime in almost everyone's life. The appeal of the subject is therefore universal, and its aspects are here told with humor and genuine delight. Though all of us have worked on jigsaws, much of the book has to do with those who work on manufacturing the puzzles and those obsessed with putting the puzzles together, or collecting them. American children almost all have put together maps of the United States, with each state being a separate piece (well, the little ones in the northeast often blended). In doing so, they participate in the earliest form of the jigsaw. The "dissected map" was the original jigsaw, and mapmakers were the original jigsaw manufacturers. The precise date of origin or identity of the inventor are not known, but there were jigsaw maps by 1760, and the children of King George III played with them, and maybe learned some geography. They were expensive, and so are the handmade wooden ones that are still made, maybe at \$6 a piece. Such puzzles often have pieces that look like letters our silhouettes of bird, clowns, or infinite others; this was an innovation of Parker Brothers in 1908, the time of the first puzzle fad. A further fad occurred around the depression, when puzzles were taken up again by a new generation who could no longer afford the theater, who had time on their hands, and who might get some small mental lift by being able to succeed in completing a puzzle. Luxury puzzles best exemplified currently by Stave Puzzles, now patronized by the likes of Queen Elizabeth, Barbara Bush, and Bill Gates. The owner, Steve Richardson, is known as the "Chief Tormentor," and takes seriously his role in making harder puzzles, like the one of only 150 pieces that could fit together a million wrong ways and one right way. He admits he went too far in an April Fool's Day puzzle for 1989 called "5 Easy Pieces". It had only five pieces, and it was easy to put four together; the last one always proved too big to fit in. Thirty buyers took the puzzle on, at \$89, and he sent refunds to them all: the puzzle wasn't too hard, it was impossible. There are computer programs now that take a photo and change it into pieces that can be shown on your monitor. You use the mouse to move and turn the pieces into the solution. Williams obviously values the older puzzles more, but admits that with a computer puzzle, one never risks losing a piece. There are computer programs used to solve puzzles, as the designer of the fiendish "Eternity" puzzle learned after he offered a prize of a million

pounds to anyone who solved it within four years. Six months of full-time computing by two Cambridge mathematicians lost him his money and the ancestral mansion he had to sell. It is only one of the amazing stories here, in a well illustrated and funny book about a happy aspect of human ingenuity.

Just when I least expected it, a new book on Jigsaw Puzzles appears. I already had a good book on the subject, "The One, The Only, The Original Jigsaw Puzzle Book" by Francene and Louis Sabin, 1977. It was and still is a very good book. While obviously, some of the same things are covered, there is still enough that is different to make it worthwhile as a companion to this new jigsaw book. (see my review). In just about every aspect, this book gives a lot more. There are 16 color pages showing about 50 collectible jigsaws; no way could black and white do them justice. History of jigsaws is covered from their inception in the mid-1700's and particularly during the puzzle crazes of the 1920's. Also covered is how innovations took place over the years. There are details on construction and manufacture as well as complete instructions on various ways to make your own puzzles. We are also told of some of the famous people who indulge in puzzles; Bill Gates, Albert Einstein, Bing Crosby, Jean Harlow, George W. Bush, Stephen King, several US Presidents and even J.P. Morgan. Hard to believe all these people have something in common. We are also told of speed competitions to assemble puzzles as well as record size and complexity of puzzles. I also found out about a puzzle I've had for some time and never got around to working on. Namely, one put out by Christopher Mockton, in 1998 called Eternity. He was the son of a Viscount and advisor to Prime Minister Thatcher. The puzzle consisted of 209 geometrically shaped pieces which had to be placed in a frame. Somewhat like a 209 piece Tangram. The buyer had 4 years to complete it for a Million Pound prize. To great astonishment, 2 Cambridge students spent 6 months on a computer program and successfully solved it. Mockton had to sell his ancestral home in Scotland to pay off the prize. It is a great collector's item, and I found in a 'Thrift Store' for a dollar, but somehow I doubt I'll ever solve it. It kind of reminds me of Loyd's "Cyclopedia of Puzzles". This huge volume was hastily assembled by his son and privately published in 1914 and offered a large prize to the first person who submitted correct solutions to all the puzzles. Well, there were all kinds of errors, multiple solutions, impossible solutions and whatnot, so that nobody won the prize. Dover Publishing and Martin Gardner put out a selection of these puzzles in 1959. Sorry for the digression. The Jigsaw book gives us some names for various shaped pieces, such as, turtles, loops, sockets, knobs, holes, tabs, slots, keys, locks and suggests you find some of your own names. I like tongues, mouths, lefties, righties, uppers, downers, straights, curves, to name a few more.

Then to top it off, Williams gives hundreds of references, all the way from web sites, books, manufacturers, sellers, organizations and many, many references to articles in all sorts of publications. It's hard to imagine this being anything but the definitive book on Jigsaw Puzzles for a long time. Then again; maybe another new dog will appear on the block; but it'll have to be good to top this one.

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