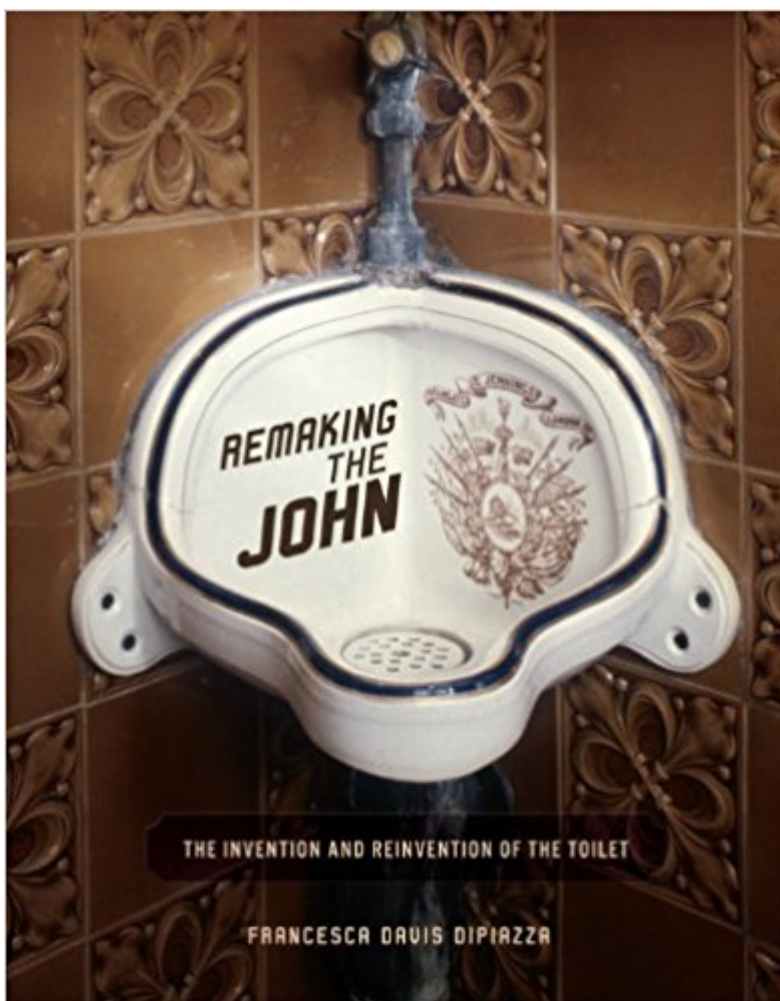


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Remaking The John: The Invention And Reinvention Of The Toilet



Synopsis

Did you know that about 40 percent of the world's population lives without toilets? That's more than two billion people, most of whom live in rural areas or crowded urban slums. And according to the World Health Organization, diseases spread by the lack of basic sanitation kill more people every year than all forms of violence, including war. In particular, diarrheal diseases kill more than two million people each year, most of them children. Everyone needs to go to the bathroom, and from the citizens of the world's earliest human settlements to astronauts living on the International Space Station, the challenge has been the same: how to safely and effectively dispose of human body wastes. Toilet history includes everything from the hunt for the causes of infectious disease to twenty-first-century marvels of engineering. In *Remaking the John*, you'll explore the many ways people across the globe and through the ages have invented and reinvented the toilet. You will learn about everything from ancient Roman sewers to the world's first flush toilets. You'll also find out about the twenty-first-century Reinvent the Toilet Challenge an engineering contest designed to spur creation of an ecologically friendly, water-saving, inexpensive, and sanitary toilet. And while you're at it, mark World Toilet Day on your calendar. Observed every November 19, this international day of action works to raise awareness about the modern world's many sanitation challenges.

Book Information

Hardcover: 88 pages

Publisher: Twenty-First Century Books (August 1, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1467726451

ISBN-13: 978-1467726450

Product Dimensions: 0.5 x 7.5 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 12 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #1,580,590 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #37 in [Books > Teens > Education & Reference > Science & Technology > Technology > Inventions](#) #59 in [Books > Teens > Education & Reference > Science & Technology > Environmental Conservation & Protection](#) #316 in [Books > Teens > Education & Reference > Social Science > Politics & Government](#)

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•Whether you call it the loo, the privy, the throne, the john, the jakes, or the latrine, the modern toilet is a major contribution to health and convenience. DiPiazza's readable text follows the ancient history of the potty all over the world, in such disparate places as Skara Brae (Scotland), Moheno Daro (Pakistan), and imperial Rome (whose abundant water supply, fine engineering, and Tiber River allowed construction of public toilets with multiple seating!). The fall of Rome apparently meant the fall of the toilet, too, and the following Dark Ages were dark indeed when it came to sanitation. The author goes on to cover the consequences of a lack of properly constructed toilet and sewage systems: diseases, stench, nasty walking surfaces, and a grossly polluted water supply, among them. She mentions modern conveniences, such as the space toilet and the composting toilet much admired by "greenies," and the problems encountered by the millions who have no access to modern sanitation. Blue information boxes focus on such topics as a modern sewage treatment plant, sewer blockages, and toilet paper. Black-and-white and color photos lend visuals. Neither as simple as Connie Miller's colorful *Getting to Know Your Toilet: The Disgusting Story Behind Your Home's Strangest Feature* (Capstone, 2008) nor as demanding as Sarah Albee's lighthearted but seriously informative *Poop Happened!: A History of the World from the Bottom Up* (Walker, 2010), this honest, fact-filled little book should attract readers and researchers (who may even begin celebrating World Toilet Day every November 19).

•Patricia Manning, formerly at Eastchester Public Library, NY

Francesca Davis DiPiazza grew up loving the smell of books; but as soon as she saw a computer, she thought, Terrific! more ways to share more words with more people! Online since 1994, she still uses an orange 1970s rotary-dial phone. One of her cultural geography books for Lerner Publishing Group, *Zimbabwe in Pictures*, won the Society of School Librarians International Book Award.

If there's one modern convenience we wouldn't want to live without, I think the flush toilet would have to be it. Sure, we love our refrigerators, TVs, microwaves, computers, cars, but the flush toilet has to rank above all of those. In fact, as Francesca Davis DiPiazza points out in her new book, *Remaking the John: The Invention and Reinvention of the Toilet*, indoor facilities are not only convenient, a 2007 survey of doctors concluded that of all medical advances since 1840, "toilets and sewers beat them all. The sanitary revolution won as the most important leap forward in health since 1840." DiPiazza covers the history of toilets, or the lack of, beginning with the first indoor toilets in Skara Brae, in present-day Scotland, dating to about 5,000 years ago. As long as towns were small and most people lived in rural areas, holes in the ground, using water sources such as

streams, rivers, and man-made ditches to carry the waste away worked out OK. But the more populations concentrated in cities, the more the waste accumulated and bred disease. When addressing the reinvention of the toilet, DiPiazza describes various modern efforts to handle human waste in innovative ways. The toilets we use today have been basically unchanged for a century or more. But as populations grow, and water becomes more precious, some inventors are seeking ways to use less water in toilets. It's a little shocking how many people around the world still don't have access to toilets, using the same kinds of methods that our ancestors used hundreds of years ago. In order to spread the use of toilets and find new ways for toilets to function, groups like water.org, the World Toilet Organization, and the Reinvent the Toilet Challenge raise funding and cultivate ideas. *Remaking the John* is brief, and is written in an accessible style, and, despite the subject matter, does not resort to potty humor. It can be easily read in one reading period at school, yet covers a lot of ground and offers suggestions for further reading. *Remaking the John* would be a perfect addition to any elementary school or junior high library. Thanks to NetGalley and the publisher for the complimentary electronic review copy!

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