***THE HISTORY BOYS*: SCENE BY SCENE SUMMARY**

**Act 1 - scenes 1-4**

* The play opens with Irwin as a government spin-doctor, in a wheelchair.
* We meet the eccentric Hector and his class of ‘History Boys’. They already have their A level results and are now studying for their Oxbridge entrance exams. Hector hits the boys but they regard it as a joke which suggests he does not hit very hard. It is a sign of favouritism – Dakin is happy that he has bruises to prove it.
* The Headmaster tells Mrs Linttot that he wants the boys to go to Oxbridge **to improve the school’s league table results**. Hector and Mrs Linttot, in the Head’s absence, disagree with him.
* Scripps, on playground duty, sees the young, new teacher, Irwin arrive. Irwin says he was at Corpus in Oxford. The Headmaster tells Irwin that if he can get one of the boys a scholarship to Oxford or Cambridge, there will be a permanent job for him.

**Act 1 - scenes 5 and 6**

* Hector and the boys are having a lesson entirely in French. The boys have chosen to set the scene in a brothel. The Headmaster and Irwin interrupt and the class conspire to tell them they are acting out a scene involving a wounded soldier, which is why Dakin has no trousers on. Although Irwin speaks in excellent French, the Head talks in English. Hector refuses to give up one of his lessons, so Irwin can prepare the boys for the exams. Hector offers a lift on his motorcycle to the boys. Posner is refused, but Scripps goes. It is clear there is something odd about [riding pillion](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/english_literature/dramahistoryboys/history_boys_plot/revision/3/) with Hector.
* Irwin and the boys are in class. Irwin returns a pile of essays which he dismisses as competent, but dull. The boys, led by Timms the joker and Dakin, their leader, try to wind him up.
* At the end of the boys’ conversation, it is revealed:
  + Posner is in love with Dakin
  + Rudge is having sex
  + Dakin is seeing the Headmaster’s secretary, Fiona
  + there is a further reference to what happens on the back of Hector’s bike which is not explicitly explained

**Act 1 – scenes 7 and 8**

* Mrs Lintott remarks that history is like story-telling, and that it is something that men do naturally. They discuss education. **Hector suggests that Mrs Lintott gives them the education while he subverts it**.
* Irwin discusses the origins of the Second World War with the boys. He tells them that knowledge is not enough to get in; they must present it in an original way. Rudge wants to know what he should write down – Irwin tells him that he cannot just write down what the teacher says. Dakin reveals that the Headmaster is after Fiona, and sometimes chases her around the desk.

**Act 1 – scenes 9-11**

* Hector’s classroom door is locked and when someone tries it from the outside, Hector uses it to challenge the boys to remember knocks on the door that occur in literature. The boys play their favourite game with Hector: identifying the play or film that the boys are acting out.
* Rudge is not as clever as the other boys, but he works hard and can tell Mrs Lintott a lot of what Irwin has told them – she thinks it’s quite odd, like the fact that he has suggested the Carry On films would be a good thing to discuss at interview.
* Irwin tells them that *Henry VIII* will teach them everything about any period in history. He also suggests that their vast stock of quotations will be useful in essays – a suggestion which the boys reject with horror.

**Act 1 – scenes 12-15**

* Irwin reveals that Posner came to see him to confess his crush on Dakin. **Scripps, acting as narrator**, makes it clear that Posner has chosen Irwin for this confidence because he knows that Irwin is also fascinated by Dakin.
* Scripps and Dakin have a conversation about religion. Their cleverness is undermined by Dakin’s mispronunciation of ‘Nietszche’ (a German philosopher).
* Irwin is exasperated by Hector’s insistence that the boys shouldn’t use their extensive quotations to show off.
* The Head checks on the boys’ progress with Irwin. Mrs Lintott tells Irwin that Dakin is seeing the Headmaster’s secretary.

**Act 1 – scene 16 and 17**

* Halfway through the term, Hector is summoned to the Head’s office. The Head’s wife has seen Hector touching the boy [riding pillion](http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/gcsebitesize/english_literature/dramahistoryboys/history_boys_plot/revision/7/) on his bike. The Head tells Hector that Irwin must be present in all his classes with the boys. He also tells him to retire early. Hector protests that nothing happened.
* Hector and Posner have a conversation about the Thomas Hardy poem *Drummer Hodge*. It is the longest conversation he has with any of the boys. When Dakin comes in and says it is his turn to ride pillion, Hector refuses and goes out alone.

**Act 2 – scenes 1 and 2**

* Irwin, five years older than when he appeared in the first scene of the play (and therefore about twenty years older than he was as a teacher), is filming a history programme. He tells the viewer that studying *Henry VIII* tells you about all other periods of history. In a break from filming he talks to a man who has been watching. It is one of the boys, but Irwin does not recognise which one. The man has clearly not made a success of his life. He tries to get Irwin to talk, but Irwin realises that he is wearing a microphone – he is trying to sell a story to the newspapers. Irwin doesn’t say anything, but agrees to sign a copy of his book for the man. It is Posner.
* While teaching the boys, Hector, to their confusion, begins to cry. None of them know what to do. Posner is the only one to pat him on the shoulder and offer some awkward comfort. They play the film game to cheer Hector up.

**Act 2 – scenes 3 and 4**

* Mrs Lintott appeals on Hector’s behalf. The Head asks if Hector has told her why he is being asked to leave. She says yes, but it becomes clear that Hector hadn’t revealed everything. She then speaks to Irwin. **They talk about what a good teacher is and if Hector is one**. Irwin reveals that he and Hector are sharing classes.
* The first shared class is not a success. The boys do not know how to behave: **they have different personas for Irwin and Hector**. It is clear that their two approaches to education and knowledge are very different. The boys end up arguing Irwin’s line against Hector. After they leave Irwin says he thinks it went well; Hector is disappointed in the way they have used his own teaching against him. Dakin returns to talk to Irwin – Scripps accuses him of flirting. **Dakin says he has never wanted to please anyone like he wants to please Irwin**. Dakin tells Scripps that Hector has been sacked. They are not unhappy about it, but nor are they particularly bothered about the reason he has been sacked.

**Act 2 - scenes 5-7**

* Posner’s parents complain about the way Irwin has been teaching the Holocaust (they are Jewish). The Headmaster tells Irwin off, although Irwin has been doing what the headmaster wants.
* Irwin tells Posner that he can get away with being much more shocking about the Holocaust in his scholarship exam because he is Jewish. The boys are getting better marks for their essays, but Dakin is still disappointed. Posner is feeling the pain of unrequited love.
* Hector, Irwin and Mrs Lintott give the boys mock interviews. Mrs Lintott talks about the possibility that one of their interviewers may be a woman, and **the overlooked position of women in history**. The boys are not interested. Rudge’s mock interview does not go well. Dakin asks which college Irwin went to and is told Corpus. Irwin is able to list most of the points Dakin has put in his essay without reading it, but Dakin surprises him with a couple of unusual ones, about the turning points of history where small things have a big effect.

**Act 2 – scenes 8-10**

* There is a photograph of the boys at school. Hector is not in it, but the Headmaster is. The boys are unimpressed.
* Mrs Lintott speculates on how unlucky Hector was that the Headmaster’s wife saw him. Hector confesses he is to leave and why, and tells Irwin not to be a teacher. Mrs Lintott comes out from the Head’s office and tells Irwin he is to be offered her job when she retires. **She also mocks Hector for his attempted justification for his behaviour with the boys**.
* Scripps, Dakin and Posner briefly describe their interview experiences.

**Act 2 – scenes 11 and 12**

* Everyone gets accepted, the headmaster is delighted, although the teachers assume Rudge did not get in. Rudge, however, is not upset. He knows he got in, because they told him at the time, and he knows this surprises his teachers. His dad used to be a college servant, so the college let him in as a PR stunt.
* Dakin has caught Irwin out about which college he was at. Irwin reveals he was actually at Bristol, although he did his teaching diploma at Oxford. Dakin invites Irwin to go for a drink, and to have sex. Irwin is surprised, and Dakin tells him that it won’t make him like Hector. They arrange to meet on Sunday afternoon.

**Act 2 – scenes 13-15**

* Dakin has saved Hector’s job by blackmailing the Headmaster about his conduct with Fiona. Dakin is about to get a lift from Hector – perhaps **in the manner of giving him a reward**, like his offer to Irwin. The Headmaster stops them before they leave. He tells Hector to take Irwin instead. They leave.
* Scripps, Irwin, Dakin and Rudge reveal that there was an accident. Irwin is left in a wheelchair.
* The Headmaster hypocritically speaks at a memorial to Hector. The boys add their memories. Mrs Lintott tells the audience what happens to the boys. They become magistrates, lawyers, self-made men. Posner has a breakdown, and lives alone, but remembers Hector fondly. Hector has the last word in the play, telling the boys that **the point of education is to pass it on**.