Darwin Day 12th February
Notes for Teachers

North East Humanists

Introduction

Darwin Day is an annual celebration of Darwin's date of birth on 12th February 1809

Darwin's work is very significant to Humanists, as well as many others, for two main reasons.

Firstly, he was the scientist who published, in 1859, the groundbreaking book 'On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection'. He was not entirely alone - other scientists, such as Alfred Wallace, were coming to similar conclusions. Humanists, along with many other people of course, see this theory as central to our understanding of the living world and our place within it. His work includes questions not only about physical evolution but also about where morality comes from and how we should live our lives.

Secondly, the way Darwin worked, making observations and collecting information, is what we now call the scientific method which involves the use of evidence to formulate theories. This is used by scientists the world over and enables communities of researchers to develop, verify and amend their thinking. As a young man Darwin believed the creation account which was dominant at the time. But, as he collected more evidence, he came to a different conclusion. He was also influenced by the tragic death of his daughter and by the cruelty he witnessed in the natural world, both of which undermined his belief in a benevolent deity.

Darwin Day Lectures

On, or close to, Darwin Day there are special lectures on a contemporary research topic related to Darwin's work ,such as evolution and genetics.

For instance in 2024

February 8th	Darwin Day Lecture NEH in association with Newcastle University Curtis Lecture Hall, Herschel Building, Newcastle University 17.30 In person and recording available online
February 6th	Darwin Day Lecture, Humanists UK 19.30 Conway Hall London Bookable for live online transmission

For more details see separate flyer included in this package.

Darwin Day in the Curriculum

Humanism is generally included as part of the RE curriculum, so RE teachers may wish to include specific work about Darwin Day, particularly in upper KS2 and KS3.

Clearly, the theory of evolution has its place in the science curriculum so a collaboration between science and RE might be a good way of working.

The Y6 science curriculum lends itself very well to Darwin Day.

Y6 Evolution and inheritance

Pupils should be taught to:

- recognise that living things have changed over time and that fossils provide information about living that inhabited the earth millions of years ago
- recognise that living things produce offspring of the same kind, but normally offspring vary and are not identical to their parents
- identify how animals and pants are adapted to their environment in different ways and that adaptation may lead to evolution.

This is then built on in the KS3 curriculum.

Working scientifically;

- understand that scientific methods and theories develop as earlier explanations are modified to take account of new evidence and ideas, together with the importance of publishing results and peer review

Genetics and evolution; Inheritance, chromosomes, DNA and genes

- the variation between species and between individuals of the same species means some organisms compete more successfully, which can drive natural selection
- changes in the environment may leave individuals within a species, and some entire species, less well adapted to compete successfully and reproduce, which in turn may lead to extinction

Resources

NEH Poster: Asking questions Included in this package (one of a series of 6 all available on the NEH website under Education)

NEH Darwin Day Card sort Included in this package (requires printing and cutting)

Films / videos

There are a number to select from for different Key Stages, such as:

BBC KS2 Charles Darwin https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/class-clips-video/ks2-charles-darwin-victorian-science/zddbnrd

TES Charles Darwin Famous Explorer for KS2 https://www.tes.com/en-us/teaching-resource/charles-darwin-famous-explorer-ks2-assembly-or-lesson-11816801

Where do we come from? KS1 KS2 Understanding Humanism
https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/res_films/where-do-we-come-from/

BBC Teach Religious Studies for KS3 D is for Darwin
https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/class-clips-video/d-is-for-darwin/zmqdmfr

Books Recommended by Humanists UK for Primary schools, plus many more resources for each Key Stage https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/books/

- How the Borks Became, Jonathan Emmett
- Grandmother Fish, Jonathan Tweet
- What Mr Darwin Saw, Mick Manning
- Our Family Tree
- Little Changes, Tiffany Taylor
- Older Than The Stars, Karen Fox