

Name _____

Date _____ Class _____

1 *The Origin of Species*

—Charles Darwin

Synopsis

The Origin of Species is Charles Darwin's explanation of his theory that life on Earth is the result of an evolutionary process of natural selection. It is considered to be one of the world's great books, and it revolutionized scientific thought. Darwin was an amateur naturalist who wrote in simple, straightforward English. This major work, considered to be his most important, can be easily understood by anyone capable of following a logical argument.

In the 1830s, Darwin served as a ship's naturalist on the surveying sloop H.M.S. *Beagle*. He collected specimens and recorded observations of the various fauna and flora that he encountered on his voyage around the world. Although Darwin wrote a brief sketch of his data analysis and conclusions in 1844, he did not publish a complete account of his findings until 1859. He did so under pressure from friends who were concerned that another naturalist had drawn similar conclusions.

Chapter by chapter, Darwin sets forth his argument in a logical progression. He discusses species variation as it occurs both in nature and domestication; the struggle of species to survive and natural selection as the dominant feature of that struggle; problems with and objections to his theory; sterility in hybrids; geological evidence; geographical dispersal of related species; and the relationship of all animals at the embryonic level. He concludes by again addressing objections to his theory and by speculating about the effect his book will have in relation to other sciences.

Student Focus

You should appreciate the author's use of the literary elements of narration, description, and exposition in this highly readable book. Pay close attention to the types of evidence amassed and the use of logic to draw viable conclusions from that evidence. Evolution cannot be directly observed and can only be deduced from indirect evidence. What were the social implications of Darwin's theory?

Correlation to Subject Matter

Evolution, Genetics, Mutations, Reproduction, Ecology, Botany, and Embryology