

Box 2.1a: Expert groups

Darwin: start of text A

Charles Darwin was born on 12th February two hundred years ago. He hated school, especially learning Latin, but he loved reading and studying the details of the natural world. He had a famous grandfather who was a radical thinker. Erasmus Darwin was the doctor of George III, an inventor of engines and very interested in natural philosophy. In fact, Erasmus had influenced the ideas of Mary Shelley who wrote *Frankenstein*. His mother, Susannah, was the daughter of Josiah Wedgwood. The Wedgwood pottery was very advanced for its time. The Wedgwoods were radical, technological minded business people. [...]



Darwin: start of text B

Some ideas in science are difficult to understand, because our intuitions don't like them very much. Some scientists argue that this may be because our brains have not evolved fast enough, and are better designed to work for small groups of hunter/gatherers. This is what most of us were doing four to five thousand years ago. So, for instance, we think we have a good chance of winning the National Lottery, we see significance in coincidences and we read astrology predictions and only remember when they come true. [...]



Darwin: start of text C

Before Darwin was born, most people in England thought that species were not linked in a single 'family tree'. They were unconnected, unrelated and unchanged since the moment of their creation. Earth itself was thought to be 6,000 years old. There would not have been time for species to change. People were not part of the natural world; they were above and outside it. They had been created to rule over the animals. Many also believed that there were superior races created to rule over inferior races. Before 1800, only a handful of naturalists in England and France had given the idea of evolution serious consideration. [...]



Darwin: start of text D

Natural selection is a simple mechanism that causes populations of living things to change over time. In fact, it is so simple that it can be broken down into five basic steps: V.I.S.T.A.: Variation, Inheritance, Selection, Time and Adaptation. Members of any given species are seldom exactly the same, either inside or outside. Organisms can vary in size, colour, ability to fight off diseases and countless other traits. These traits arise from spontaneous mutation and enable the organism to survive and pass them to future generations. [...]



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