

Charles and Emma: The Darwin's Leap of Faith

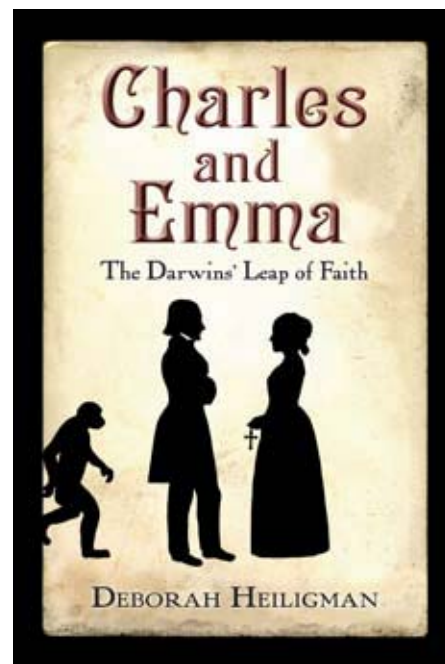
by Deborah Heiligman

Pre-reading Activity

What do you know about Charles Darwin? Make a short list. As you read *Charles and Emma*, think about how what you're learning compares to what you already knew.

Discussion Questions

- What does it say about Charles's character that he made a pro/con list to decide whether he should get married or not?
- What effect do you think that fact Dr. Darwin allowed his children freedom of thought regarding religion had on Charles's professional life?
- Do you agree with Dr. Darwin's marital advice to his son?
- Explain the quote on page 46 "education and environment produce only small effect on the mind of anyone ... most of our qualities are innate." Does this sound like any popular scientific theory you know of?
- What does Charles mean when he uses the term "materialism"? (Chapter 7)
- Why did the author include the information about slavery and Charles's position and thoughts upon the subject? (see page 72)
- Could Charles's theory of evolution have upset the church in ways other than upsetting the belief in creationism? (see pages 74 ff.)
- At the bottom of page 120 Charles believes that revealing his theory on the mutability of species will be like murdering God. Is there a way to reconcile believing in God and accepting a theory such as evolution?
- Why did Emma help to edit Charles's sketch of his species theory? (see page 123)
- What do you think of Emma's morality story on page 165?
- Why do you think that the first book on the ability of species to change (*Vestiges of Natural History of Creation*) received more attention than Charles's book?
- Why do you think Charles chose to put God into the second edition of his book? What effect did it have on the work? (Chapter 27)
- How do you feel about Charles being buried in a church? Do you agree with Emma that he would have accepted the offer to be buried in Westminster Abbey?
- In the Epilogue Gwen, Charles's granddaughter states "Of course we always felt embarrassed if our grandfather were mentioned, just as we did if God were spoken of." She describes Charles's study as "faintly holy and sinister, like a church." She goes further on to say "At Down, there are more things to worship than anywhere else in the world." How are these statements ironic?



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