

In the late summer of 1831, Charles Darwin received a letter which changed his life. He was invited to accompany Captain Robert FitzRoy (who was employed by the British government) on a voyage aboard a ship called the *Beagle*. (Follow the link for a narrated, animated version of Darwin's journey.)

Although Darwin's father was initially against the trip, which would keep his 23-year-old son away five years, he finally gave in. The results of the exploration, which continued between 1831 and 1836, made Charles famous even before he returned to England.

In this clip, from "Darwin's Dangerous Idea," we catch-up with the budding naturalist as he explores areas in South America. Locating interesting fossils, and other specimen, Darwin wonders - a great deal - about what he sees.

Returning to England, Darwin shows his older brother, Erasmus, his "finds." It doesn't take long before Erasmus - named after his famous paternal grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, who published *Zoonomia* (containing one of the first formal theories of evolution) - urges "Charlie" to write a book about his five-year travels and his developing theories.

It will take more than twenty years before that revolutionary event happens. The delay is caused, in part, by Darwin's concerns on how his work will be received by the academic and scientific community. Evolutionary theory did not originate with Darwin, and his worries were justified.

Not everyone agreed with Darwin's theory of natural selection, after his book was published. According to historian Peter Bowler (in *Evolution: The History of an Idea*, at page 224):

Darwin had faced mounting opposition to the theory of natural selection in his own lifetime, and its popularity had continued to decline until, by the end of the century, its opponents were convinced it would never recover.

Today, however, Darwin's ideas are widely embraced. NOVA, which aired this docudrama in America, provides more background on it:

This program interweaves the drama in key moments of Darwin's life with documentary sequences of current research, linking past to present and introducing major concepts of evolutionary theory. It also explores why Darwin's "dangerous idea" matters perhaps even more today than it did in his own time.

When Charles Darwin published his book - on the 24th of November, 1859 - he called it:

On

The Origin of Species

By Means of Natural Selection,

Or The

*Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle
For Life*

His "big book" was not the first publication Darwin released regarding his evolutionary theories, however. He was forced to publish a paper, on 20 August 1858, in the *Journal of the Proceedings of the Linnean Society of London* since Alfred Russel Wallace had reached similar conclusions about "natural selection."

Articles by both men were published in the same issue of the *Journal*.

See, also:

[Darwin's Dangerous Idea, Part 2](#)

[Darwin's Dangerous Idea, Part 3](#)

[Darwin's Dangerous Idea, Part 4](#)

[Darwin's Dangerous Idea, Part 5](#)

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Darwin's Dangerous Idea, Part 11

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