Darwin's Emotional Struggles as Depicted in "Creation" (2009)

Amalia Amburn | 2:50

While many students today are familiar with Darwin’s theory of evolution, most are less familiar with his personal life. Darwin completed his research and had the ideas formulated for his theory long before he published them in *On the Origin of Species*. There were several personal reasons that he took so long to publish his theory, including his struggle with the implications his theory had on religion, his debilitating health issues, and his sufferings when his daughter Annie died at the age of 10.

This class will look into these emotional struggles due to the implications of his theory and how we might personally identify with or relate to them in general. The only requirement for the class is a willingness to have open discussion of one’s religious beliefs and views on death.

I would like to show the film “Creation” from 2009 that showcases his personal life, focusing on the struggles mentioned above. After watching the film, I would like to show copies of relevant primary source documents to focus discussion on specific scenes in the movie and from there to discuss the larger implications Darwin’s theory has on all of us in our daily lives.

Access to a projector is required to show the film and electronic copies of documents. Preferably not held in a lecture hall so we can make a circle for discussion after the movie.

Intro

* Darwin’s personal history (5 minutes)
  + Married to first cousin Emma
  + Had many children – Annie was perhaps favorite, she passed away young
  + Health complications
* Darwin’s intellectual history (5 minutes)
  + Importance of travels to Galapagos
  + Extensive/exhaustive documentation of theory with notes and drawings
  + Problematic relationship with Wallace
  + Relationship with other scientists including Huxley

Film Showing – “Creation” (2009) (1 hour 50 minutes)

Student Driven Discussion using Primary Sources to focus discussion

1. Importance of Darwin’s relationship with Annie (20 minutes)
   1. Primary Source: Jenny the Orangutan drawing
      1. Retell story and discuss significance
   2. Primary Source: Letter about Annie
      1. Discuss overall nature of Darwin’s mourning of daughter
      2. Retell impertinent scenes from film
         * Examples to bring up: Beach scene, picnic scene, dead bird scene

Questions: Which episode with Annie did you like the best? Why? What did you learn from the story about Jenny the orangutan? What did you make of how strongly Darwin reacted to Annie’s illness and death? Did you find his reaction ‘normal,’ heightened in part due to his own illness and potentially looming death, or heightened due to his research and theory, and thus his views on man's fate?

1. Importance of Darwin’s relationship with Emma (20 minutes)
   1. Primary Source: Letters between Charles and Emma discussing Emma’s religiosity
      1. Discuss Emma’s religious sensibilities and the tensions they created for the family, especially in light of Annie’s death
      2. Discuss the reconciliation between Emma and Charles at the end of the film
         * Believable?
         * Is their reconciliation a model for how this tension in human history might be reconciled?

Questions: What did you make of the picnic scene with the pastor? How did that scene inform your understanding of the tensions between Emma and Darwin? Did you sympathize more with Darwin or Emma? What did you make of the tensions between Darwin and Emma over religion? Was their resolution convincing? What can we learn from how they resolved their differences?

Closing and Summary (10 minutes)