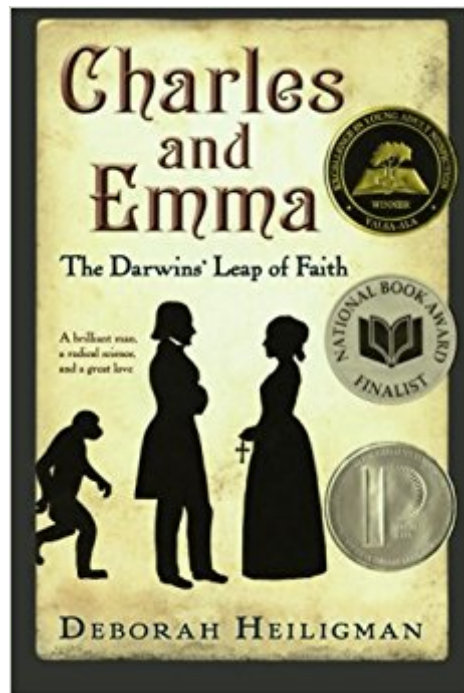




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Charles And Emma: The Darwins' Leap Of Faith



Synopsis

Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, his revolutionary tract on evolution and the fundamental ideas involved, in 1859. Nearly 150 years later, the theory of evolution continues to create tension between the scientific and religious communities. Challenges about teaching the theory of evolution in schools occur annually all over the country. This same debate raged within Darwin himself, and played an important part in his marriage: his wife, Emma, was quite religious, and her faith gave Charles a lot to think about as he worked on a theory that continues to spark intense debates. Deborah Heiligman's new biography of Charles Darwin is a thought-provoking account of the man behind evolutionary theory: how his personal life affected his work and vice versa. The end result is an engaging exploration of history, science, and religion for young readers. *Charles and Emma* is a 2009 National Book Award Finalist for Young People's Literature.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Grade 8 Up
Beginning with Darwin's notorious chart listing reasons to wed and not to wed, Heiligman has created a unique, flowing, and meticulously researched picture of the controversial scientist and the effect of his marriage on his life and work. Using the couple's letters, diaries, and notebooks as well as documents and memoirs of their relatives, friends, and critics, the author lets her subjects speak for themselves while rounding out the story of their relationship with information about their time and place. She shows how Darwin's love for his intelligent, steadfast, and deeply religious cousin was an important factor in his scientific work—pushing him to

document his theory of natural selection for decades before publishing it with great trepidation. Just as the pair embodied a marriage of science and religion, this book weaves together the chronicle of the development of a major scientific theory with a story of true love. Published for young adults, this title will be equally interesting to adults drawn to revisit Darwin on his 200th birthday. --Ellen Heath, Easton Area Public Library, Easton, PA Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Starred Review When the book opens, Charles Darwin is trying to make a decision, and he is doing so in a time-honored fashion: drawing a line down a piece of paper and putting the pros of marriage on one side and the cons on the other. As much as Darwin is interested in wedded life, he is afraid that family life will take him away from the revolutionary work he is doing on the evolution of species. However, the pluses triumph, and he finds the perfect mate in his first-cousin Emma, who becomes his comforter, editor, mother of his 10 children and sparring partner. Although highly congenial, Charles and Emma were on opposite sides when it came to the role of God in creation. Heiligman uses the Darwin family letters and papers to craft a full-bodied look at the personal influences that shaped Charles's life as he worked mightily to shape his theories. This intersection between religion and science is where the book shines, but it is also an excellent portrait of what life was like during the Victorian era, a time when illness and death were ever present, and, in a way, a real-time example of the survival of the fittest. Occasionally hard to follow, in part because of the many characters (the family tree helps), this is well sourced and mostly fascinating, and may attract a wider audience than those interested in science. Austen fans will find a romance to like here, too. To be illustrated with photographs. Grades 8-12. --Ilene Cooper --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Charles and Emma: The Darwins' Leap of Faith by Deborah Heiligman is exceptional. As a fan of science writing, biography, historical settings, and young adult literature, I felt like Charles and Emma was written just for me. The religious issues along with the romantic aspects brought drama to what might have otherwise been a traditional biography. The religious and romantic elements might also move some fiction readers toward nonfiction. Many adult biographies can be academic and dry, so I enjoyed the simple language, conversational style, and topical emphasis of this book written for young adults. I don't normally think of biographies as "page turners," but the story was a really "quick read." Heiligman wove interesting primary source materials and stories into the book. I particularly enjoyed the "to marry" and "no to marry" list. I could relate to this very analytical

approach. I could also connect to his obsession with "knowing everything" about a particular topic such as his species studies. Combining the stories of Charles and Emma made the book unique. As I read the story I wondered about the impact of spouses on other scientists. I'd like to see other books taking this approach to biography. So much of YA literature focuses on realistic fiction (teen angst and melodrama) and fantasy (vampires, werewolves, dystopia) that it's great to see a book written for nerdy teens like I was! In publisher's quest for "high profit" books, they often forget that there's a market for engaging biographies, readable nonfiction, and quality storytelling outside traditional fiction categories. This book will never get the readership of the Twilight series, but there are teens in the world that aspire to be naturalists, scientists, and scholars that are thirsty for books like this. One sign of an exceptional book is the degree to which I think about the book later. Darwin seems to be everywhere I look. Darwin's 200th birthday was Feb 12 2010. I've always respected Charles Darwin for the many years he spent researching and reflecting on his theories before publishing. He truly wanted to "get it right." His approach to science and the development of arguments is a great example of critical thinking. There are some great websites devoted to his work. You can also visit Darwin's countryside on Google Earth. For a great overview with images go to [http://www.darwinday.org/learn/Want to learn more?](http://www.darwinday.org/learn/Want%20to%20learn%20more%3F) Go to [http://www.darwinday.org/Beyond the book...](http://www.darwinday.org/Beyond%20the%20book...) I think it's important to introduce biography and Charles Darwin to children. For younger readers, I'd suggest the beautifully illustrated picture book "One Beetle Too Many: The Extraordinary Adventures of Charles Darwin" by Kathryn Lasky as a great introduction to Charles Darwin. For teens who enjoy this book, I'd recommend moving into quality adult nonfiction such as Erick Larson's *The Devil in the White City*, Isaac's *Storm*, or *Thunderstruck*. I enjoy reading about naturalists from the 1500s through the 1900s. For an engaging biography that takes place in the late 1600s, read "A Pirate of Exquisite Mind: Explorer, Naturalist, and Buccaneer: The Life of William Dampier" by Diana Preston. The biographies of Linda Lear would be a great way to introduce young adults scholars to adult literature. Read *Beatrix Potter: A Life in Nature* or *Rachel Carson: Witness for Nature*. Okay, so now you know I'm a nerd. We need more nerds in the world!

This is based mainly on the Darwin family's correspondence so it's easy to believe it's accurate. I have read several books about Darwin, along with trying to slog through his actual book *Origin of Species* which is really tough going. The book adds detail to other facts about Darwin found in other books. It especially discusses the complication caused by Emma's belief in heaven and Darwin's struggle with that. Interesting fact: They had ten children, seven of whom survived, and Emma had her last child when she was 48 years old. However, they had an astonishing number of household

employees, so Emma was not exactly doing laundry and cooking for the family. Great read!

I used this book to teach evolution to my 8th grade science students. You'd be surprised at how capable 8th graders can be of having respectful discussion on this topic! It allows students with or without religious convictions to address their concerns by talking about how Charles Darwin did so. They were also able to think about how to relate to people on both sides of the debate by exploring Charles's respect for his wife Emma (and her support of him despite her disagreements). Our Socratic seminar on the themes in this book allowed us to start our unit on evolution with an open mind and with an understanding of (and respect for) different viewpoints. The author also has a theater version of the book on her website, which was perfect for differentiation for English language learners or reading disabilities.

This was a fascinating book, bringing to light Darwin's personal story in a most interesting way. It was written for young adults, but both my husband and I enjoyed it thoroughly. It was extremely well written and revealed what limited resources physicians had in those days as well as the story of two lovely people who definitely deserved each other. Also, of course, the at that time Darwin's unorthodox view of man's development and how he and his very religious wife came to terms with his revolutionary views.

What a refreshing book! After all that's been written about Charles Darwin it's hard to believe that any new slant on this genius's life could be mined. But author, Deborah Heiligman, has found her way by giving us a bird's eye view into the love story between Charles and his devout wife Emma. Though science and religion are important keys to Charles and Emma's lives, Heiligman wisely uses a conversational tone, full of wit and humor, that keeps the pacing at the right level for middle grade and high school readers. What makes this a stand out read is the author's deft hand with details which she uses to paint a vivid picture of 19th century England. I loved that she starts out with a list young Darwin made of the pro's and con's of marriage! Not exactly Mr. Spontaneous, but his loyalty to Emma and his children never wavered. What also comes through is the author's sympathy for two people of such opposing views, who somehow manage to come together and actually thrive. It really is a testament to the strength of their love when you read about their many struggles and heartbreaks within their own family. It's biography at it's best.

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