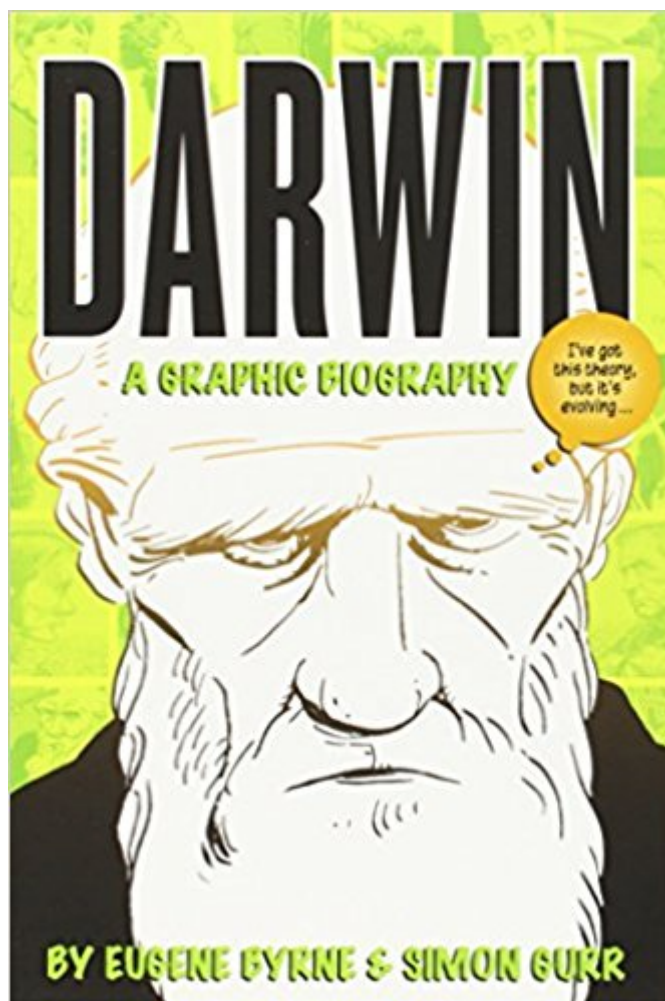


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Darwin: A Graphic Biography



Synopsis

Darwin: A Graphic Biography is an inspiring expedition into the physical and intellectual adventures of Charles Darwin. Presenting Darwin's life in a smart and entertaining graphic novel, Darwin: A Graphic Biography attempts to not only educate the reader about Darwin but also the scientific world of the 1800s. The graphic medium is ideal for recreating a very specific time frame, succeeding in placing the reader right next to a young Darwin on a "beetling" expedition. With specimens in both hands, and anxious to get another, Darwin ends up stuffing the third beetle into his mouth. Darwin's life presented in this form is an inspirational tale for kids of all ages. They'll be sure to identify with a curious young Darwin finding his way on youthful adventures in the fields near his house. The ups, downs, and near-misses of Darwin's youth are portrayed honestly and without foreshadowing of his later fame. This is a key point for younger readers: that Darwin wasn't somehow predestined to greatness. He was curious, patient, and meticulous. He persevered--a great lesson about what science is all about.

Book Information

Paperback: 100 pages

Publisher: Smithsonian Books (2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1588343529

ISBN-13: 978-1588343529

Product Dimensions: 6 x 0.3 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 6.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #931,460 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #50 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Comics & Graphic Novels > History #54 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Comics & Graphic Novels > Biography #55 in Books > Children's Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Biographies

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Gr 6 Up-Darwin's experiences and achievements are set within an overview of how societal views on science and religion evolved before his birth, during his lifetime, and after his death. The book is introduced by a group of anthropomorphic wild animals in Madagascar that are filming a

documentary about Darwin's life for a channel called APE-TV. The monkeys serve to bookend the story, act as narrators and commentators, and provide comic relief. While readers who pick up this book will be able to learn a lot about Darwin's life, his theories, and the way they have stirred up controversy over the years, the format does not make the book accessible for assignments. That said, it is both witty and readable, and students who finish it will definitely have a better handle on the man and will see how his theories changed our understanding of the world. The black-and-white illustrations include cartoons, diagrams, and photographs, providing a good mix of scientific accuracy and humor that will make the subject matter more appealing.-Andrea Lipinski, New York Public Library (c) Copyright 2011. Library Journals LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of Media Source, Inc. No redistribution permitted.

It's notable that Smithsonian Books, a publisher of long-form nonfiction, should make its first foray into graphic novels with this take on Charles Darwin. Although healthily humorous, the story is framed by an ape-hosted nature program, the book delves deeply into creationism, the scientific advances and culture that formed a foundation for Darwin's thinking, his mischievous childhood, his schooling, his travels, and, of course, his world-changing theories. The humor and slightly exaggerated realism of the art humanize the great figure, and the treatment is, to say the least, thorough. The text, however, is extremely dense, often crowding out the art, which is forced to eschew sequential narrative and merely depict what is being described in the captions. This gives the effect of an illustrated book, where each panel serves as a miniature page in its own right, rather than a graphic novel per se. Although unlikely to be selected on a casual browse, this may find a home in school or even academic libraries, where it can serve a primarily educational purpose. Grades 9-12. --Jesse Karp

Stunningly entertaining and filled with interesting facts and stories. Starting the book with the prediction that Darwin made, that if there was a flower with a 10" tubular blossom there must also be a pollinator with a proboscis long enough to reach that far, is a great framing device for the usefulness of Darwin's theory, and the way the man's mind worked. The artwork, selection of facts and stories, and touches of sometimes wry, sometimes silly humor go a long way toward propelling the reader through a whirlwind tour of biography and biology. The reference toward the end to Human Genome Project hero Francis Collins, a brilliant scientist by any measure, and a committed evangelical Christian, initially seemed a little gratuitous to me (especially given that earlier on, I thought we had sort of dispensed with the religious view), but I can see that the authors wished to

make sure that the facts of evolution were available to everyone, regardless what extra-scientific commitments they might also hold. It is a mistake to idolize Darwin too much. He was after all merely a man, but a smart, generous, solid man, I think; a good family man, filled with empathy and insight. But he got things wrong, and was a product of his times, as well. One great purpose to which Darwin can be put is to provide a narrative by which we can come to understand the rudiments of evolution. This graphic novel does that with as much economy, grace, and fun as I've ever seen.

I love the concept of teaching science history through a graphic novel but I was not impressed with the story being told as a premise of a nature docu-drama. I'm not sure to which audience that part was targeted, and it cheapened the subject. With that said, I hope the author continues to create these. Or that other people adopt this media for expanding science communication.

This illustrated biography of Darwin gives a nice overview of Darwin's life and ideas. It's fun to read the biography as a comic book and it may do a better job of engaging younger readers.

Nicely done. The story has good momentum, and the scientific concepts are well presented. Only a bit of extraneous jokiness (to appeal to younger readers?) mars the book. The creators and publisher deserve much credit for this fine project.

Purchased by school district. Didn't hear any complaints from the teacher (and I would), so assume all's good.

This book was silly....

This is the complete review as it appears

(<http://ianwoodnovellum.blogspot.com/2015/04/darwin-graphic-biography-by-eugene-byrne.html>) at my blog dedicated to reading, writing (no 'rithmetic!), movies, & TV. As a young man, Darwin was rather rudderless. He was pointed in the direction of family tradition (for men) which was medicine, but he couldn't stand the sight of blood and had to leave the OR during one surgery he was supposed to be witnessing. Of course, medicine was far more of an experimental "if not just plain mental" endeavor back in his day than it is now, and far more bloody and painful (there was no anesthesia). Perhaps Darwin was wise in deciding that he would much rather spend his time taking nature rambles and looking at beetles, plants, and life in tidal pools. His father determined that

he should become a clergyman in default of a medical career, and though he was religious, Darwin wasn't interested in that, either. He did manage, with some help, to complete his schooling, but before he had a chance to lose his way in the church, he had the opportunity to take a sea voyage on a ship called The Beagle. The idea was to finish mapping South America's coast line and estuaries for trade and naval use. The voyage was supposed to last two years, but Darwin was gone for five, and when he returned, he was quite a celebrity in scientific circles, having documented geology and life, both plant and animal, extensively, and sent back hundreds and hundreds of specimens, some of them live, along with letters and reports. One of these live specimens was a giant tortoise from the Galapagos, which ended up in Australia and died only in 2006. The idea of organisms changing over time is inescapable to anyone with eyes and a decent amount of smarts. It's evident even in living species, and it's blatantly evident from the fossil record, but because of the power of the church, it was very much a taboo subject. Nonetheless, the evidence forced it into the light, and Darwin wasn't the first person ever to think about this. He was the first to marshal so great a wealth of evidence, supported by a working, testable explanation, that the subject could no longer be ignored by the populace, dismissed by scientists, or repressed by religious authorities. This book describes his life leading up to the Beagle voyage, the voyage itself, and the years of hesitation and agonizing over the theory before he finally published his land-mark work late in 1859. Darwin's On the Origin of Species was a best-seller, and was read not only by scientists and the wealthy, but by ordinary people for whom it was an expensive purchase. When he learned that everyday people were reading it, Darwin even produced a mass market version using smaller print so it cost less to produce and buy. This graphic novel explains lucidly and accurately what the theory was all about, and details some of the extensive evidence that supports it. It also cuts the legs out from under a lot of the lies which young-Earth creationists have been forced to create in their attempts at character-assassination of Darwin over the years, as they realized their attempts at science have failed dismally and repeatedly. I thoroughly recommend this book.

Very nice view and short look to Darwin's mind and his life. The book is not just about life chronology, it has many funny points and additional information as well.

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