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# Offer of a lifetime

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Activity4: When Darwin met Captain FitzRoy

Subject: English

2 x 60 minutes

## Suggested preparation

Presentation:

[The offer of a lifetime](#)

## What do I need?

**Letter 115** Charles Darwin to Susan E Darwin, 4 Sept 1831

**Letter 118** Charles Darwin to John Stevens Henslow, 5 Sept 1831

**Letter 135** Robert FitzRoy to Charles Darwin, 23 Sept 1831

**Letter questions:** 'When Darwin met FitzRoy

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Darwin had not met Captain FitzRoy when he was offered his place on HMS *Beagle*. They were close in age but not experience. Create a short drama of the first meeting of the two men who were about to live in very close quarters for the next five years.

# What do I do?

## Lesson One

1. Read through the letters and answer the questions.
2. Split into 2 groups and complete the following:

### Task group A

- i. Find out what you can about Captain FitzRoy.
- ii. Produce a short fact file to describe his career to this point.
- iii. Use your research (including letter 135) to describe FitzRoy's personality.

### Task group B

- i. Find out what you can about Darwin at this time in his life.
- ii. Produce a short fact file to describe his career to this point.
- iii. Read through the letters from Darwin to find out more about his personality and how he felt about FitzRoy.

## Lesson 2

1. Share your research with the class.
2. Using your research on FitzRoy and Darwin, draft a short script based on their first meeting (the finished piece should only be a few minutes long). Think about what you know about each person, how they feel and what they might want from their first meeting.
3. In pairs, perform your short drama to the class.

## Letter 115 Charles Darwin to Susan E Darwin, 4 Sept 1831

4 Sept 1831

Cambridge  
Sunday Morning

My dear Susan

...The whole of yesterday I spent with Henslow, thinking of what is to be done.—& that I find is great deal. By great good luck, I know a man of the name of Wood, nephew of Lord Londonderry; he is a great friend of C. Fitzroy & has written to him about me—I heard a part of C. Fs letter, dated sometime ago, in which he says “I have a right good set of officers & most of my men have been there before.” it seems that he has been there for the last few years; he was then second in command, with the same vessel that he has now chosen.— He is only 23 years old; but seen a deal of service, & won the gold medal at Portsmouth. The admiralty say his maps are most perfect.— He had choice of two vessels, & he chose the smallest.—

Henslow will given me letters to all travellers in town whom he thinks may assist me...

I should be obliged if my Father would place to my account here 100£ if at present convenient ditto at London.— what bank?

I am afraid there will be a good deal of expence at first.— Henslow is much against taking many things; it is mistake all young travellers fall into.— I write as if it was settled: but Henslow tells me, by no means, to make up my mind till I have had long conversations with C. Beaufort, & Fitzroy:

Good bye. You will hear from me constantly. direct 17 Spring Gardens Tell nobody in Shropshire yet.—Be sure not: C. Darwin

Love to my Father.

The reason I dont want people told in Shrops: in case I should not go, it will make it more flat.



# Letter 118 Charles Darwin to John Stevens Henslow, 5 Sept 1831

5 Sept 1831

17 Spring Gardens London  
Monday

My dear Sir

Gloria in excelsis is the most moderate beginning I can think of.— Things are more prosperous than I should have thought possible.— Cap. Fitzroy is every thing that is delightful, if I was to praise half so much as I feel inclined, you would say it was absurd, only once seeing him.— I think he really wishes to have me.— He offers me to mess with him & he will take care I have such room as is possible.— ...



Cap Fitzroy has good stock of books, many of which were in my list, & rifles &c So that the outfit will be much less expensive than I supposed.— The vessel will be out 3 years I do not object, so that my Father does not.— On Wednesday I have another interview with Cap. Beaufort, & on Sunday most likely go with Cap. Fitzroy to Plymouth...

What changes I have had: till one to day I was building castles in the air about hunting Foxes in Shropshire, now Lamas in S America.— There is indeed a tide in the affairs of men.— If you see Mr Wood, remember me most kindly to him.—

Good bye, my dear Henslow

Yours most sincere friend

Chas Darwin

Excuse this letter in such a hurry.



## Letter 135 Robert FitzRoy to Charles Darwin, 23 Sept 1831

Sepr. 23d. 1831

Devonport

Dear Darwin

I read the first sentence of your letter—"Before you judge of my conduct"—and threw it away in a rage—saying "Damn these shoregoing fellows they never know their own minds,"—"well let's see what crotchet makes him refuse to go"—when upon reading further I found that so desperate a beginning only ushered in a simple request about a Mid!—I made certain you were off your bargain a Lady in the way, or something unforeseen!



I am sorry it is out of my power to take young Owen —because the number of Mids allowed has been complete since the Vessel was commissioned.

There is no chance of a Vacancy. You were surely quite right to ask —I could but refuse—yet I would not have refused had I been able to oblige you...

There will be plenty of room for Books...

I have arranged good & dry stowage for your things—and I think you will have small cause to complain of your Cabin—table—Drawers &ca.

The Dock Yard are making very slow progress—so that we shall not sail until the end of October You can remain away another week so as to be here on the 17th. if you like.

Faithfully Your's

Robt. FitzRoy



## Letter questions:

Use letters 115, 118 and 135 to answer the following questions:

1. In Letter 115 to Susan, how does Darwin describe Captain FitzRoy?
2. In Letter 118 to Henslow, what does Darwin think about Captain FitzRoy after meeting him?
3. What does Captain FitzRoy's letter to Darwin reveal about his character?

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## Who's who?

### George Peacock

George Peacock (1791-1858) was a mathematician and tutor in mathematics at Trinity College, Cambridge from 1823–39. He was Lowndean Professor of Astronomy and Geometry at Cambridge between 1837 and 1858, and Dean of Ely, from 1839 to 1858. He asked John Stevens Henslow to suggest a suitable naturalist to accompany Captain FitzRoy on the *Beagle* voyage.



### John Stevens Henslow

John Stevens Henslow (1796–1861) was a clergyman, botanist and mineralogist. He was Charles Darwin's teacher and friend. He was Professor of Mineralogy at Cambridge University from 1822 to 1827 and Professor of Botany from 1825 to 1861. He also extended and remodelled the Cambridge Botanic Garden as well as being firstly curate of Little St Mary's Church in Cambridge, then vicar of Cholsey-cum-Moulsford, Berkshire, and finally rector of Hitcham, Suffolk. Henslow recommended Darwin as an ideal candidate for the *Beagle* voyage.



Image of John Stevens Henslow courtesy of the National Library of Medicine

### Charles Darwin

Charles Darwin (1809-1882) was a naturalist who established natural selection as the mechanism for the process of evolution. He joined the voyage of HMS *Beagle* when he was 22, a journey he described as the 'most fortunate circumstance in my life'. He wrote to around 2000 correspondents all over the world as a means to inform his research. Most famously he published *On the Origin of Species*, in 1859 but he researched and wrote extensively on natural history throughout his life.



## Offer of a lifetime: Who's who?

### Francis Beaufort

Francis Beaufort (1774-1857) was a naval officer and hydrographer (he prepared accurate charts of the seas of the world) to the navy from 1829 to 1855. He retired as rear-admiral in 1846 and was the originator of the Beaufort scale for wind force.

Image of Francis Beaufort ©National Portrait Gallery, London. NPG 918. CC BY-NC-ND 3.0



### Josiah Wedgwood II

Josiah Wedgwood (1769-1843) was Charles Darwin's uncle. He was a master potter in Staffordshire and became a Whig MP for Stoke-on-Trent (1832-4). He was the father of Emma Wedgwood (who became Darwin's wife). Darwin asked his uncle his advice regarding the *Beagle* voyage. The reply influenced Darwin's father's decision, resulting in him giving his consent for Darwin to go.



### Robert FitzRoy

Robert FitzRoy (1805-65) was Vice-Admiral to the Navy, a pioneering meteorologist and hydrographer. He was made the commander of HMS *Beagle* at the age of 23. He was appointed Governor of New Zealand in 1843. He is credited with inventing several barometers and devising sea charts to forecast the weather. Despite FitzRoy's explosive temper, he and Darwin were close friends during the voyage and he supported Darwin's work. FitzRoy subsequently distanced himself from Darwin's ideas and turned increasingly to religion.

Image of Robert FitzRoy: ©National Portrait Gallery, London. NPG x128426. CC BY-NC-ND 3.0





## Offer of a lifetime: Who's who?

### Robert Waring Darwin

Robert Waring Darwin (1766-1848) was Charles Darwin's father and a physician. He had a large practice in Shrewsbury and resided at The Mount. He was the son of Dr Erasmus Darwin who took a great interest in botany. Robert Waring Darwin married Susannah, daughter of Josiah Wedgwood I.



Image of Robert Waring Darwin ©Shrewsbury Museums Service (SHYMS: FA/1991/033/2)

### Susan Darwin

Susan Darwin (1803-66) was Darwin's sister. They wrote regularly to each other during the *Beagle* voyage. She conveyed much family news to him and referred to herself as 'Granny' in her letters as she was always giving him advice. She also corrected his grammar and spelling.