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# The Beagle Voyage

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Activity 2: St Jago: All at sea  
Subject: History  
1 hour 20 minutes

## Suggested preparation

Presentation:  
[The Beagle Voyage](#)

## What do I need?

- [Letter 158: Charles Darwin to Robert Waring Darwin](#)
  - [Diary entry](#)
  - [Letter questions](#)
- [Life at Sea in the age of sail](#)

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Explore life at sea from the evidence of Darwin's writing. Imagine you are Darwin and send a letter home describing how you feel.

## What do I do?

1. Read through the letter and diary extract and answer the letter questions.
2. Visit the web pages from the Royal Museums Greenwich describing life at sea. Imagine you are going on an expedition for 5 years. Write down 3 things that would be difficult and 3 things that you would enjoy – give your reasons.
3. Imagine you are Darwin; write a letter to your best friend describing a day at sea.

## Letter 158: Charles Darwin to Robert Waring Darwin

(Brazils)  
Bahia or St. Salvador

My dear Father

...We sailed as you know on the 27th. of December & have been fortunate enough to have had from that time to the present a fair & moderate breeze...In the Bay of Biscay there was a long & continued swell & the misery I endured from sea-sickness is far far beyond what I ever guessed at.— I believe you are curious about it. I will give all my dear-bought experience.— Nobody who has only been to sea for 24 hours has a right to say, that sea-sickness is even uncomfortable.— The real misery only begins when you are so exhausted—that a little exertion makes a feeling of faintness come on.— I found nothing but lying in my hammock did me any good.— I must especially except your receipt of raisins, which is the only food that the stomach will bear...



From Teneriffe to St. Jago, the voyage was extremely pleasant.— I had a net astern the vessel, which caught great numbers of curious animals, & fully occupied my time in my cabin, & on deck the weather was so delightful, & clear, that the sky & water together made a picture...

The time has flown away most delightfully, indeed nothing can be pleasanter; exceedingly busy, & that business both a duty & a great delight.— I do not believe, I have spent one half hour idly since leaving Teneriffe: St Jago has afforded me an exceedingly rich harvest in several branches of Nat: History...Nobody but a person fond of Nat: history, can imagine the pleasure of strolling under Cocoa nuts in a thicket of Bananas & Coffee plants, & an endless number of wild flowers...

I already have got to look at going to sea as a regular quiet place, like going back to home after staying away from it.— In short I find a ship a very comfortable house, with everything you want, & if it was not for sea-sickness the whole world would be sailors...

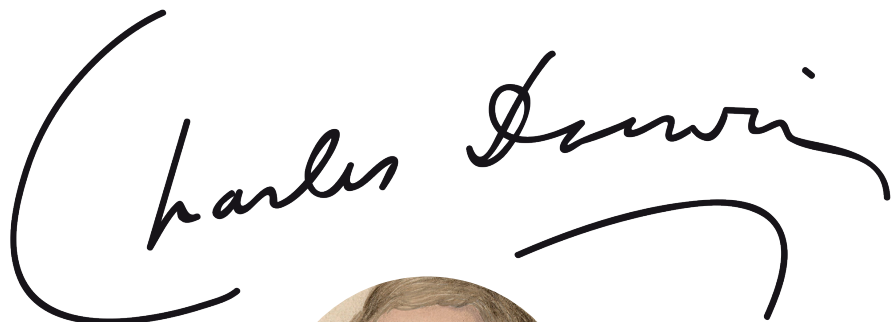
Decidedly the most striking thing in the Tropics is the novelty of the vegetable forms.— Cocoa Nuts could well be imagined from drawings if you add to them a graceful lightness, which no European tree partakes of.— Bananas & Plantains, are exactly the same as those in hothouses: the acacias or tamarinds are striking from blueness of their foliage: but of the glorious orange trees no description no drawings, will give any just idea: instead of the sickly green of our oranges, the native ones exceed the portugal laurel in the darkness of their tint & infinitely exceed it in beauty of form...

Cocoa-nuts, Papaws.—the light-green Bananas & oranges loaded with fruit generally surround the more luxuriant villages.— Whilst viewing such scenes, one feels the impossibility than any description should come near the mark,— much less be overdrawn...

Hitherto the voyage has answered admirably to me, & yet I am now more fully aware of your wisdom in throwing cold water on the whole scheme: the chances are so numerous of it turning out quite the reverse.— to such an extent do I feel this that if my advice was asked by any person on a similar occasion I should be very cautious in encouraging him...

The conviction that I am walking in the new world, is even yet marvellous in my own eyes, & I daresay it is little less so to you, the receiving a letter from a son of yours in such a quarter: Believe me, my dear Father Your most affectionate son

Charles Darwin

A large, elegant handwritten signature of Charles Darwin in black ink, written in a cursive style.

# Darwin's Diary on board HMS Beagle

13 February 1832

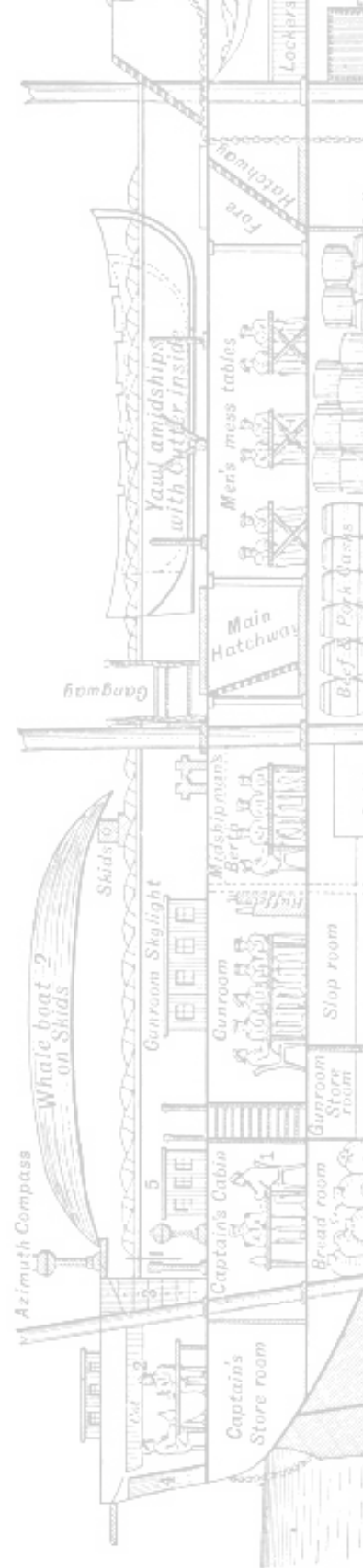
This has been the first day that the heat has annoyed us, & in proportion all have enjoyed the delicious coolness of the moonlight evenings: but when in bed, it is I am sure just like what one would feel if stewed in very warm melted butter. — This morning a glorious fresh trade wind is driving us along; I call it glorious because others do; it is however bitter cruelty to call anything glorious that gives my stomach so much uneasiness. — Oh a ship is a true pandemonium, & the cawkers who are hammering away above my head veritable devils. —



## Letter questions: All at sea

Using letter 158: Charles Darwin to Robert Waring Darwin and the diary entry: 13 February, 1832, answer the following questions:

1. According to the letter to his father, what has caused Darwin difficulties and what is he enjoying?
2. From the letter and diary entry, do you think that the voyage has met Darwin's expectations so far?
3. How is Darwin feeling in his diary entry? Why does Darwin describes events differently here than in the letter to his father?



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## Who's who?

### 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.



### 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.

### 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



# The Beagle Voyage: 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)



## William Darwin Fox

William Darwin Fox (1805–80) was a clergyman and Charles Darwin's second cousin. He was a good friend of Darwin's at Cambridge and shared his enthusiasm for studying insects. He maintained an active interest in natural history throughout his life and provided Darwin with much information. He was the Rector of Delamere, Cheshire (1838–73) but spent the last years of his life at Sandown, Isle of Wight.



## 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

