
Offer of a lifetime



Activity 2: Dear Uncle Jos
Subject: English
1 hour

Suggested preparation

Presentation:
[The offer of a lifetime](#)

What do I need?

[Letter 110](#) Charles Darwin to Robert Waring Darwin, 31 Aug 1831

[Letter 109](#) Josiah Wedgwood to Robert Waring Darwin, 31 Aug 1831

[List of Darwin's father's objections to the voyage](#)

[Letter Questions: 'Dear Uncle Jos'](#)

For practical reasons, Darwin's father didn't want his son to join the Beagle voyage and he almost didn't go. Darwin's Uncle Jos helped to persuade his father. Write the letter from Darwin asking for his uncle's help.

What do I do?

1. Read through the letters and answer the questions.
2. Make a table in which the first column lists Darwin's father's objections, for each objection write how Darwin may have responded. What other objections might his father have? Add these to the table.
3. Imagine you are Darwin; write the missing letter to Uncle Jos asking for his help. Remember to summarise your dilemma and express why you want to go on the voyage.

Letter 110 Charles Darwin to Robert Waring Darwin, 31 Aug 1831

31 Aug 1831

My dear Father

I am afraid I am going to make you again very uncomfortable.— But upon consideration, I think you will excuse me once again stating my opinions on the offer of the Voyage.— My excuse & reason is, is the different way all the Wedgwoods view the subject from what you & my sisters do.—



I have given Uncle Jos, what I fervently trust is an accurate & full list of your objections [see below], & he is kind enough to give his opinion on all.— The list & his answers will be enclosed.— But may I beg of you one favor. it will be doing me the greatest kindness, if you will send me a decided answer, yes or no.— If the latter, I should be most ungrateful if I did not implicitly yield to your better judgement & to the kindest indulgence which you have shown me all through my life.—& you may rely upon it I will never mention the subject again.— if your answer should be yes; I will go directly to Henslow & consult deliberately with him & then come to Shrewsbury.— The danger appears to me & all the Wedgwoods not great.— The expence can not be serious, & the time I do not think anyhow would be more thrown away, than if I staid at home.— But pray do not consider, that I am so bent on going, that I would for one single moment hesitate, if you thought, that after a short period, you should continue uncomfortable.—

I must again state I cannot think it would unfit me hereafter for a steady life.— I do hope this letter will not give you much uneasiness...

I do not know what to say about Uncle Jos.' kindness, I never can forget how he interests himself about me

Believe me my dear Father

Your affectionate son

Charles Darwin.

Letter 110 Charles Darwin to Robert Waring Darwin, 31 Aug
1831

- (1) Disreputable to my character as a Clergyman hereafter
- (2) A wild scheme
- (3) That they must have offered to many others before me, the place of Naturalist
- (4) And from its not being accepted there must be some serious objection to the vessel or expedition
- (5) That I should never settle down to a steady life hereafter
- (6) That my accomodations would be most uncomfortable
- (7). That you should consider it as again changing my profession
- (8) That it would be a useless undertaking



Charles Darwin

Letter 109 Josiah Wedgwood to Robert Waring Darwin, 31 Aug 1831

31 Aug 1831

My dear Doctor

I feel the responsibility of your application to me on the offer that has been made to Charles as being weighty, but as you have desired Charles to consult me I cannot refuse to give the result of such consideration as I have been able to give it. Charles has put down what he conceives to be your principal objections & I think the best course I can take will be to state what occurs to me upon each of them.



1— I should not think that it would be in any degree disreputable to his character as a clergyman. I should on the contrary think the offer honorable to him, and the pursuit of Natural History, though certainly not professional, is very suitable to a Clergyman

2— I hardly know how to meet this objection, but he would have definite objects upon which to employ himself and might acquire and strengthen, habits of application, and I should think would be as likely to do so in any way in which he is likely to pass the next two years at home.

3. The notion did not occur to me in reading the letters & on reading them again with that object in my mind I see no ground for it.

4. I cannot conceive that the Admiralty would send out a bad vessel on such a service. As to objections to the expedition, they will differ in each mans case & nothing would, I think, be inferred in Charles's case if it were known that others had objected.

5— You are a much better judge of Charles's character than I can be. If, on comparing this mode of spending the next two years, with the way in which he will probably spend them if he does not accept this offer, you think him more likely to be rendered unsteady & unable to settle, it is undoubtedly a weighty objection— Is it not the case that sailors are prone to settle in domestic and quiet habits.

Letter 109 Josiah Wedgwood to Robert Waring Darwin, 31 Aug 1831

6— I can form no opinion on this further than that, if appointed by the Admiralty, he will have a claim to be as well accommodated as the vessel will allow.

7— If I saw Charles now absorbed in professional studies I should probably think it would not be advisable to interrupt them, but this is not, and I think will not be, the case with him. His present pursuit of knowledge is in the same track as he would have to follow in the expedition.

8— The undertaking would be useless as regards his profession, but looking upon him as a man of enlarged curiosity, it affords him such an opportunity of seeing men and things as happens to few.

You will bear in mind that I have had very little time for consideration & that you & Charles are the persons who must decide.

I am
My dear Doctor
Affectionately yours
Josiah Wedgwood



Offer of a lifetime

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.