

THE HISTORY CHANNEL® PRESENTS

Ape to Man



Introduction:

“Where did we come from?” This is one of the central questions that has plagued human beings throughout the centuries, as people across cultural backgrounds and national boundaries have pondered the origins of the human species. Societies have framed this question in various ways, formulating diverse explanations for the sources of humankind. In the 19th century, scientists developed new theories of “evolution” which aimed to find evidence for the origins of humanity and to document the process of human development. This informative and compelling documentary, *Ape to Man*, chronicles the major anthropological and archaeological discoveries of the 19th and 20th centuries, revealing the ways scientific methods were first used to trace the path of humankind. The show covers the experiments of scientists like Charles Dawson, Raymond Dart and the Leakey’s, introducing viewers to their key theories and how they arrived at their findings.

With accurate reenactments of the early human ancestors who roamed the earth, viewers gain insights into what life might have been like millions of years in the past. *Ape to Man* traces several key theories presented by evolutionary scientists, many of which were never fully accepted. From an elaborate scheme of scientific deception known as the “Piltman scandal” to the evolutionists quest for the “Missing Link” or humanity, this documentary traces the ways scientists have studied and defined the progression of humankind. Delving into the history of these scientists and their theories, *Ape to Man* helps viewers understand why theories that have been proven false today were considered valid in their 19th century context. This program offers educators and their students a compelling historical framework for discussions of the origins of humanity. Rather than analyzing the current debate over evolution, this program recounts the scientific theories of evolution which emerged in the 19th century, and the ways these ideas have been reflected and reinterpreted since their inception.

Curriculum Links: *Ape to Man* would be useful for classes in Social Studies, Geography, Anthropology, and Science. It is appropriate for high school students. . It fulfills the following standards as outlined by the National Council for History Education: 1) Civilization, cultural diffusion, and innovation, 2) Human interaction with the environment, 3) Conflict and cooperation, 4) Patterns of social and political interaction.

Vocabulary: Using the dictionary at www.merriamwebster.com, an Internet resource such as www.history.com, or an encyclopedia, students should define or explain the significance of the following terms:

neanderthal
evolution
psyche
humanity

anthropology
archaeology
homo sapien
australopithecus

homo erectus
homo habilis
hominid



Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think so many people want to know where or how the human species originated? Do you think this is a central question all societies ponder? Discuss.
2. Who was Neanderthal Man and what were some of his defining characteristics?
3. Why did so many Victorians have trouble with the proposition that they had descended from apes? What does this reveal about the historical context in which they lived?
4. Why do you think anthropologists became focused on finding a “missing link” in order to explain human origins?
5. How was Charles Dawson able to convince the Royal Geographic Society and most of the world that his fossils were the “missing link” needed to explain human origins? What do you think fossils proved or suggested about human origins?
6. Why did Charles Darwin believe Africa was the cradle of humanity? What were the ramifications of this argument in Darwin’s era?
7. What was significant of the Taung fossil that Raymond Dart received and studied? Why were his findings disregarded in the anthropological world? Why do you think this was a significant event in the history of science?
8. What was the significance of Louis and Mary Leakey’s findings in the search for the “missing link”? Why do you think they are regarded as pioneering scientists?
9. According to scientists highlighted in this documentary, walking upright is the main feature that put Lucy on the road to humanity. Why was this theory so important? What kind of cascading effects did the ability to walk have for humans according to the scientists in this program??

10. According to this documentary, how was it possible for Neanderthal Man and Homo Sapiens to evolve as separate species? Why is this distinction important?
11. Do you think that in the 21st century we have a satisfactory answer to where human beings came from, and when? Do you think it is possible for societies to arrive at consensus on this topic? Discuss.

Extended Activities:

1. It is sometimes very difficult to differentiate between the various fossil findings of the 19th and 20th century. Split up into groups of three or four. Using textbooks, or the internet, research the history of fossils. Then, create a Venn diagram that compares two of the major archaeological discoveries mentioned in this documentary. (Be sure to note not only the similarities, but also the differences.) Share these findings with your larger class or group.
2. As this program makes clear, planning a successful archeological dig was not a simple task. In order to further understand the work of archeologists, pretend that you are the leader of an expedition and design your own archeological dig. Start by writing up plans for where and when you will be completing your project. Make sure to draw up a budget complete with supply lists and the number of assistants you will need. The project may be presented in any way possible, but make sure to share even the smallest of details with the class.
3. Raymond Dart made one of the most important anthropological discoveries of all time. However, his findings were cast aside and disregarded. Draft your own letter in Raymond's words to the Royal Geographic Society. Explain your findings and why your discovery should be acknowledged. Make sure to use this program as well as your own research at the library or using the Internet to understand what exactly Raymond Dart uncovered and the significance of his findings.
4. The scientists in this documentary propose theories for how and when the Neanderthal Man and Homo Sapien met. Pretend you watched this historic event unfold and write a newspaper article detailing the occasion. Make sure to be descriptive in your explanations of how each side appeared, the defining characteristics of each, and how they behaved and interacted. Be sure to date these articles and keep in mind the historical context in which these events took place.
5. Charles Darwin was one of the first scientists to publicly endorse the ideas of natural selection and human evolution. His theories were the driving forces behind the findings of the archaeologists who follow after him. Write a journal entry from Darwin's point of view that describes his feelings and thoughts regarding the discovery of Lucy, the Australopithecus. Be sure to consult Darwin's book, *The Voyage of the Beagle*, to become familiar with Darwin's writing style and approach. These entries can be read dramatically in front of the class or can be treated like a formal paper.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Websites:

The Leakey Foundation, a member supported organization committed to research related to human origins:

<http://www.leakeyfoundation.org/>

Royal Geographic Society: A Society with an interest in promoting both academic and non-academic appreciation of geography:

<http://www.rgs.org/HomePage.htm>

The Human Origins program at the Smithsonian:

<http://www.mnh.si.edu/anthro/humanorigins/>

Books:

Dart, Raymond. *Adventures with the Missing Link* (Harper and Brothers, 1959).

Darwin, Charles. *The Voyage of the Beagle* (Penguin Classics, 1989).

Darwin, Charles and Julian Huxley. *The Origin of Species* (Signet Classics, 2003).

Johanson, Donald and Maitlend Edey. *Lucy: The Beginnings of Humankind* (Simon & Schuster, 1990).

Leakey, Richard. *The Origin of Humankind* (Harper Collins, 1996).