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# Darwin's scientific women

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Activity 1c: Darwin's family workforce

Subject: History

50 minutes

## Suggested preparation

Presentation:

[Darwin's scientific women](#)

## What do I need?

Letter 3681: Margaret Wedgwood to Darwin,  
[before 4 Aug 1862]

Letter 4373: Darwin to his nieces, 4 [Aug 1862]

Letter 7124: Darwin to Henrietta Darwin, 8 Feb  
1870

Letter 7223: Charles Darwin to Lucy Wedgwood,  
8 June [1867–72?]

Letters questions

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Darwin exchanged letters with more than 2000 people all over the world when carrying out his research. He also sought advice and support from members of his family, including his nieces and his daughter. What can we learn from his letters compared to published work?

## What do I do?

1. Read through the letters between Darwin, his nieces and his daughter, and answer the questions after the letters.
2. Discuss anything that you found surprising about these letters.
3. Create a list headed 'Published sources' and another headed 'Letters'. Make a note of the advantages and drawbacks of each type of historical source for a historian.

## Letter 3681: Margaret Wedgwood to Charles Darwin, [before 4 Aug 1862]

Dear Uncle Charles

Of 256 specimens of *Lythrum* gathered this morning from different plants, we find

94 with long pistil

95 — middle length pistil

69 — shortest pistil.



These plants were all in one large field or near it but tomorrow we will go if we can manage it in a different direction for more— We find it rather difficult in gathering to know what are distinct plants and what only offsets. At Criccieth & Aber we thought the different sorts usually grew in plots together mixed with a few of the others but here they are all together. We have found the *Hottonia*, and find the pistils of different lengths as I think you told us.

Your affec niece

M. S. Wedgwood

## Letter 4373: Charles Darwin to Sophy, Margaret, and Lucy Wedgwood, 4 [Aug 1862]

My dear Angels!

I can call you nothing else.—

I never dreamed of your taking so much trouble; the enumeration will be invaluable. I will write this evening if possible & explain what I have very little doubt is the case with *Lythrum*, & which I am daily working to prove by most laborious crosses.—

But I write now to ask whether you will be more angelic than angels & send me in tin, not tightly packed, with little damp (not wet) moss (perhaps tied round stems??) 2 or 3 flowers of both forms of *Hottonia*: I much wish to measure pollen & compare stigmas.—

GoodBye

My dear Angels

C. Darwin

A large, elegant handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles Darwin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C' and a long, sweeping underline.

## Letter 7124: Charles Darwin to Henrietta Darwin, 8 Feb 1870

My dear H.

Please read the Ch. first right through without a pencil in your hand, that you may judge of general scheme; as, also, I particularly wish to know whether parts are extra tedious; but remember that M.S is always much more tedious than print.— The object of Ch. is simply comparison of mind in men & animals: in the next chapt. I discuss progress of morals &c.— Some sentences are at back of Page marked thus @.—



I do not send foot-notes, as I have no copy & they are almost wholly mere authorities.— After reading once right through, the more time you can give up for deep criticism or corrections of style, the more grateful I shall be.— Please make any long corrections on separate slips of paper, leaving narrow blank edge, & pin them to margin of each sheet, so that I can turn each back, & read whilst still attached to its proper page.— This will save me a world of troubles

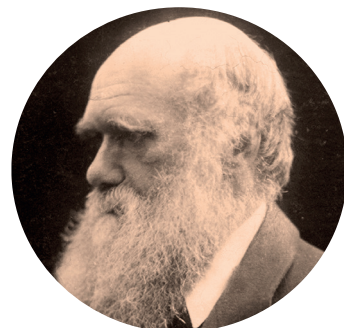
Heaven only knows what you will think of the whole, for I cannot conjecture.— You are a very good girl indeed to undertake the job.—

Your affect Father

C. Darwin

(I suspect that here & there style will want a good deal of improvement, though I hope greater part fair.—)

(I fear parts are too like a Sermon: who wd ever have thought that I shd. turn parson?)



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## Letter 7223: Charles Darwin to Lucy Wedgwood, 8 June [1867–72?]

My dear Lucy

I hear that your Dog is a barker: please observe for me whether the (upper) lips are at all retracted or everted when he barks & just before he barks. My impression is that if you open a dog's mouth lips almost hide teeth; but that they are much more exposed, when he barks, which implies some contraction or eversion.



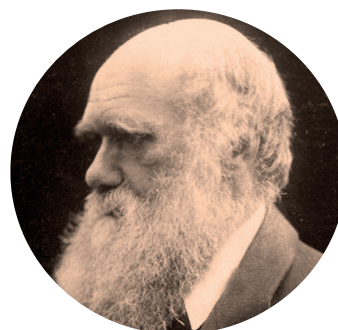
You are so good an observer that I know I can trust your conclusion. The Bark ought not to be a savage one, as that wd give tendency to snarl— a joyful bark or bark of good spirits wd. be best.—

Think of any fact about expression of any emotion in any of your birds.—

Yours affect.

C. Darwin

Our Polly will not bark except as she rushes away to some supposed enemy in forest.



## Letter questions:

1. In letters 3681, 4373, 7124, and 7223, what jobs are carried out by Darwin's nieces and daughter to help him with his work?
2. What do the letters show about Darwin's relationship with his family?
3. In letter 7124, Darwin asks Henrietta to read through his manuscript chapters and comment on them. Henrietta edited several of Darwin's books. How typical would this have been in Victorian times and why?
4. What does it say about the relationship between them?