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# Offer of a lifetime

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Activity 1: Right for the job?  
Subject: English  
1 hour

## Suggested preparation

Presentation:

[The offer of a lifetime](#)

## What do I need?

[Letter 104](#) George Peacock to John Stevens Henslow, 6 or 13 Aug 1831

[Letter 105](#) John Stevens Henslow to Charles Darwin, 24 Aug 1831

[Letter Questions](#): 'Right for the job?'

[Selection of job descriptions to consult when writing your own version.](#)

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In 1831 John Stevens Henslow wrote to offer Darwin the chance to join the trip of a lifetime. Read the letters to find out more. What kind of qualities would Darwin have needed to join the Beagle voyage and why would they be important? Write a job description for his position on the ship.

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## What do I do?

1. Read through the letters and answer the questions.
2. Discuss what a job description is for and what is important to include when writing one.
3. Using the examples of job descriptions and information in the letters to help you, write a job description for the role that Darwin eventually took on. The job description could be in the style of a nineteenth century advertisement or a modern one.
4. Share with your class and select the best one.

## Letter 104 George Peacock to John Stevens Henslow, 6 or 13 Aug 1831

6 or 13 Aug 1831

My dear Henslow

Captain Fitz Roy is going out to survey the southern coast of Terra del Fuego, & afterwards to visit many of the South Sea Islands & to return by the Indian Archipelago: the vessel is fitted out expressly for scientific purposes, combined with the survey; it will furnish therefore a rare opportunity for a naturalist & it would be a great misfortune that it should be lost:



An offer has been made to me to recommend a proper person to go out as a naturalist with this expedition; he will be treated with every consideration; the Captain is a young man of very pleasing manners (a nephew of the Duke of Grafton), of great zeal in his profession & who is very highly spoken of; if Leonard Jenyns could go, what treasures he might bring home with him,... in the absence of so accomplished a naturalist, is there any person whom you could strongly recommend: he must be such a person as would do credit to our recommendation

Do think on this subject: it would be a serious loss to the cause of natural science, if this fine opportunity was lost

The ship sails about the end of Sepr...

Write immediately & tell me what can be done

Believe me

My dear Henslow

Most truly yours

George Peacock

7. Suffolk Street

Pall Mall East



## Letter 105 John Stevens Henslow to Charles Darwin, 24 Aug 1831

24 Aug 1831

My dear Darwin,

... I have been asked by Peacock who will read & forward this to you from London to recommend him a naturalist as companion to Capt Fitzroy employed by Government to survey the S. extremity of America— I have stated that I consider you to be the best qualified person I know of who is likely to undertake such a situation—



I state this not on the supposition of yr. being a finished Naturalist, but as amply qualified for collecting, observing, & noting any thing worthy to be noted in Natural History. Peacock has the appointment at his disposal & if he can not find a man willing to take the office, the opportunity will probably be lost— Capt. F. wants a man (I understand) more as a companion than a mere collector & would not take any one however good a Naturalist who was not recommended to him likewise as a gentleman. Particulars of salary &c I know nothing. The Voyage is to last 2 yrs. & if you take plenty of Books with you, any thing you please may be done— You will have ample opportunities at command— In short I suppose there never was a finer chance for a man of zeal & spirit...

J S Henslow



## Letter questions:

Using letters 104 and 105, answer the following questions:

1. In letter 104 Peacock writes to Henslow with an exciting job opportunity for a young naturalist to join the Beagle voyage. Why does Peacock think it is such an important opportunity?
2. How does he describe Captain FitzRoy?
3. In letter 105, why does Henslow think that Darwin should take the job?

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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.