

Chapter 7: Animals

Evolution: the grand adventure of life

Ratings

MESS  DANGER  DIFFICULTY 

Theme

God creates creation to create itself

Equipment needed

Animal templates printed off (download them online); set of dice or dice templates printed off (download them online); scissors; sticky tape

Experimental method

The object of the game is to construct a new animal using the parts (body, head, tail, front and rear limbs) of the animals depicted in the figures. You need three dice, or you can make them using the templates provided. Photocopy the animals, or draw your own, and cut them out. Also cut along the dotted lines to use the parts of each animal, and cut out the bird's wing.

Designate the yellow die to tell you what kind of animal to include in your evolving creature: 1 – snake, 2 – fish, 3 – frog, 4 – bird, 5 – mouse, 6 – your choice. The other two dice will tell you which parts to use, but you need both numbers the same to be able to include the parts in your animal as follows: double 1 – body; double 2 – head; double 3 – tail; double 4 – forelimbs; double 5 – hind limbs; 6 – free choice. You can use parts in any order but you must start with a body (1 or 6 on the yellow). And, yes, you can put wings on your snake's body, but the snake only contributes head, body and tail.

Big thinking

One thing that is special about humans is our big brains. God has given us the means to look around us and weigh the evidence of our own existence as a created thing – and God is who we have been able to discern as our creator. The biblical book of Genesis speaks of our origins. It tells us in the most wonderful and beautifully poetical form that God created us, out of the earth, but it doesn't tell us in detail how. Now, God has given us science to try to understand a bit more about how he did this, and it is clear that it was through the process of evolution. But we are still trying to understand how that works. Through the science of genetics, it is becoming clear that elements we thought rather random are actually less random than we thought, and that there are goals for evolution determined by what works and what doesn't in a process that Charles Darwin first recognised and called natural selection. So the evolution game has a rather random element – dice – shuffling genes, and a goal (a telos): you need to get the right numbers to win.

Big questions

Christians read the book of Genesis in different ways. Some say Genesis is a very special kind of poetry called allegory, which tells us some deep truths about our relationships with God and the rest of creation, but not in detail how he did it. So Genesis 2:19 says: 'Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky,' and that he created us humans out of the earth – that is even what the name Adam means; we are of the earth. But creation is ongoing: as the Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225–74) called it, Continuous Creation. So talk about how the book of Genesis captures in its first three chapters what you know about human origins from science, and how they are telling the same story in different ways and how, in an amazing way, charged with wisdom, and with our active participation, God has been 'playing the evolution game'.