



EDUCATORS' GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

In the summer of 1925, the nation was riveted by the news of the young teacher on trial in Dayton, Tennessee, accused of teaching Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution in a high school biology class. The trial of the century, as it would come to be known, pitted science versus Fundamentalist Christians who believed in the literal interpretation of the Bible. *The Monkey Trial: John Scopes and the Battle Over Teaching Evolution* presents a fascinating and in-depth look at this historic trial and its aftermath. In a period where science and free thought is once again under fire in American schools, *The Monkey Trial* provides a powerful reminder of the fight that pitted science against religion and that continues to this day.

"With cogence aplenty for current national issues, Sanchez expertly sifts a mountain of documentary evidence to present a coherent account of the event [that is] perceptive, well written and reasoned, and as topical as ever."

— Kirkus Reviews
(starred review)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the meaning of integrity. John Scopes wrote, “I had been taught from childhood to stand up for what I thought was right. I did not think the state of Tennessee had any right to keep me from teaching the truth (p. 21).” How did Scopes, as well as Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan, demonstrate integrity during the trial? Do you agree with the ways they stood up for their beliefs?
2. On page 30, *Media in the Spotlight: Newspapers*, states that, “The big-city papers, like the *New York Times* and the *Chicago Sun*, kept people up to date on national and international news. And like the TV news stations of today, each newspaper had its own particular slant: conservative, liberal, or in-between.” Discuss the meaning of bias, and how each side in the battle over teaching evolution used language (in the media and in the courtroom) to slant the story to their advantage. Reread “Homo Neanderthalensis” (p. 69), the 1925 editorial by H. L. Mencken. What language does he use that is particularly biased?
3. Reread pages 31 and 100, and discuss how racism played into the vehement denial of Darwin’s Theory of Evolution.
4. The words controversial and controversy appear throughout the text. What made (and still makes in some parts of the USA) teaching the theory of evolution so controversial? What are some issues in the news today that are considered controversial? Why?
5. Discuss the First Amendment, including the concept of separation of church and state as written in the establishment clause. How did the Scopes trial test the right of freedom of speech, freedom of academic thought, and the separation of church and state? How did Judge Raulston’s behavior during the trial impact this?
6. What is a media circus? Discuss how the Scopes trial was like a circus. Can you think of any examples of modern-day media circuses?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS *(continued)*

7. When the leaders of Dayton, Tennessee, first thought of enlisting John Scopes to be the center of attention in the teaching of evolution, they had ulterior motives. What were those motives? Do you think that these people foresaw what they ultimately unleashed, both for their town and for the country as a whole? Explain.
8. On page 60, it reads that “Darrow passionately opposed what he called the ignorance and bigotry of denying science and forcing religion into public classrooms.” What is *ignorance*? *Bigotry*? Cite examples of both that emerged over the course of the trial.
9. Discuss and debate the following statements that appear on page 76 of *The Monkey Trial*: “The legislature is the judge of what shall be taught in the public schools.” (Tom Stewart, attorney for the prosecution); and “Here we find today as brazen and bold an attempt to destroy learning as was ever made in the Middle Ages. The only difference is we have not provided that they [teachers] shall be burned at the stake” (Clarence Darrow, lead attorney for the defense). Do you agree with the prosecution or the defense? Who do you think should decide what can be taught in a classroom?
10. Discuss Darwin’s concept of the survival of the fittest (p. 98). “But this concept led some social philosophers to suggest that perhaps some humans were more deserving of survival than others. The homeless, the poor, the mentally ill—they seemed to be less ‘fit’ and therefore it was part of the natural order that they not survive.” Think carefully about the above excerpt. How did some people try to taint Darwin’s ideas as a way to argue for the superiority of some segments of humankind? Why is this extremely dangerous thinking?
11. One of the lawyers for the defense contended that young people should be trusted to think for themselves: “They are a pretty smart generation. . .As a matter of fact, I feel that the children of this generation are probably much wiser than many of their elders” (p. 103). Do you agree with Malone? Can young people think for themselves, and at what age is old enough to be trusted with independent thought? He goes on to state: “The truth always wins and we are not afraid of it. The truth is no coward. The truth does not need the law. The truth does not need the forces of government” (p. 104).
12. As you have learned, the Scopes trial “polarized the nation (p. 125).” What is *polarization*? How is the “us versus them” mentality alive and well in the United States today, and how do you think it can be remedied?



EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

THE GREAT COMMONER AND THE ATTORNEY FOR THE DAMNED

After reading *The Monkey Trial*, stage a mock “trial of the century,” having students take turns playing the two celebrity lawyers from the trial: William Jennings Bryan and Clarence Darrow. Assign additional roles as well: Scopes, the supporting lawyers for the prosecution and the defense, the judge, journalists, scientists, and townspeople. Encourage students to make the pertinent arguments that both sides made in 1925. Trial transcripts, photos, and more can be found in [The Clarence Darrow Digital Collection from the University of Minnesota Law Library](#).

MONKEY BUSINESS

Darwin theorized that human beings are but one member of the primate family, which includes monkeys, chimpanzees, and gorillas. Explore the family tree of our species (*Homo sapiens*). Have students investigate some of the following questions: How long ago did we split off from chimpanzees, our closest relatives? *Homo sapiens* is the only human species that exists today, but there were once many other kinds of human beings. What other species of humans once lived on this planet?

INHERIT THE WIND

After students complete reading *The Monkey Trial*, screen selected parts of the 1960 feature film *Inherit the Wind*, or read aloud parts of the play by the same name (as the film has a running time of 2 hours and 8 minutes, showing just the final courtroom confrontation between the two lawyers will make it more appropriate for one class period). After the screening or reading, lead a discussion of Hollywood’s adaptation of the trial compared to the factual depiction presented in the book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Science educator Anita Sanchez is the award-winning author of many books for children and adults, including *The Forest in the Sea: Seaweed Solutions to Planetary Problems*, and *Meltdown: Discover Earth’s Irreplaceable Glaciers and Learn What You Can Do to Save Them*, and the picture book *Hello, Puddle!* She lives in upstate New York.

This guide was created by Colleen Carroll, literacy specialist, curriculum developer, and author of the *How Artists See* series. **Learn more about Colleen at about.me/colleencarroll.**



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