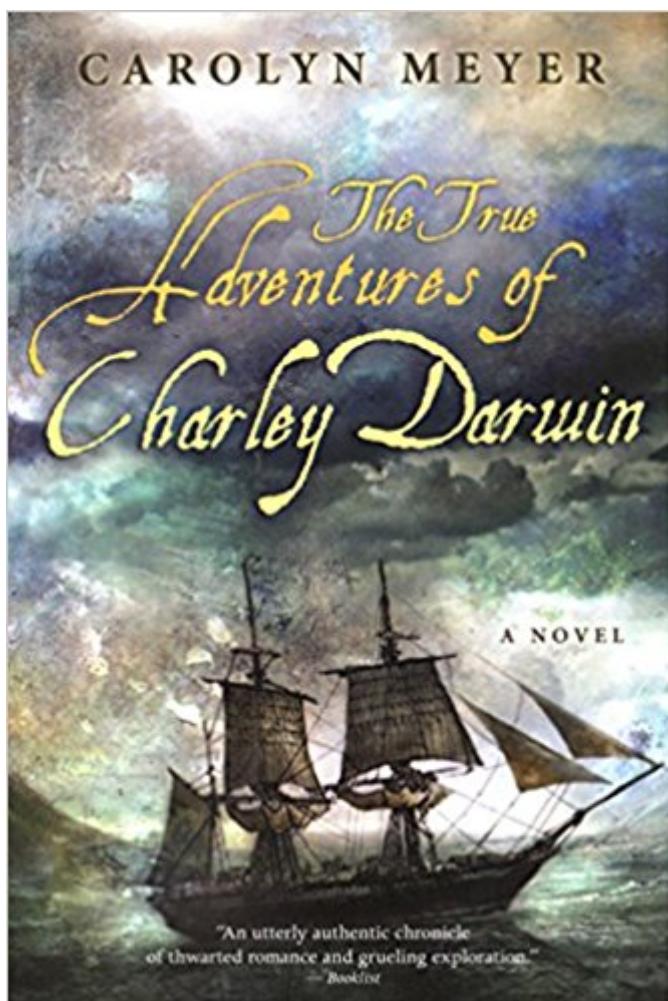


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# The True Adventures Of Charley Darwin



## Synopsis

Young Charley Darwin hated school—he much preferred to be outside studying birds—eggs, feathers, and insects. And so, at the age of twenty-one, he boarded a ship called HMS Beagle and spent five thrilling but dangerous years sailing around the world, studying plant and animal life that was beyond anything he could have imagined. Historical novelist Carolyn Meyer tells the story of his unconventional adventures of the author of the legendary book *The Origin of Species*. It's the story of a restless childhood, unrequited teenage love, and a passion for studying nature that was so great, Darwin would sacrifice everything to pursue it.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Grade 6—In this first-person novel, Meyer takes the facts of Darwin's life and enlivens them with fictional dialogue and thoughts. Charley's unhappiness at boarding school, his fascination with science and collecting natural objects, and his relationships with friends and family are all explored. His time aboard the Beagle makes up close to half of the book and is filled with adventures with gauchos and Galapagos tortoises, the latter of which he captured for food for the journey home. Meyer also fleshes out Darwin's infatuation with flirtatious Fanny Owen and his problems with the Beagle's troubled captain, Robert FitzRoy. Charles presents himself here as

self-effacing, awkward at times, yet warm, well liked, and ambitious in his scientific pursuits. This portrait fits with documented research and Darwin's own journals. Meyer's writing has a light touch that capitalizes on the humorous, romantic, and exciting events in the man's life while introducing his scientific pursuits and the beliefs of his time. Ending with his marriage to Emma Wedgwood and before the publication of his theory of evolution, this novel paints a readable and detailed portrait of the young Charles Darwin.  Ellen Heath, Easton Area Public Library, Easton, PA Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Even Charles Darwin suffered bullies and stammered when talking to girls, and these are exactly the details that will make Meyer's account of the famous naturalist's formative years so appealing. There are also challenges: some readers will be tested by the numbing accounts of the finery of nineteenth-century England, and others will find the historic voyage of the HMS Beagle that occupies the book's latter half to be meandering. But patient readers and fans of Jane Austen's style will be rewarded with an utterly authentic chronicle of thwarted romance and grueling exploration. The motherless Darwin is nine when the book begins and nearly 30 when it ends, and younger readers will identify with the intelligent but restless boy's unwillingness to follow the staid career paths endorsed by his family and friends. Those already interested in Darwinism will find his early inklings of natural selection and doubts about religion fascinating; there are plenty of vivid historical details that will keep most other readers entertained as well. Grades 9-12. --Daniel Kraus --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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The item was excellent WHEN I received it. I paid extra postage to have it delivered in 2 days and did not receive it for 5 days. I was not given a refund on the extra postage nor did I receive an email explaining the problem and giving me a new estimated time of arrival. NOT HAPPY!

This wonderful YA historical novel relates the story of young Charles Darwin in a way that allows every reader to experience his journey of discovery. We meet Charley as a boy who prefers to hunt newts in the quarry rather than study Latin and Greek in the classroom; we sympathize with his plight as a youth under immense pressure to pursue careers in which he has no interest; and we

experience the excitement of destiny realized when the young man embarks on a perilous journey that will forever transform the way he (and the rest of the world) understands the origin and complexity of life. Written in the voice of Charley Darwin, the text is accessible and thoroughly engaging for all readers who are young, and young at heart. The story focuses on Charley as a person - his relationships with friends, family and cousins, his struggles with questions of career and marriage. We see his curiosity, enthusiasm, courage and uncertainty, his humility and pride, his capacity for compassion and dedication to his work. The romances with Fanny Owen and Emma Wedgewood are thoroughly charming in their awkwardness, heartbreak, and (in the case of one, at least) fulfillment. In her interpretation of the character of Charley Darwin, Meyer takes the myth out of the personae, and turns this sometimes controversial historical figure into an engaging young man we might have all admired and befriended, had we had the opportunity to know him personally. Though Darwin's coming of age takes center stage, the thread of science is constant throughout, allowing young readers a basic introduction to the foundations and logic of evolutionary theory as originally conceived by this brilliant natural historian. We see, step by small step, how Charley Darwin's keen eye for natural history led him from a very early age toward the inevitable development of the theory that would revolutionize science and inaugurate a new era of biological inquiry. Most of all, *True Adventures* is a great read. I would recommend it without reservation for anyone interested in adventure, history, biology, evolution, exploration, and the ever-appealing theme of coming-of-age.

As an older man, his pictures reveal a thin, white-bearded, imposing-looking figure. Charles Darwin built his reputation as an outstanding scientist and collector. His life's work was devoted to the study of nature and the development of theories that, in his time, made him the subject of controversy. Gentle, shy and ever curious, he seemed destined from childhood to enlighten those around him. Charley Darwin was born in the right place to pursue his avid interests in nature. In England's peaceful Shrewsbury district, with its lovely rivers and woods, he took every opportunity to be outside exploring. Being the youngest boy, with three older, hovering sisters, he was happily indulged. Even his older brother, Erasmus "Ras", had a keen interest in nature and often joined him in dragging back various specimens found in the area. His younger sister, Emily, along with the three older ones --- Marianne, Susan and Caroline --- adored their two brothers. When their mother died, the sisters took over the job of "mothering" eight-year-old Charley --- especially the oldest, Caroline. Though loving, she was also strict in trying to discipline him in his education. Charley's father, a physician with a very successful practice, had great expectations for young Charles,

hoping he also would go into medicine. Though Charley had excellent communication with patients and was clever with medicinal formulas, it was not the life he wanted. He had been very unhappy with his time in the Shrewsbury boarding school, and when his medical studies did not work out, his father decided he was more fit for the clergy. At Christ's College, though, he finished his degree, still drawn to botany, hunting and specimen collecting. He did manage to take botany courses and was very influenced by the geologist/scientist Adam Sedgwick. He also had begun his fascination with insects and shells. His father indulged him, knowing he was an extremely bright young man and knowing that the blood of his grandfather, Erasmus Darwin, a renowned scientist, ran strongly in the boy's blood. His sisters, on the other hand, were more frustrated that they could not find a perfect match for their brother. When an opportunity came, at the age of 22, for him to take part in an exploring expedition with Captain FitzRoy of the HMS Beagle, Charley did not hesitate --- though it would involve hardship and years away from England. At first his father was not pleased, but eventually supported him with blessings and financial aid. Three years aboard the HMS Beagle as a naturalist and companion to FitzRoy turned into five. The voyage basically took them around South America with stops at islands (such as the famous Galapagos) and inland areas along the way. Charley was often terribly ill from the effects of being seasick, and though he enjoyed all the explorations, he sometimes was overwhelmed by the hardships they endured. He sent hundreds of specimens back to England, and his father sent him hundreds of dollars. He dissected and preserved every sort of animal and bird he could shoot. His records were detailed, and the voyage turned out to be one of the most well-documented ventures thanks to his painstaking recordings. Reading about the adventures and encounters of Charley and the crew during this time makes the reader realize what a huge undertaking all of this was. At one point, with the bodies of so many dead birds and animals piled around him, Charley actually decided he had had enough killing of living things and began to pull back in that area. He became a strong conservationist for his time. His fascination with fossils and geology helped balance this out as he concentrated on varieties of shells, rocks and bones --- all of which would be groundbreaking in his body of work. The more he learned, the more questions he asked. Why were certain birds made with long beaks and others had short? Why did lizards within the same species have webbed feet or shorter tails or changing colors? His notes and studies, sent back to England, would be the basis for many detailed volumes that would show the natural evolution among the species. Though his life was privileged through the wealth of his family and influential friends, the curious, daydreaming Charley Darwin used the opportunities he had to open the eyes of the world to a new way of thinking. As in her other biographical studies, Carolyn Meyer's appealing book is written with an eye for the fascinating

details of the period. She gives readers a vivid picture of the character and life of an inquisitive boy who became one of the greatest thinkers of our time. --- Reviewed by Sally M. Tibbetts

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