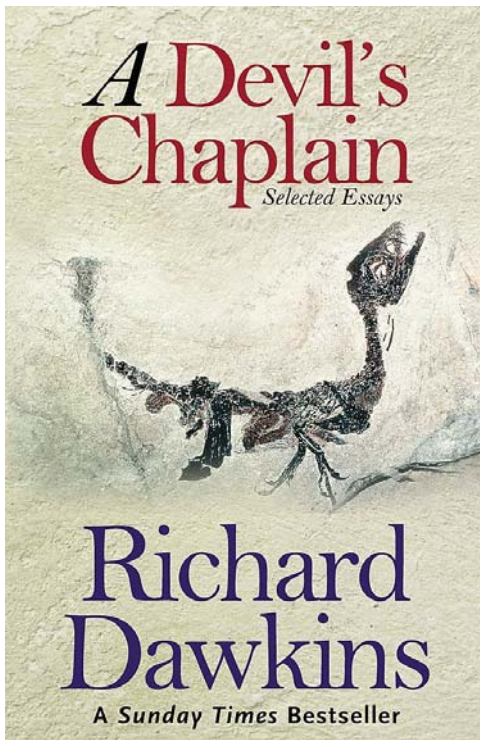


The Literacy Lowdown: A Devil's Chaplain



A level geography students, remember, you should:

- undertake wider reading
- use factual texts, discursive / creative material

Summary

A Devil's Chaplain is a selection of essays from scientist and author Richard Dawkins. Dawkins is a British evolutionary biologist who is an outspoken advocate of Darwinism and atheism.

This book review covers two chapters of interest to educators: chapter 1.8 The Joy of Living Dangerously, Sanderson of Oundle and chapter 7.1 A Prayer for my Daughter.

Throughout these Selected Essays Dawkins also argues "nature is not cruel, only pitilessly indifferent."

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Key quotes

"He [headmaster Sanderson] directed that the laboratories should be left unlocked at all times, so that boys could go in at work on their research projects, even if unsupervised. The more dangerous chemicals were locked up but enough was left about to disturb the equanimity of other masters who had less faith than the Head." (p65)

"A certain boy was so keen on a project he was working on that he used to steal out of the dormitory at 2 a.m. in the (unlocked, of course) library. The headmaster caught him there and roared his terrible wrath...the thunderstorm passed. 'And what are you reading, my boy, at this hour?' I told him of the work that had taken possession of me, work for which the daytime was all too full. Yes, yes, he understood that. He looked over the notes I had been taking...he sat down beside me to read them...and he began to talk to me of discovery and the values of discovery." (p66)

"How do we know that the stars, which look like tiny pinpricks in the sky, are really huge balls of fire like the Sun and very far away? And how do we know that the Earth is a smaller ball whirling round one of those tars, the Sun? The answer to these questions is *evidence*." (p284)

"I want to...warn you against three bad reasons for believing anything. They are called tradition, authority, and revelation." (p285)

"Inside feelings [revelations] are valuable in science too, but only for giving you ideas that you later test by looking for evidence. A scientist can have a 'hunch' about an idea that just 'feels' right...scientists use inside feelings all the time to get ideas." (p289)