

Minnesota Storytime
Reading Guide

Title: *Our Family Tree: An Evolution Story*

Author: Lisa Westberg Peters

Illustrator: Lauren Stringer

**Publisher and
Copyright Date:** Harcourt Brace, 2003

**Connection to
Minnesota:** Minnesota author, Minnesota illustrator

Summary: This Minnesota Book Award winner is the story of the evolution of humankind, told from the beginning of life on earth to the present day. A family spends the day at the beach, learning about humanity's ancestors.

Suggested ages: 7-10

Tips for Reading:

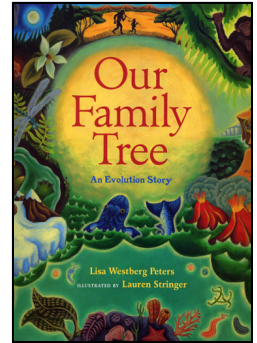
- Read the story slowly. It is a dramatic book in which a lot happens. Allow the children to hear every word.
- Pause for questions. There are a lot of difficult or unfamiliar words. Make sure you can define these words for your child.
- Point to the pictures to help with unfamiliar words, and to connect the text and pictures.
- Refer to the back of the book. Each step in the evolutionary process is described in more detail.
- Show a sample of a "real" family tree and compare it to the one drawn in the book (seen on the pages, "Today is a long, long time...").

**Questions
before reading:**

- What do you think the world was like millions and millions of years ago?
- What came before dinosaurs? Do you know?
- How many monkeys have you ever seen? How are people and monkeys the same? How are they different?
- How are humans different from other creatures?

**To Introduce
this story say:**

This is a story about where people may have come from. It shows us what the world was like billions of years ago.



**Questions
After Reading:**

- What do you think the world would be like if animals never left the sea? Do you think we'd all be living underwater?
- Why do you think humans started walking on two feet instead of four? Are two feet faster than four?
- What do you think humans will look like millions of years from now if we keep changing?
- Have you ever heard about the theory of evolution before? What did you know about evolution before we read this book?
- What does "theory" mean? Does everyone believe the same "theories"?

RELATED ACTIVITIES

Art:

- Have children draw their own family trees (and they can use their biological family or possibly the family in which they live). Show children how to begin. Ask them to ask their parents/caregivers for names of great and great-great grandparents to fill out the tree.
- Have the children draw pictures of different animals, starting with simple one-celled organisms and ending with monkeys and humans.

Language:

- Talk about the scientific words used in the story. Ask the kids what they'd name these creatures if they could come up with any word in the world. Have them create whole new words.

Science:

- Have the kids look at one another. Ask them what's different about each child. Then ask them what is the same. Point out how we're all special, no matter what we look like. Do the same thing with a book with photographs of dogs or of cats.

**Suggestions for
English Language
Learners:**

- Discuss the names of animals in different languages. Concentrate on words like: dinosaur, monkey, and mammal.
- Use a flannel board to show how one animal may have led to another as millions of years passed. Have children describe the changes using the flannel board.

Related Books:

- ***How Whales Walked Into the Sea*** by Faith McNulty, illustrated by Ted Rand (Scholastic, 1999)
- ***Life on Earth: The Story of Evolution*** by Steve Jenkins (Houghton Mifflin, 2002)
- ***The Tree of Life: A Book Depicting The Life Of Charles Darwin, Naturalist, Geologist, & Thinker*** by Peter Sís (Farrar Straus Giroux, 2003)
- ***The Evolution Book*** by Sara Bonnett Stein (Workman, 1986)
- ***The Beast In You!: Activities & Questions to Explore Evolution*** by Marc McCutcheon (Williamson, 1999)