

### **Activity: *Make a pressed plant specimen***

A given day in the life of Charles Darwin's children included activities such as accompanying their father on his infamous walks throughout the gardens around his home Down House, playing lawn tennis as he acted as spectator from the sidelines, and listening to stories of his earlier journeys on the HMS *Beagle*. Darwin was passionate about sharing his experiences, both personally and professionally, with his children.

Darwin spent a lot of time studying the plants that grew around Down House so that he could better understand the different parts of a flower. He would collect plants and flowers and would identify the different species. Scientists today still collect and press plant specimens as Darwin did, because doing so allows them to share their discoveries with other scientists and to get other opinions if they are unable to identify a certain plant. Imagine how it would be if a scientist saw an unknown plant one day and never collected and pressed it to show other scientists: the world would miss out on learning about a new plant!

Have you explored the different plants and flowers around your home or in a nearby park? Here's an activity you and your family can do together.

#### *Materials:*

- 2 pieces of corrugated cardboard
- Newspaper
- 3 large rubber bands
- Heavy books or a brick
- Plants and flowers collected on a nature walk

#### *Procedure*

1. Go on a nature walk and explore the various plants and flowers growing around your neighborhood. How many of the plants and flowers have you seen before? Can you name them? How many of the plants and flowers are new to you? Do you think they may be related to another plant or flower you have seen before? Why do you think so?
2. Pretend you are Charles Darwin and collect some of the plants and flowers you would like to use to begin your own pressed plant specimen collection. Make sure to collect your plants only from private property with the permission of the landowner and be careful to avoid touching unsafe plants (like poison ivy). Ask an adult if you are unsure of a plant. What do you like about the plants you collected? Is there anything new or special you noticed about some of them? If so, what? How do they smell and feel?
3. Place your plants and flowers between some newspaper pages. Then place the newspaper with the plants and flowers in between two pieces of the cardboard, like a sandwich. Hold the "sandwich" together with rubber bands (space them out evenly). Place a heavy book or brick on top of the cardboard-newspaper sandwich to help press it down. In about a month you can open it up to see your pressed plant specimens!
4. How do your plants and flowers look different from when you first collected them? Do they feel any different? If so, how? Do they still smell the same? If not, how do they smell now? Act like a scientist and show your collection to a friend or family member and see if they can help you to identify all of the different species in your collection.