

Gene ABC website

By the Swiss National Science Foundation

Reviewed by Fabienne Jäggi

DNA, also known as the molecule of life, has fascinated scientists since its discovery over half a century ago. But what exactly is DNA? What does it look like? What are genes and how do geneticists work with them? Gene ABC, a website by the Swiss National Science Foundation (www.gene-abc.ch), invites everyone on a journey into the world of genes. Available in German, French and Italian, it is regularly used by biology teachers as well as students aged 14-20.

The website has eight sections, ranging from gene technology and the history of genes to a question-and-answer section. Apart from the history, glossary and Q&A, each section features a selection of films which combine video footage and animations to explore a topic in depth. In an introductory section, visitors discover the nature of a cell. They find out what genes are, where they are stored, how they are transmitted from one generation to the next and how the information in a gene is translated into function. A second section describes genes and their meaning in greater detail.

Yet another section presents the techniques of genetic engineering and explains the methods used to introduce additional genes into bacteria or animal or plant cells. This part takes its examples from gene technology applications in medicine, explaining how gene therapy works, how drugs are produced by genetic engineering, and how pathogens are identified. The techniques and goals behind genetically modified plants, as well as details about Golden Rice and its potential in developing countries, explain how knowledge about DNA and genes is applied in agriculture.

Using illustrative animated graphics, easy-to-understand texts and examples taken from everyday life, the Gene ABC website is a tool which enables visitors to easily learn about the complex subject of genes.

