

The Selfish Gene was the place where a new generation of biologists first learned about it.

Thirty years ago, Dawkins advocated a set of ideas that were mature enough to coalesce into a coherent view of evolution but still new enough to be confined to a select group of mainly English and American biologists. The whiff of revolution, combined with deep insights into the mechanics of altruism, is what makes the book exciting to read even today.

The context is very different for the authors contributing to the volume of essays published simultaneously with the anniversary edition of *The Selfish Gene*. *Richard Dawkins: How a Scientist Changed the Way We Think – Reflections by Scientists, Writers, and Philosophers*, edited by Alan Grafen and Mark Ridley, is a rather mixed collection of short pieces. Too many are of the ‘Dawkins is brilliant’ school of writing, which is true in some respects but ultimately boring. There are exceptions, though, and I particularly recommend David Haig’s musings on ‘The Gene Meme’. This takes up the idea of a meme as a unit of cultural evolution, proposed by Dawkins in the last chapter of *The Selfish Gene*. The concept of the gene might be such a meme and Haig traces its evolution to conclude that a gene-centred view of biology is more fruitful than a meme-centred perspective on culture. If this leaves you intrigued, go and (re)read Dawkins’ original – but don’t get angry.

Details

The Selfish Gene

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Richard Dawkins: How a Scientist Changed the Way We Think

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ChemMatters CD-ROM

Reviewed by **Tim Harrison, University of Bristol, UK**

ChemMatters is an award-winning magazine published quarterly by the American Chemical Society for secondary-school students. Each issue is full of readable articles about the chemistry used in everyday life, and is of interest to budding chemists and their teachers alike. The ChemMatters CD-ROM (version 3.0) contains two decades of the magazine from February 1983 (volume 1, number 1) to December 2003 (volume 21, number 4).

This archive of more than 300 articles is a useful resource for students, whether they are working on specific projects or undertaking general research. All the material is suitable for school students studying pre-university chemistry and much of it would be accessible to bright 15-year-olds.

For teachers, it is a great source of background information for enlivening lessons with snippets of information that hook students. Whether your students want to know the chemistry involved in measuring ground-level ozone (September 2001 issue) or what the atmospheres on other planets in our Solar System are like (October 2003 issue), then this is the right resource for you.

Users can search the whole CD-ROM for keywords in articles, or browse the magazine issues one page at a time. The articles are in Adobe PDF format and can be printed easily.

The American Chemical Society website^{w1} includes a free archive of samples from more recent magazine issues (February 2003 to December 2006), plus a full archive of the teach-

ers’ guides. These magazine supplements contain additional information, comprehension questions, laboratory activities related to articles, and other activities such as instructions for building a methane ice model out of card (October 1995 issue).

Web references

w1 - For the free archive of articles, see:

www.chemistry.org/portal/a/c/s/1/acdisplay.html?DOC=education\curriculum\chemmatters\issue_arch.html

Ordering

The ChemMatters CD-ROM costs US\$25 for a single user or US\$99 for a single school site licence, which allows all the information to be shared across a school or library network. It can be purchased online from <http://chemistry.org/chemmatters/cd3.html>

