

Sir David Attenborough – Naturalist and Presenter

Have you ever dreamt of travelling from exotic country to exotic country observing some of the most amazing creatures in the world? As the world's most famous naturalist, Sir David Attenborough has brought amazing wildlife to television screens for over 50 years. From series such as Life on Earth, to Frozen Planet, his documentaries have inspired **generations** to learn more about the natural world.

Early Years

In 1926, David Frederick Attenborough was born into a well-off family with two brothers, John and Richard. During World War II, his parents took in two Jewish girls who had fled the Nazis and they were treated like family. His brother Richard went on to great success as an actor and film-maker, starring in Hollywood **blockbuster** films such as Jurassic Park. Sadly, he has since died.

David became fascinated by natural history in his early childhood. In fact, by the age of seven, he had already created his very own "museum" of bird eggs, old stamps and ancient fossils.

University and Early Career

After school, David studied natural sciences at Cambridge, but he was **reluctant** to become an academic, disliking the idea of being stuck in labs and lecture theatres for the majority of his life. So on finishing his studies, David joined the Royal Navy hoping to see the world, but unfortunately his dreams were not fulfilled; he did not get very far as he was posted to North Wales and Scotland.

Family

In 1950, Attenborough married Jane Elizabeth Ebsworth Oriel. The couple had two children, Robert and Susan. Robert is a senior lecturer in **bioanthropology** for the School of Archaeology and Anthropology at the Australian National University in Canberra.

Joining the BBC

David joined the BBC in 1952. His boss at the BBC **initially** told Attenborough he shouldn't actually work in front of the cameras as his "teeth were too big" but he had always wanted to present wildlife documentaries and after several years, he started to make a name for himself, producing the successful Zoo Quest series. By 1965, he was **elevated** to the post of Controller of BBC2, where he

oversaw the introduction of colour TV to Britain, and only a few years later was made Director of Programmes for BBC1 and BBC2.

Wild World

David returned to his first love of making natural history documentaries in 1973. After several successful years of making wildlife programmes, they **peaked** with his series - Life on Earth in the late nineteen seventies; at the time, this was the most ambitious series the BBC had ever produced. In recent years, all of Attenborough's programmes, such as, Planet Earth and even more recently, 'Climate Change - The Facts' are highly acclaimed.

What is David like to work with?

David writes all his own scripts and has won literary prizes for his books. The great presenter is no **prima donna**, always travelling economy class with his film crew and only accepting offers for airline upgrades if it extends to his crew as well. A modest David has been quoted as saying, "People assume I do all the work. I keep having to tell them, it was the film crew, not me".

Not only does David undertake extensive travel to often-dangerous regions, he is also willing take risks for his shows. He let himself be attacked by military ants in Africa, abseiled down a rainforest tree his late 60s and is the oldest person to set foot on the North Pole! In fact, the **plucky** presenter has only two **aversions**: rats, and anywhere (like dark caves) where there might be rats.

A National Treasure

David Attenborough was named as the most trusted celebrity in Britain in a 2006. He has also been named among the 100 Greatest Britons alongside Winston Churchill, Princess Diana and Charles Darwin. At the age of 88, he is still producing natural history and films and has no intention of stopping. He said, "I just wish the world was twice as big and half of it was still unexplored."

* **bioanthropology**

the study of how humans evolved

WALT use the text to answer VIPER questions

1. When was David Attenborough born?

2. How many siblings did he have?

3. What did his brother Richard do when he grew up that made him famous?

4. What kind of family did David grow up in?

5. *In fact, by the age of seven he had already created his very own "museum" of bird eggs, old stamps and ancient fossils.*

a) What does this tell us about David as a boy?

b) Why is the word museum in inverted commas?

6. What did David Study at University?

7. Explain why David did not want to work in a university

His boss at the BBC initially told Attenborough he shouldn't actually work in front of the cameras as his "teeth were too big" but after several years he started to make a name for himself, making the successful Zoo Quest series.

a) Why are the words "teeth were too big" in inverted commas?

b) Find and copy one phrase that tells us that Attenborough was becoming famous.

9) Why was David's career in the Navy disappointing to him?

12) What else does David do, other than presenting, to contribute to his TV programmes?

14) What is David afraid of?

15) How do we know that David is courageous?

16) Using information from the text explain what you would like and dislike about being a TV naturalist. Give reasons for your choices.

17) Why do you think the author tells us about the other people included in the 100 Greatest Britons list?

18) What two sentences tell us that David still wishes to carry on exploring, travelling and making his programmes?

1.

2.

19) Use lines to join the boxes to show the purpose of the text. **[2]**

Born in 1926, David Frederick Attenborough into a well-off family with two brothers, John and Richard.

To tell us about David's personality.

A modest David has been quoted as saying, "People assume I do all the work. ".

To tell us about how David goes about his working life.

Once a massive file of notes has been accumulated, only then does David begin his travels.

To tell us about David's background.

20) Write numbers 1-5 to put these in chronological order. **[1]**

David is named as one of the top 100 Great Britons.	
David set up his own "museum"	
David joined the BBC.	
David made his Life on Earth series	
David got married to Elizabeth.	

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