

BIG IDEAS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD OF DISABILITY

Information Pack

Who Wins? The Big Idea of EUGENICS

Presented by
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About the Workshop

Background to Eugenics

Who Comes out Top? Activity

Discussion

About the Workshop

1. Saying hallo - your name and ONE thing you want to tell us.
2. Simon will give a short talk with some slides
3. Those who want will play a game to find out Who Comes Top?
4. Discussion - what do we think about eugenics?
5. Final thoughts



About Simon

Simon wrote a book called *Those they called idiots – the idea of the disabled mind from 1700 to the present day* (2020) which is a history of learning disability over the last 300 years. He says that there was a time before asylums were built where people with learning disabilities were much more included and accepted in communities.

He is the editor of *Community Living* magazine which campaigns for equal citizenship for people with learning disabilities. He is the chair of Corali Dance company in South London which supports talented dancers who have learning disabilities, to develop their careers.

Background - Darwin, Galton and Eugenics

There are a lot of scientific words for this talk. There is a dictionary on page 7. All the words in *italics* can be found there.

There is a full **picture dictionary** at the end of the pack: pages 12-14

Charles Darwin was a scientist who studied the development of animals and people, from prehistoric times to the present day. He lived from 1809-1882.

His famous book *The Origin of Species* was published in 1859.

Francis Galton was another scientist. He was interested in how people developed healthy bodies and intelligent minds.

He lived from 1822-1911.

Evolution and breeding

Charles Darwin's *Theory of evolution* argued that humans and animals developed (evolved) over millions of years from lower forms of life.

People and animals survive by *adapting* to their *environment* .– for example giraffes developed long necks so that they can eat the food they need from tall trees.

Creatures and plants that are fit and strong survive. Those that are weak will die out.

This is known as *survival of the fittest*. We *breed* animals and plants to make sure that this happens.

Eugenics

In 1869 Francis Galton used the theory of evolution to argue that we are made only by what we *inherit* from our parents and other ancestors - our *genes*. For example...

Galton argued that just as we can breed strong animals and plants, so we should be able to breed strong human beings, and get rid of weak and undesirable ones. He called this *Eugenics* – (meaning 'well-born' in Greek)

Eugenics became a very popular way of thinking from the end of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century.

It said that 'social problems' were caused by poor people with bad genes breeding too much.

They wanted to stop 'bad breeding' amongst poor people by locking many of them up in institutions and through *sterilisation*. They also wanted to encourage rich middle class people to have more children.

People with learning disabilities were particularly targeted by the idea of eugenics. Some thought they should not be allowed to exist, and everyone agreed that learning disabled people should be locked away and not allowed to 'breed'. This meant they could not have a sex life or get married.

In 1913 the *Mental Deficiency Act* in Great Britain made it law that all people with learning disabilities should either be locked away in special hospitals or closely supervised in the community to make sure they did not 'breed'.

In Germany the Nazi party who came to power in 1933 believed in eugenics. From 1939 they started to kill disabled people. More than 100,000 people were murdered.

After this happened in Germany, eugenics became seen as bad and cruel. From the 1980s the long stay hospitals finally began to close.

Eugenics was bad science because:

- we are not just made by what we inherit from our parents and other ancestors.
- *heredity* is not straightforward. Just because our parents have some characteristics, does not mean we will have them too.

- it says that anyone who is 'different' should not be allowed to belong to society, It does not accept the *diversity* of life with different people able to live in the same community.

Nowadays....

Eugenic thinking has never completely disappeared, and there are still scientists, doctors and others who believe in it today. We still have eugenic laws, about who has permission to have children. Abortion is allowed to prevent children with disabilities such as Down syndrome being born.

New scientific techniques mean that we can change the genes from "abnormal" to "normal" and this could mean that fewer children with disabilities are born. This is called "genetic engineering"

<https://issues.org/interrogating-equity-a-disability-justice-approach-to-genetic-engineering/>

Other people think that though it would be good to stop many severe illnesses and impairments, it would be very easy to slip into deciding that only "normal" people should be born.

Do we really want this, or do we think that disability is a part of our human society?

Co-operation

In fact Darwin ALSO found that living things co-operate in order to survive! For example, ants build nests together, birds forage for different types of food so they can live in the same place without competing.

We could be thinking more about this as a way of organising society.

Dictionary

Adapting/ adaptation – changes that help living things to grow and survive.

For example, giraffes eat leaves. Over time they grew longer and longer necks to reach them.

Breeding - making sure that only people or animals with the “right” qualities can have babies.

For example, farmers may breed cows that give a lot of milk and get rid of cows who don't.

Co-operation - working together to survive or get a task done.

Diversity -variety or difference amongst people

Environment – the surroundings in which we live

Evolution – the theory that living things/ different species change over a long time, and adapt to their environment in order to survive

Genes – parts of us which are passed on by our parents - cells and DNA

Genetic Science – the study of genes

Eugenics – the belief that ‘better’ humans can be bred by increasing ‘desirable’ genes and reducing ‘undesirable’ genes.

Inheriting– the passing on of mental or physical characteristics from one generation to another

Species – a group of living things that have characteristics in common and can breed with each other. Human beings, dogs, cats, elephants and so on are all different species.

Survive - staying alive and healthy

Survival of the fittest – how living things stay alive by adapting to their environment – those that become most ‘fit’, or suitable, for their environment survive, while those who cannot adapt do not survive

Activity: Who Comes Top?

This game is all about *Survival of the Fittest*. You can play or you can just watch.

Here are some Top Trump cards. You can print them, and cut them out if you want. Or you can take a photo of them with your phone.

Each card has a character with some skills and qualities which have scores from high to low. Everyone chooses a card (you can act the person if you like!). The workshop leader will call out a skill and you have to say what your score is. The highest score wins!

For example, Antman and Groot - if the skill is "Fun" then Groot wins. If the skill is "Cleverness", Antman wins.

The skills and qualities are:-

- Strength
- Size
- Cleverness
- Fun
- Mystery

TOP Trump Cards (please add pictures)

Antman

Groot

Strength 10
Cleverness 10
Size 1
Fun 1
Mystery 25

She-Hulk

Strength 45
Cleverness 2
Size 14
Fun 0
Mystery 60

Strength 47
Cleverness 6
Size 12
Fun 3
Mystery 30

Spider Man

Gamora

Strength 24
Cleverness 10
Size 7
Fun 4
Mystery 50

Strength 18
Cleverness 10
Size 7
Fun 2
Mystery 55

Handout

Hulk

Rocket

Strength 50
Cleverness 2
Size 15
Fun 1
Mystery 20

Strength 10
Cleverness 10
Size 3
Fun 5
Mystery 45

Further reading

- There are no Easy Read articles about Eugenics.....

- Links to some *Community Living* articles

<https://www.cl-initiatives.co.uk/mass-murder-social-policy/>

<https://www.cl-initiatives.co.uk/brave-new-world-satire-or-blueprint/>

<https://www.cl-initiatives.co.uk/finding-ivy-life-worthy-life/>

- Stephen Unwin is the father of Joey, a young man with profound disabilities.

He wrote this moving article

<https://bylinetimes.com/2021/12/28/life-unworthy-of-life-the-lessons-of-t4/>

- Radeva, S. (2019). *Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species*. London: Puffin

Sabina Radeva is a biologist and an illustrator. She has written a picture version of Darwin's book for adults as well as children

- Grove, S. (2021) *Retrieving Darwin's Revolutionary Idea*. Lexington Books.

Sam Grove discusses co-operation and competition in this academic book.