**evolution** |ˌevəˈlo͞oSH(ə)n|

noun

1 the process by which different kinds of living organisms are thought to have developed and diversified from earlier forms during the history of the earth.

The idea of organic evolution was proposed by some ancient Greek thinkers but was long rejected in Europe as contrary to the literal interpretation of the Bible. Lamarck proposed a theory that organisms became transformed by their efforts to respond to the demands of their environment, but he was unable to explain a mechanism for this. Lyell demonstrated that geological deposits were the cumulative product of slow processes over vast ages. This helped Darwin toward a theory of gradual evolution over a long period by the natural selection of those varieties of an organism slightly better adapted to the environment and hence more likely to produce descendants. Combined with the later discoveries of the cellular and molecular basis of genetics, Darwin's theory of evolution has, with some modification, become the dominant unifying concept of modern biology.

2 the gradual development of something, especially from a simple to a more complex form: *the forms of written languages undergo constant evolution*.

3 *Chemistry* the giving off of a gaseous product, or of heat.

4 a pattern of movements or maneuvers: *silk ribbons waving in fanciful evolutions*.

5 *Mathematics, dated* the extraction of a root from a given quantity.

DERIVATIVES

**evolutional** |-SHənl | adjective.

**evolutionally** |-(ə)lē | adverb.

**evolutive** |ˌevəˈlo͞odiv | adjective

ORIGIN

early 17th cent.: from Latin *evolutio(n-)* **‘unrolling,’** from the verb *evolvere* (see evolve). Early senses related to physical movement, first recorded in describing a tactical “wheeling” maneuver in the realignment of troops or ships. Current senses stem from a notion of “opening out” and “unfolding,” giving rise to a general sense of **‘development.’**

 