

Discussion Prompts

After students have reviewed the article “One Africa exodus populated globe,” lead a classroom discussion based on the following questions:

- Ask your students how this article informs their thinking about how people are related. After tens of thousands of years living in different habitats and mating mostly with others nearby, humans show variety in their outer appearance. How do people differ? What explains those differences? What about similarities? Are people more different or more similar? Explain to your students that humans are genetically far less diverse than many other mammal species. Ask students to consider the implications of these similarities. How might a greater understanding of these similarities affect interactions with others in the school, city and country?
- Two of the genetic studies discussed in the story find that all non-Africans alive today can trace their roots to one major migration out of Africa. A third genetic study finds that at least 2 percent of the Papuan genome can be traced to an earlier wave of migration dating to 120,000 years ago. “It’s a superficial disagreement,” says evolutionary geneticist Joshua Akey. Ask your students to think about the reported 98 or 100 percent DNA signature from the primary wave. Do students think the difference between these two findings is important? Why or why not? What are some possible reasons for the difference? (Encourage students to consider both different migration scenarios and errors in data collection and analysis.) Why do scientists sometimes come to different conclusions from the same set of data? How might analysis of data or scope of datasets lead to conflicting conclusions? How can scientists resolve those differences?
- When sharing information with a wider audience, researchers and journalists have to decide what to focus on and how much detail to provide. Often the audience or the context will dictate how a story is told. Ask students how they decide what to focus on when they are telling a story. What helps them decide what information to include and what to omit? How do they simplify the story to make it more understandable? When is this preferred or acceptable? Can students think of situations in which simplification would be considered a misrepresentation? Encourage your students to relate this conversation back to the various accounts of human migration available in textbooks and online.