

Culture and Evolution Education in the US South

What is it that knowing our history supposedly does for us? It helps us avoid repeating our past mistakes. However, avoiding such presumes we understand the present in such a way as to recognize the pattern. We imagine readers of this volume to be K-12 science teachers, students, in-service and pre-service teachers. But does knowing one of your possible roles fully explain who you are and why you do the things you do? Of course not. Therefore, we want to acknowledge that knowing about attitudes toward evolution in the past and present doesn't mean you will change anything (or that you even need to). It is important to understand evolutionary principles (if not all applications of them), what they mean, and why they're important. Not everyone accepts what we do—we get that. You have probably heard people say that science is method and religion is belief and that we understand evolutionary mechanisms through application of the scientific method. While that is true, we hope these chapters demonstrate how influential beliefs can be, even in regards to science and evolution. The ultimate goal is science literacy for all people, regardless of their background or beliefs. To achieve this goal science educators and scientists alike are engaged in outreach and research to develop new ways of talking about controversial topics and exploring the evidence that will close the growing distance between the scientific community and the general public. As we see with many topics deemed publicly controversial—evolution, stem cell research, climate change—there is a need to engage the public and improve their understanding, not just of the concepts specifically but of science as a practice and way of knowing.