***Scopes: The Battle over America's Soul***

**Key Terms:**

Evolution

Atheist

Agnostic

Pragmatic

Darwinism

1. Why do you think evolution became such a hot button issue in the 1920s? What else what going on during this period that explains the increased attention given to evolution?
2. What was the Butler Act, and what role did it play in the Scopes trial? Who supported its passage and why?
3. At the time of the Scopes trial, Americans were divided about the issue of teaching Darwin’s theories. Explain these diverse views.
4. Describe the diverse views between the two lawyers on the case: Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan. Do you feel that one had a stronger case than the other?
5. How would you explain the concept “survival of the fittest”? What is “social Darwinism”? How did this concept become a factor in the Scopes trial? How may is be seen as being in direct opposition to Christianity?
6. What if, instead of arguing for Biblical literalism and parents’ rights not to have anything taught in public schools that they don’t personally believe in – what if William Jennings Bryan had made the destructive potential of Social Darwinism the center of his argument? What if he had emphasized the evils that could come from applying the principal of “natural selection” to human society? How would his place in history, his reputation to future generations, have changed?
7. What was the central issue at stake in the jury’s decision to either convict or acquit John Scopes? Discuss.
8. The Scopes Trial was the first time court had been used to decide issues of school curriculum. Do you think that court is the appropriate place to make such decisions? Why or why not?
9. The enormous interest in the Scopes Trial was made possible in large part because of the increased availability of radio. The entire trial was broadcast live over the radio, pulling Americans into the drama in real time. Can you relate the influence of the radio in the 1920s to current American culture?
10. Can you relate the issue of the teaching of human evolution to a current controversial issue? Or is this itself still a controversial issue today? Explain.