What’s it all about?

Do you sometimes ask yourself *The Big Question*?

I mean the question “Why am I here?”

Why is *anything* here, come to that?

Birds, badgers, bus drivers or bumblebees – what are we all doing here?

This play thinks about exactly this question.

That’s the reason for its title, of course.

“What’s it all about?”

Well, what *is* it all about?

Tutor: I’ve been thinking.

*Student: Oh, not again!*

Well...

*You’ll wear it out!*

Wear what out?

*Your brain.*

Wear it out?

*Thinking too much.*

I don’t think you can.

*What, think too much?*

No. Wear your brain out.

*Of course you can’t. Not really.*

Which is why I was thinking.

*And what were you thinking about?*

Life.

*Life?*

Yes. Life.

*What about it?*

Well, what’s it for?

*What’s it for?*

Yes.

*It’s not really for anything, is it?*

There must be some reason for life.

*I’m not so sure.*

It must be for something.

*Maybe it’s just for living.*

Just for living?

*Maybe.*

That’s what I was thinking about, anyway.

*You mean “Why are we here?”*

Yes. Exactly. The Big Question!

*The meaning of life?*

Sort of.

*Sort of?*

All the different animals, for instance.

*All the different animals?*

Yes.

*Oh.*

And plants.

*What about them?*

Why are they here?

*Why are they here?*

What are they doing here?

*I don’t get it.*

What are they for?

*What are they for?*

Yes.

*That’s a weird question!*

Do you think so?

*Why do you think life has to be for something?*

There must be some reason for it.

*Why?*

It just feels as if there should be.

*I don’t think it feels like that to animals.*

Don’t you?

*A ladybird, for example.*

Well no.

*It probably doesn’t feel like that to a ladybird.*

No.

*Or a cat.*

Maybe not.

*No.*

Well, what is a mole for?

*A mole?*

Yes.

*Digging holes, I’d say. That’s what they do, you know!*

No, seriously, what is the point of being a mole?

*Is there one?*

I don’t know. Is there?

*Beyond digging holes, you mean?*

Yes.

*Search me!*

And what about all those earthworms which moles love to eat?

*What do you mean?*

What is the point of an earthworm?

*What is the point of an earthworm?*

Why does an earthworm get out of bed in the morning?

*When its alarm clock rings, you mean?*

Yes.

*Search me!*

What would they say, if they could speak?

*Moles? Or earthworms?*

What would they say was most important to them?

*And what do you think an earthworm would say?*

More earthworms.

*More earthworms?*

Yes. More earthworms.

*Just “more earthworms”?*

I think so.

*Right.*

Mmmm…

*And what would he mean by “more earthworms”?*

I think he would mean that he was here to reproduce.

*Oh?*

Yes.

*Here to reproduce?*

I think so.

*To produce more earthworms?*

Yes.

*Is that all?*

Well, for an earthworm, I think so.

*And a mole?*

Mmmm…?

*Is that what you think a mole would say?*

Well, yes.

*Just “More moles”?*

I suppose.

*Just to reproduce?*

Well…

*There must be more to it than that, surely?*

Yes.

*There must be some point to life?*

There must be.

*But why must there?*

I don’t really know. It’s just a feeling I have.

*I suppose all animals do it.*

What? Reproduce?

*Yes. All animals reproduce.*

And plants.

*Yes, plants too.*

Everything has to reproduce.

*Or die out.*

Exactly.

*They have to reproduce.*

Animals have different ways of doing this.

*Of course they do!*

They’ve got to produce offspring.

*And they’ve got to make sure their offspring survive.*

Yes.

*It’s a dangerous world.*

Especially for young animals.

*Yes, it’s especially dangerous for young animals.*

Animals have ways of helping their offspring survive.

*Different animals have different ways of doing that.*

So that they can reproduce.

*Exactly! When it’s their turn.*

There’s danger everywhere.

*Yes.*

From predators, for example.

*Yes. But not only that.*

No?

*The environment can be dangerous, too.*

It might be too hot.

*Or too cold.*

Too dry.

*Too wet.*

Not enough food.

*They must have food.*

Thank goodness for parents, I suppose!

*Some animals take a lot more care of their offspring than others.*

Well, yes. That’s true.

*Different animals look after their young differently.*

They do.

*Some hardly look after them at all.*

No, some don’t.

*And some take great care of them.*

Well, yes.

*Some really do.*

It depends on their strategy.

*Their strategy?*

Yes.

*What do you mean by “their strategy”?*

Well, the way they do it.

*How they look after their young?*

Yes.

*And?*

Well, there are two possible strategies, really.

*Are there?*

Yes.

*Oh.*

Either you produce huge numbers of offspring.

*Because almost all of them will die, I suppose.*

That’s the careless way of doing it.

*I suppose so.*

A lot of plants do it this way.

*Dandelions, for example.*

Exactly.

*They produce loads of seeds.*

Loads of them.

*And one or two will make it.*

Which is the strategy frogs use.

*Yes.*

They produce masses of frog spawn.

*With hundreds of eggs in it.*

Hundreds of eggs.

*Because loads of them will be eaten by fish.*

Quite a few will make it to tadpoles.

*But loads of them will be eaten by fish, too.*

Well, yes, but one or two will become frogs. With a bit of luck, anyway.

*And if they do become frogs, it’s job done.*

So that’s one strategy.

*The ‘big numbers’ strategy, I suppose.*

Yes. And not much care taken of the offspring.

*But big numbers produced.*

It seems a bit wasteful.

*Well, yes, it is.*

But it seems to work.

*There’s another way to do it, though.*

Which is?

*You can produce very few offspring at a time.*

But look after them better?

*Yes.*

Like elephants.

*Elephants?*

Elephants take very good care of their offspring.

*They have to, I suppose.*

Elephant mothers only have one baby at a time.

*That’s true.*

And they have a gestation period of 22 months.

*Gestation period?*

The time a baby takes to grow inside its mother.

*And an elephant baby takes 22 months to do that?*

It does.

*But that’s almost two years!*

Which makes a baby elephant really special.

*Something to look after really carefully.*

Which is what elephants do, of course.

*Yes. Young elephants are really well looked after.*

The whole herd looks out for them.

*Not like insects.*

No.

*Some insects produce large numbers of offspring.*

And don’t seem to take much care of them.

*Butterflies don’t, for example.*

Butterflies are quite careless, really.

*Well, they lay their eggs near food.*

But they don’t take any care after that.

*No. None at all.*

They just leave them to it, really.

*No bed time story.*

No lunch box.

*No nappies.*

No*.*

*Mum just lays her eggs and flies off.*

She doesn’t wait to see how it all turns out.

*No. She doesn’t.*

Not like us.

*Not like us at all.*

We take a lot of care of our offspring*.*

*We have to!*

We care for them for years and years.

*Years and years and years.*

Well, a baby can’t look after itself, can it?

*No.*

And we take years to grow up.

*It’s years before we’re old enough to look after ourselves.*

Old enough to tie shoelaces.

*Ride a bike.*

Get on a bus.

*Use a computer.*

Get a job.

*And some money.*

Get a bank account.

*A car.*

Marry.

*Kids.*

All that.

*It takes years.*

Years and years and years.

*We need a lot of care.*

When we’re young.

*Yes.*

Some animals stick around to help their young.

*Birds do.*

Yes. For weeks.

*Not like turtles.*

No.

*They just lay their eggs in the sand.*

Bury them on a beach.

*And then push off.*

The young turtles grow in the eggs.

*Then they hatch.*

Dig their way up.

*Onto the beach.*

Loads of tiny turtles.

*They crawl down the sand.*

Into the sea.

*And swim away.*

But they won’t see mum or dad again.

*No.*

Wouldn’t recognise them if they did.

*No.*

Some animals use a bit of both strategies, of course.

*Well, yes.*

Crocodiles do.

*They use a bit of both strategies.*

They guard the eggs until they hatch.

*Well, yes, they do.*

And they help the baby crocodiles.

*Once they are hatched.*

The see them safely into the water.

*Yes.*

But they don’t bother after that.

*No. They don’t seem to bother at all.*

So they do look after their young a bit.

*A bit.*

But they also produce large numbers of them.

*They do.*

Up to 50 at a time.

*50 babies at a time?*

Well, up to 50, yes.

*Imagine if we did that! If we had kids 50 at a time!*

Yes. Imagine if we did that!

*I’d rather not!*