

MORE GREAT QUESTIONS IN SCIENCE

# What makes us **HUMAN?**

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Scientists have struggled for centuries to pinpoint the qualities that distinguish humans from the millions of other animal species we share the vast majority of our DNA with. *NOVA scienceNow* explores those traits once thought to be uniquely human—language, tool use, even laughter—to discover their evolutionary roots.

### **Neanderthals 'R' Us**

Is there a Neanderthal in your family tree? Geneticists recently shocked the scientific community when they revealed evidence suggesting that ancient humans may have interbred with Neanderthals. Delving into his own genetic makeup, *New York Times* columnist David Pogue discovers the DNA that appears to come from Neanderthal ancestry.

### **Stone Age Tech Revolution**

Could two of our species' defining achievements—tool use and language—be intimately connected? Using modern-day flint-knappers as their subjects, anthropologists are studying what happens in the brain when people make stone tools. Their results suggest that language and tool use might go hand in hand.

### **Laughter**

Humans may be the only species that can appreciate jokes, but we are not the only species that laughs. Researchers are busy tickling baby chimps, bonobos, and orangutans to record their giggling and uncover the deep evolutionary roots of laughter and what they can tell us about the social bonds that hold us together.

### **Profile: Zeresenay Alemseged**

Ethiopian anthropologist Zeresenay Alemseged struggled against all odds to make one of the biggest recent discoveries in human origins: the fossil bones of Selam, a 3.3 million-year-old ancient cousin of our human ancestors. Born and raised in Ethiopia, Alemseged grew up in a closed society with no media. He even had to sneak out of the house to attend school as a child. Today, he endures scorching heat, flash floods, venomous snakes, and tribal warfare to continue his work in the remote Afar Triangle. His work has made him a national hero and the leader of a new generation of African-born anthropologists.

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# NOVA

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