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LIFE

A COSMIC STORY

How did life on Earth begin?

This tantalizing question forms the basis of Life: A Cosmic Story. Take a journey through time and witness key events since the Big Bang that set the stage for life.

Narrated by Academy Award Winner
Jodie Foster
How did life on Earth begin? This tantalizing question forms the basis of a magnificent production by the California Academy of Sciences Morrison Planetarium.

**Life: A Cosmic Story** begins in a redwood forest, with the sounds of wind and life. One redwood looms larger, and as we approach its branches and enter one of its leaves, we adjust our perspective to the microscopic scale inside a cell. We see a pared-down version of its inner workings, learning about the process of photosynthesis and the role of DNA. This scene sets the stage for the story of life.

We then leap backward billions of years to the origin of elements themselves. The early Universe contained mostly dark matter, which drew hydrogen and helium together to form the first stars. The carbon and heavier elements required by living organisms came from generations of stars.

We continue our journey, diving into the Milky Way Galaxy as it was several billion years ago. We approach a region in which stars are forming, where we encounter a protoplanetary disk surrounding our newborn Sun. We arrive at the young Earth, splashing down in deep water to visit a hydrothermal vent and to examine the formation of organic molecules. We then travel above a volcanic island to encounter an enriched "hot puddle" of water, in which nucleotides (building blocks of RNA and DNA) may have wrapped themselves in protective vesicles.

The show leaps forward in time, showing the movement of continents and the changing environment for life. Finally, we reach modern Earth, circling the globe to review the evidence for the story we have heard. Much of what we understand about evolution we have pieced together from the fossil record, but we can also reassemble evolutionary history by studying life that surrounds us today.

As we learn that all life shares a common ancestry and common chemistry, we pull away from individual images of life, and we end the show as we see their three-dimensional distribution form the double-helix strand of DNA. The audience is left immersed inside a representation of the structure of life's shared origins.