

The Amazon Rain Forest

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Summary

This book offers a lively introduction to the ecology, history and economy of the Amazon rain forest. It explains why the rain forest is important for the future of mankind, and it also highlights the pressures and problems that rainforests around the world face in today's global economy.

Students will all possess some general knowledge about the Amazon rain forest before they read the book. The book begins with a multiple-choice quiz to test the readers' knowledge and to arouse their curiosity about the questions they do not know the answers to. All the answers can be found later in the book.

The Amazon: This first section describes the course of the great Amazon River from its source, high in the Andes, to its exit into the Atlantic Ocean 6,400 kilometers downstream. Each part of the river is quite distinct – and the text describes the differences in landscape, vegetation and weather as well as some of the people that live along the river at different points.

What is a Rain Forest: This section describes some of the plants and animals of the forest and also explains how the warm, wet weather of the Amazon helps to maintain such an abundance of life. The world's rain forests are a rich resource of food and medicine that is currently not used or understood to its full potential. The text suggests that we could lose thousands of life-saving medicines and foods if the destruction of rain forests continues at its present rate.

Why are Rain Forests Disappearing: This section talks about the destruction of the world's rain forests over the last 100 years. It also explores why this has happened and why it may continue to happen unless the world's

consumers, companies and governments change their current habits.

The People of the Rain Forest: This section explores the lives of different people in the rain forest and presents their experiences through a series of first-person narratives. Here, readers learn about the relation between the people of the Xingu River and the white men through a story of an old man. They also find out about the Kayapo Indians by means of an old man's story and a short panel story which help to build a fuller picture of the Kayapo's lives and concerns. Next, readers hear about how the Amazonian forests were cleared for farming, and how farms eventually failed, leaving people without money, through the story of a Brazilian taxi driver. Readers are then informed about the economic rise and fall of Manaus—the most important city in the Amazon rainforest. Manaus became rich due to the rubber industry but it eventually suffered a severe economic decline in the 1920s when other countries started producing rubber more cheaply. Finally, readers hear the views of a Brazilian cattle farmer who argues that Brazil, as a whole, will face a poor future if it does not use even more of the rain forest land for farming.

Plans for the Rain Forests: This final section ends by looking to the future and asking what can be done to save the rain forest whilst still safeguarding the livelihoods of the people who live in and around it.

Background and themes

Environmental issues: These issues are the main theme of the book. With the destruction of the rain forests, thousands of the world's animals and plants are becoming extinct even before we have the chance to discover and study them. Also, the rapid disappearance of much of the world's forests is contributing towards global warming. The world's weather systems are changing and the results could be catastrophic.

The effect of colonization: The book also explores the role that history has had in the destruction of the Amazon rain forest. When the Europeans arrived in South America in the sixteenth century, they changed the continent for ever. Many indigenous people were killed in wars and by imported diseases. By 1700 the colonists were plundering the rain forest's resources to meet the demands of Europeans and North Americans for hardwood. And with the growth of the global economy through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Brazil

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became more and more reliant on its exports—rubber, wood and agricultural produce. All of these industries put more pressure on the forest's resources.

The future of the Amazon: By presenting a number of different points of view, the book highlights the difficult job that Brazil's government faces. The forest's resources are wanted by a number of different groups of people, each with their own strong arguments. In addition to needing to take responsibility for the welfare of its own people, the Brazilian government is also under a lot of external pressure from environmental groups and other governments around the world. The future of the Amazon is an international affair and relies upon cooperation and understanding among nations.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- 1 Pair work and predict:** Ask students to look at the cover of the book but not to open it. Based on their own general knowledge, each pair should write an outline for a short book about rain forests. Guide them with these instructions: *Look at the book cover in pairs and imagine the main sections of your book. Include also a short description of the content (including any pictures) of each section.*
- 2 Compare:** When the pairs have finished their outlines, ask them to look at the book's Contents page and to flick through its pages to compare it with their own books: *Now open The Amazon Rain Forest and compare its contents to your own book. How close were you?*
- 3 Read carefully and pair work:** Ask students to read the Introduction in pairs. Guide them with these questions: *Read the Introduction in pairs and (a) discuss with another student how it makes you feel. Then (b) try to answer the question at the bottom of the Introduction together.*
- 4 Group work and write:** Ask students to work in groups. They should write a short paragraph about the rain forests using at least ten of the words below: air cattle disappear disease frog grow leaf piranha plant poison root rubber seed soil water
Ask students to look up the words they do not know in the Word List in back of the book.

Pages 1–9

While reading

- 5 Pair work: The Amazon**
Tell students to work in pairs and to take down notes of the most important information they read on pages 2–4: *As you read about the Amazon on pages 2–4, decide with another student which are the five most important things about it. Write them down.*

6 Read and check: Piranhas

Ask students to copy and complete the following chart about piranhas while they read page 4.

What they usually eat	What they eat when they are hungry	Their size	Their teeth

7 Research: South America

Ask students to work in groups and look at the map on page 5. They discuss what they know about Latin American countries and choose one to do research on: *Work in groups. Look at the map on page 5 and (a) compare these countries—their size, their rain forests, their mountains, etc; (b) say what else you know about these countries; (c) choose one country and find out more about it. Then tell the rest of the class.*

- 8 Write:** Ask students to look at the section of text on page 8 called 'Food from the Forest' and ask them to do the following activity as you write the everyday foods listed (fruits, vegetables, coffee, tea, chocolate and sugar) on the board: *Write three sentences about each of these foods. For example: 'I eat fruit every day. I had a banana for my breakfast this morning. My favorite fruits are strawberries and grapes.'*
- 9 Pair work:** Tell students to work in pairs and to do the following activity as they read page 9: *Work with another student. Read 'Medicines for all' on page 9. Each student writes down five questions and then they take turns to ask and answer questions.*

After reading

- 10 Group work and guess:** Students work in groups. Each student chooses to be one of the animals, rivers or trees in this section (the Amazon, the piranhas, the rain forest, etc). They take it in turns to describe themselves and the others guess who they are.
- 11 Role play:** Tell students to do the following activity after reading page 8: *Imagine you are two people living in different parts of the rain forest. Tell each other where and how you live, what you do every day, etc.*
- 12 Write:** Discuss with students what newspaper articles are like. Tell them what a headline is. Ask students to work in pairs on the following activity after reading the section: *Imagine that you are writers for your school newspaper and you choose to write about one of the animals, rivers or trees in this section. Decide what to write about, and what headline and pictures to use. Then write down your article.*
Choose five students to read their work out loud and have the rest vote for the best one.
- 13 Group work and compare:** Ask students to work in groups and to compare each text of this section to their own country: *In groups, re-read pages 1–9 quickly and compare each river, animal, fish, tree, rain forest, etc., you read about with one from your country. Take some time to talk about them.*

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- 14 Research:** Review with your students what they have learnt about the rain forests. Then ask them to work on the following: *In groups, find out more about the rain forests. Write ten sentences about them and read them to the class.*

Pages 10–15

While reading

- 15 Pair work and discuss: Why are rain forests disappearing?**

Students work in pairs after reading Chapter 10: *Discuss with another student why rain forests are disappearing. Write down the five most important problems.*

- 16 Read and check:** Ask students to copy and complete the following chart about wood after they read pages 11–12:

What wood was used for in the past	What wood is used for now

- 17 Role play: People from the rain forest**

Tell your students to do the following in small groups after reading page 13: *In groups, read page 13 and choose to be one of the different people who live in the rain forest, for example, the Pizabo, the Sinabo, Kayapo, etc. Imagine you all meet in the forest and you tell each other how you live.*

- 18 Discuss: Indians**

Ask students to work in pairs and to discuss the following after they read pages 14–15: *Work with another student and discuss what happened to Indians in the past and what is happening to them now.*

After reading

- 19 Write and group work:** Tell students to work in groups and to do the following activity after they read the section: *In groups, write down sentences about how we are losing rain forests.*

Choose five students to read their writings out loud and discuss the topic with all the class.

- 20 Discuss:** After doing activity 19, discuss what we can do to save the rain forests. Write students' suggestions on the board: *We talked about how and why rain forests are disappearing. What can we do to save them?*
- 21 Group work and artwork:** Explain what leaflets and brochures are and what they are used for. Students design a poster, leaflet or brochure informing people about what is happening to rain forests and how we can save them.

Pages 15–25

While reading

- 22 Write:** Ask students to re-read pages 15–16 and work on the following activity: *Imagine you are Maria. What do you write down in your diary after visiting the Kayapo people and listening to the old man's story? What are they like? What do they make you feel?*
- 23 Role play: The Kayapo people**
Tell students to work on the following activity as they read pages 16–17: *Imagine you are Jose. You call your parents in Sao Paulo and you tell them what you learned about the Kayapo people. Your parents ask you lots of questions. Answer them.*
- 24 Pair work: A very special day**
Ask students to work in pairs and to imagine they are Jose and Maria on pages 18–19: *Work with another student and discuss all that Jose and Maria did when they went fishing. Now decide what to write in your journals.*
- 25 Discuss: The taxi driver's story**
Tell students to work in groups and to do the following activity as they read pages 20–21: *In groups, read pages 20–21 and write down all the problems that the taxi driver talks about.*
- 26 Read and check: What is wood for?**
Ask students to copy and complete the following chart about Manaus after they read page 22:

Manaus in the past	Manaus today

After reading

- 27 Write:** Ask students to work in groups and do the following activity when they finish the section: *Imagine you are Jose and Maria back in Sao Paulo. Discuss and plan what you will write in your article about the people in the rain forest. Write the article.*

Extra activities

- 28 Group work:** Students work in groups. They should write their own rain forest quiz like the one on page 1 of the book. Then, someone from each group should read their questions to the rest of the class and the first group to put up their hands and answer a question correctly gets one point. Alternatively, collect the quizzes from the groups and act as quiz master yourself, keeping a record of each group's score on the board.