

Theme Overview

“Under the Canopy” is a thematic unit, based on the rainforest with a key focus on geography and history. The children will be commissioned to work for a fictitious organisation called ‘Roots’ in helping two adopted children to find out about their Mexican/Mayan heritage. Through the project, we will also learn about the importance of the rainforest.

Recommended Reading...



Access books online for free through Hampshire School Library Service. Ask your child's teacher for their barcode/login information.

What we should know...

Where are the Rainforests?

The world's rainforests are found close to the equator, where the temperatures and rainfall are very high all year. Most tropical rainforests are between the Tropic of Cancer and the Tropic of Capricorn. Can you find these on a map or globe?

There are large areas of tropical rainforests in South East Asia, West Africa and South and Central America. Tropical rainforests cover 7% of the Earth's land mass but are home to more than half of the world's plants and animals. We rely on rainforests for many things—clean air, a stable climate, medicines, bananas, citrus fruits, chocolate and coffee beans, to name a few.

The Rainforest Alliance is a global charity that raises awareness to protect and positively change the future of the rainforests and the lives of the people and animal who live there.

Rainforest Layers

Rainforests are divided into four layers. Each layer receives a different amount of sunlight and rainfall, so different types of animals and plants are found in each one.

1. Forest Floor—dark and damp, full of dead leaves and fungi, which are home to millions of insects
2. Understory—warm, damp and sheltered, with short trees and leafy bushes which provide cover for jaguars, sloths and small creatures like frogs
3. Canopy—teeming with life because it is sunny and wet with a fresh breeze, the thick branches of tall trees create a leafy roof and it is full of fruit and nuts all year
4. Emergent Layer—high treetops that rise above everything else, get the most sunlight, rain and wind and are home to e.g. eagles, vultures, and animals with good balance like monkeys.

The Mayan Civilisation

- The Mayan empire began around 2000 BC/BCE and ended around 900 AD/CE.
- The Mayans built ceremonial cities in the rainforests around Mexico and Central America. These cities all had a palace for the ruler, a plaza for the marketplace and, in common with the Egyptians, they build large stone pyramids.
- The Mayans played a ball game with religious significance called *ulama* on a court shaped like a capital 'I'. Two teams would compete against each other to get a large rubber ball through a stone ring. Losers could even be put to death!
- The Mayan religion centred around worshipping nature gods. Temples were designated places for the worship of these gods and rituals included human sacrifice!
- No-one knows for definite why the Mayan empire disappeared, although possible reasons could be crop failure and disease.
- The Ancient Mayans developed the science of astronomy, calendar systems, and hieroglyphic writing.

Key Vocabulary you should discuss with your child

Canopy Layer: located right underneath the top layer of the rainforest (trees and plants here absorb 80% of the sunlight)

Citrus: a type of fruit, including grapefruit, orange, lemon and lime

Deforestation: the action of clearing a large area of trees

Emergent Layer: the tops of trees that poke up above the rainforest canopy (it is very sunny here and only the strongest, tallest plants reach this level)

Equator: an imaginary circle around the middle of the Earth, dividing it into two parts (northern hemisphere and southern hemisphere)

Forest Floor: the ground (first) layer of the rainforest

Fungi: types of organisms (not plants or animals) e.g. mushrooms

Hieroglyphs: a writing system that uses pictures and symbols instead of letters and words

Plaza: a public square or market place

Rainforest: forests with tall trees, warm humid climate and lots of rain

Sustainability: the ongoing capacity for Earth to maintain life

Tropical: places that are hot and humid usually near the Equator

Ulama: Mayan ball game

Understory Layer: lies between the canopy layer, where there is plenty of sunlight, and the forest floor layer, where there is almost none.

Question Flow

- To know where the Mayans lived and locate it on a map
- To know about some aspects of Mayan daily life
- To know some facts about the rainforest
- To understand the importance of the rainforest within the world's eco system



Please talk to your children about the information on this sheet. The more children discuss their learning the more likely they are to embed the learning to their memory. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact your child's class teacher.