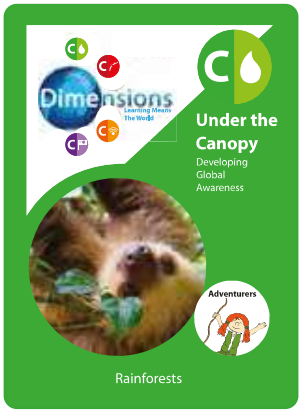
Adventurers - Under the Canopy



Overview

"Under the Canopy" is a thematic unit, based on the rainforest with a key focus on Geography and History. We have been commissioned to work for a fictitious organisation called 'Roots' in helping two adopted children find out about their Mexican / Mayan heritage. Through this project, we will also learn about the importance of the rainforest.

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. Make sure you know where to find these on a map and 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 animals 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 built large stone pyramids.
- The Mayans played a ball game with religious significance called *ulama* on a court shaped like a capital letter "**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 or disease.
- The Ancient Mayans developed the science of astronomy, calendar systems, and hieroglyphic writing.
- There are still some Mayan communities that live much like the ancient Mayans did.

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Vocabulary

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 and 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 marketplace
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

My Notes / Questions

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