

The Amazon Rainforest

By ReadWorks



The Amazon rainforest in South America is an amazing place. Filled with beautiful tropical flowers, towering trees, colorful parrots, and poisonous fish, it has some of the greatest levels of biodiversity of any region in the world. This means there are more different kinds of animal and plant species in this forest than in most other places. There are also many different kinds of human cultures that exist in this rainforest, from indigenous tribes to modern farmers. While all environments change over time, some scientists think that rapid human development is changing the Amazon too quickly. These changes are putting some plants, animals, and humans in danger.

The Amazon region, which stretches across the countries of Brazil, Peru, Columbia, Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Guyana, Suriname, and French Guiana (see map above), contains over half of the planet's remaining rainforests. Rainforests are well-known for being great habitats for animals and plants, as they get a lot of water, which all species need to survive. Today, the Amazon rainforest is home to 40,000 plant species, 2.5 million insect species, 378 reptile species, and 427 mammal species, including humans. You'd need a huge zoo to hold all the animals in this rainforest!

This remarkable rainforest region is also home to 400 different indigenous Amazonian tribes, many with their own unique languages and names, such as the Yanomami tribe and the Nukak tribe. Some tribes live in villages along the rivers in the Amazon rainforest, growing vegetables and fruits like corn, beans, and bananas. Others are “nomadic,” which means they move from place to place. These tribes get food by hunting and fishing, using poison darts, bows and arrows, spears, or sometimes shotguns to catch their dinner. Some tribes have had ongoing contact with the outside world and access to Western doctors and healthcare; others have never been contacted by outsiders at all, since the center of the Amazon rainforest can only be reached by traveling along piranha-infested rivers.

Another important fact about the Amazon rainforest is its role in storing carbon dioxide for our earth. Since it contains so many trees, which absorb carbon dioxide the way we breathe oxygen, the rainforest acts like the lungs of our planet. And since carbon is a “greenhouse gas” that heats up our atmosphere, the Amazon helps to keep our planet cool by storing carbon in its plants. So, even though the Amazon is far away from many places in the world, it still plays an important role in our world ecosystem.

Unfortunately, many of the amazing plants, animals, and humans in the Amazon are under threat. People are using the Amazon to grow plants for humans, like bananas and sugar cane plants. Others are digging holes in the earth to look for oil or gas reserves. And still others are cutting down the trees for lumber. To do this, developers are building farms, roads, and factories in areas where rare plants and animals thrive. This is a big problem for several reasons.

First, these changes in the Amazon will decrease the biodiversity of the rainforest. This means there will be fewer rare plant and animal species living there, and some species may go extinct as their habitat changes. Second, as the plants and animals die, the indigenous peoples who depend on them for food will also suffer from hunger. Third, when outsiders travel through the area via roads, they bring new diseases that can kill the native peoples. Finally, as new farms and factories begin to replace the forests and villages in the Amazon, they will produce more carbon dioxide, and there will be fewer trees to absorb this gas. So everywhere in the world we may feel the loss of the rainforest as our planet heats up.

But there is good news. Many groups of volunteers, doctors, and environmentalists are teaming up to protect the Amazon. They are spreading the word to students like you about the plight of the rainforest and asking people to help. Some organizations are helping to buy up land, so that it cannot be used for farming. Other organizations are fighting against the governments that want to build roads, arguing that they will endanger too many plant and animal species. And others are helping to provide medicine and healthcare to the indigenous tribes in the Amazon, to help these populations cope with the big changes in their habitat. Many hope that there is still a way to save the rainforest and all of the plants and animals inside it.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Why is the Amazon rainforest in danger?

- A The rainforest has some of the highest biodiversity.
- B Human development is changing the rainforest too quickly.
- C The indigenous tribes have no contact with the outside world.
- D It is home to 2.5 million insect species.

2. Trees are being cut down for lumber in the Amazon. In addition, new farms and factories are beginning to replace the forests and villages. What is an effect of this human activity?

- A more carbon dioxide can be absorbed by the Amazon rainforest
- B new diseases will be brought to the rainforest and harm indigenous tribes
- C the planet's atmosphere will gradually begin to cool down
- D less carbon dioxide is being absorbed by the Amazon rainforest

3. The indigenous tribes in the Amazon rainforest have different cultures and ways of life. What evidence from the passage best supports this statement?

- A Some tribes are nomadic, while others are settled in one place.
- B Different tribes have different names, like Yanomami and Nukak.
- C Some tribes have no contact with the outside world.
- D Indigenous tribes rely on native plants and animals for food.

4. Read the following sentences: "People are using the Amazon to grow plants for humans, like bananas and sugar cane plants. Others are digging holes in the earth to look for oil or gas reserves. And still others are cutting down the trees for lumber."

Based on this information, what is the main reason why humans are changing the Amazon rainforest?

- A the preservation of rare plant and animal species
- B bringing modern technology to indigenous tribes
- C the desire for more resources
- D minimizing carbon dioxide in the atmosphere

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A dangers faced by the Amazon rainforest
- B how volunteers are working to save the rainforest
- C how the rainforest can help moderate global warming
- D biodiversity in the Amazon rainforest

6. Read the following sentences: "While all environments change over time, some scientists think that **rapid** human development is changing the Amazon too quickly. These changes are putting some plants, animals, and humans in danger."

What does "**rapid**" mean as used in this sentence?

- A detailed
- B expensive
- C advanced
- D very fast

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

The Amazon rainforest is being threatened by human development; _____, many volunteers, doctors, and environmentalists are working to protect the rainforest.

- A ultimately
- B as a result
- C namely
- D after

8. What is one thing people are doing in the Amazon which is threatening the Amazon rainforest?

9. Explain how changes to the Amazon rainforest harm its indigenous tribes.

10. Explain how humans might be able to reduce the harm caused by changes to the Amazon rainforest. Use information from the passage to support your answer.

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 1240

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8. What is one thing people are doing in the Amazon which is threatening the Amazon rainforest?

Suggested answer: Answers may include any of the following:

- People are growing plants.
- People are digging holes in the earth.
- People are cutting down trees.
- People are building farms, roads, and factories in areas where rare plants and animals thrive.

9. Explain how changes to the Amazon rainforest harm its indigenous tribes.

Suggested answer: Changes to the Amazon rainforest harm its indigenous tribes in a number of ways:

- Plants and animals may die as their habitat changes or is destroyed. The people who depend on these species for food will suffer as a result.
- When outsiders travel through the forest via new roads, they bring with them new diseases that can kill indigenous peoples.

10. Explain how humans might be able to reduce the harm caused by changes to the Amazon rainforest. Use information from the passage to support your answer.

Suggested answer: Answers may vary and should be supported by the passage.

For example: Humans can help reduce the harm caused by chopping down rainforest trees by planting more trees in other areas. This can help offset the lower absorption of carbon dioxide caused by cutting down trees. People can buy plots of land in the rainforest to prevent that land from being used for human development. We can teach other people about the dangerous environmental effects of changing the rainforest.