

Reading

Thematic Overview

'The Great Kapok Tree' – Lynne Cherry

The Great Kapok Tree: A Tale of the Amazon Rainforest by Lynne Cherry is a beautifully illustrated story about a man who falls asleep while trying to cut down a tall kapok tree. While he sleeps, the animals of the rainforest speak to him, encouraging him to reconsider his actions and save their home.

English

Pupils can explore the idea of individuals who protect the rainforest. They could read or watch short biographies of real-life environmental activists such as Jane Goodall or indigenous Amazonian leaders. They can then write their own simplified biography of one of these figures, linking to the book's environmental message. The story provides a perfect stimulus for writing non-fiction texts about rainforest animals, trees, or the ecosystem. Pupils can gather facts and present them using subheadings, captions, and diagrams.

Technology

Drawing inspiration from the environmental and cultural messages in the book, pupils can design their own "rainforest promise" flags. Each flag could include a drawing and a written pledge to help protect the environment, echoing the book's moral message. Using the rich biodiversity of the rainforest as a starting point, pupils can explore the kinds of foods that come from there (e.g., bananas, cocoa, nuts, fruits).

Geography

Set in the Amazon rainforest, the story highlights the characteristics of a tropical climate, such as warmth, rainfall, and rich biodiversity. These elements are crucial in shaping the ecosystems found in the rainforest. Although the story primarily focuses on the ecological aspects of the rainforest, it can also lead to discussions about the geology of the region. The Amazon basin is influenced by tectonic plates, and understanding these geological processes can help us comprehend how earthquakes and volcanic activities shape the landscapes in South America, including areas surrounding the Amazon.

Science

Pupils can investigate the life cycles of animals found in the rainforest, comparing how different species (like frogs, butterflies, or jaguars) grow and change over time. The story is centred around a tree – perfect for examining how trees grow from seeds. Pupils can plant seeds (e.g., beans or sunflowers), observe changes over time, and relate this to how a kapok tree might grow in the rainforest. They can explore what plants need to grow and compare the rainforest environment to their own local surroundings.

Art

Pupils can create rainforest dioramas or layered artwork showing the different levels: canopy, understory, and forest floor. Explore the textures and patterns of leaves, bark, and animals through printing, collage, or mixed media. Use observational drawing to focus on rainforest creatures and plants, linking to the animals in the book.

History

The book explores themes of discovery and the impact of human activities on the environment. It also provides a backdrop for discussing the historical journeys of explorers and conquistadors in South America and how these expeditions altered the landscape and the lives of local people.

