

The Great Kapok Tree

Lynne Cherry
1990
New York: Gulliver Books

RESPECT

Brazil
Fiction
Reading Time: 6 minutes

CONCEPTS

Respect
Hope
Conservation

SUMMARY

In this ecological tale, animals living in a Kapok tree appeal to a woodcutter to save their home by reminding him of the interdependence of nature. Lynne Cherry traveled to Brazil to research the lush, colorful illustrations that communicate the vibrancy of the rainforest as well as her own deep respect for the earth.

OBJECTIVES

The student will be able to identify, define, and discuss respect, hope, and conservation as they apply to the story, and will explore actions he or she can take to help the environment.

Interdisciplinary Ideas

LANGUAGE ARTS

Write a "Talking to a Tree Poem."* Together, discuss what you might want to say to a tree (see Wrap-up #1). Begin with "Oh tree,..." and then ask a question, express a hope, etc. Include Heartwood attributes.

ART

Make a class mural of the layers of the rain forest (see Science #1). Draw, color, and cut out animals that live in the rain forest and place them in the appropriate layer.

SOCIAL STUDIES

1. Find out about peoples indigenous to the rain forest.* (Keyword: indigenous peoples rain forests)
2. Have some fun with online informational games, such as "Rain Forest Concentration" or Amazon Interactive. (Keyword: rain forest games)

SCIENCE

1. Draw, label, and color a diagram to explain the strata (zones) of the rain forest. (Keyword: tropical rain forest strata or layers rain forest)
2. With a partner, investigate an animal that lives in the rain forest. Choose from the story or the endpapers of the book. (Keyword: rain forest animals) Make a fact sheet about your animal and post around the rain forest mural (see Art).

After the Story

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DISCUSSION

1. Why are the world's rain forests being devastated? Who is responsible for this?
2. Why is there a need to respect an area of the world that is far away from your own? How does this ecosystem affect the rest of the world?
3. The anteaters foretell of a world without trees. Describe what it might be like to live in this changed world.
4. What do you think the Yanomamo child means when he tells the man to "...look upon us with new eyes"? How is this message related to empathy?
5. Discuss the terms 'conservation' and 'ecology.' What can you do to conserve resources?
6. Read Lynne Cherry's letter at the beginning of the book and the information about her at the end of the book. What Heartwood attributes do you think she possesses? Explain.

ACTIVITIES

1. Locate Brazil on the world map. Look at the endpapers of the book to find other tropical rain forests of the world. On an outline map of the world, color these areas green. (Keyword: world outline map printout)
2. In small groups, investigate activities you can do to help the earth, such as preserving rain forests. (Keyword: kids help save the earth) (Write to: The Children's Rain Forest, P.O. Box 936, Lewiston, Maine 04340.) Share information with the class and together choose three or four projects to carry out during the school year.
3. Make rain forest folders (use manila folders) to hold outline maps, research notes, and writings related to the story. On the outside of the folder, write your message (or the author's message) of hope and respect for the earth. Draw and color an illustration.
4. In pairs, visit Lynne Cherry's website (www.lynncherry.com). Grow a garden, read her books, or try another activity described there.

EXTENSION

1. Complete Home Connection pages and take home to share with families.
2. With your family, talk about ways you can conserve resources at home, such as water and electricity. Brainstorm ways to reuse paper. Share ideas with the class.

WRAP-UP

1. In *My Heartwood Journal*, write what you would say to a tree about its great value. Include at least three living things that depend on trees.
2. Create a "Story Door" about the book. Include the title and author, the sleeping woodcutter, and animals with dialogue bubbles showing their messages.

VOCABULARY

conservation
ecology
understory
canopy

emergents
Yanomamo
hesitate
lush

slither
lulled