Activities

Life in the Rainforest

Grades: 3–5

Overview
Kids learn about the rainforests through various activities: 1) creating animal life web charts; 2) making scaled representations of the plants and animals who live at different layers of the forest; 3) measuring out the height of the tallest trees; 4) tracing everyday houseplants back to their origin in the rainforests...
Background
The educational and earth–friendly book, *This Planet is Mine*, was written by two teachers. Their intent was to explore the wonders of the planet through various environmentally–focused and literature–based curriculum activities. This book is a compilation of their classroom experiences. The following sample activities taken from *This Planet is Mine* may inspire you to take your own students on a journey. They can be used in collaboration with the book, *Life in the Rainforests* by Lucy Baker.

*Learning Links*

**LANGUAGE ARTS:**

*Reports on Animals from A–Z!*
We divided into partners to work on rainforest animal reports. As we researched we made web charts of the attributes of our animals. We watched Part 1 of *You Can't Grow Home Again*, a fantastic video about life in the rainforest.

**SCIENCE/MATH:**

*Layers of Life*
We had learned there were four major layers of life in the rainforest: emergents, the canopy, the understory, and the forest floor. Different life exists in all these layers. We created a small rainforest bulletin board. (One centimeter equaled two feet.) We made tiny animals and tried to place them in the proper level of our miniature rainforest. We knew our emergent trees (the few that break out and grow above the canopy) can grow to 300 feet tall, which is as long as a football field. However, most grow to be about 150 feet. We illustrated what we had learned about levels and wrote rainforest “facts” we were accumulating. We had a “What I Know About the Rainforest” journal for our information.
**SCIENCE/MATH:**
**Measuring a Miracle**
We took an adding machine tape and marked off 150 feet, one foot at a time. We taped this to the wall in the hallway. It kept going and going! Most trees in the rainforest are eighty to 150 feet tall. We found out that our school was only twenty-five feet tall.

**SCIENCE/MATH:**
**Where Did You Come From?**
We were learning that many of our common houseplants originally came from the plants in the rainforests. In fact, two-thirds of the flowering plants in the world came from there.

**SCIENCE/MATH:**
**Money Matters**
We learned about the problems facing the rainforest today. We wanted to help, so we started to plan a bakesale to be held at school. Each item would cost one quarter. We practiced ways to make change from a dollar so when the sale days came, we would be able to serve our customers well. We plan to donate the proceeds to an organization like The World Land Trust or The Nature Conservancy.

**SOCIAL STUDIES:**
**Rainforests Have People**
- **A book about a child of the Amazon.** We read *Amazon Boy* by Ted Lewin (Macmillan, 1993). The boy in the story lives in the Amazon rainforest and realizes how special his home is when he visits the city downstream. At the end of the story he makes an important choice! It seems that there are Earthkeepers all over the planet making choices.

- **Reading a folktale.** We read a folktale the Amazon boy might have liked, *Papagayo: The Mischief Maker* by Gerald McDermott (HBJ, 1992). In this vibranty illustrated story we met Papagayo, a parrot,
similar to the “trickster” characters in Native American lore. People have lived in the rainforests of South America for thousands of years! This is a tale of a moon-dog who is eating the moon a little bit more every night.

- **A tale of rubber tappers.** Rubber is made from the liquid latex of rubber trees. Rubber can now be made in other ways but the rubber trees in the rainforest are still very important to protect and use wisely. The book, *Antonio’s Rain Forest* by Anna Lewington (Carolrhoda, 1993), tells of the life of a boy, Antonio José. His father is a rubber tapper. It explains the history of rubber and the problems rubber tappers face today.

- Subjects:
  
  **Forests and Rainforests, Environmental Conservation and Preservation, Habitats and Ecosystems, Jungle and Rainforest Animals, Plants and Flowers, Reading**