

Can the Amazon Be Saved?

Paradise Lost?

The Amazon rain forest is disappearing at an alarming rate.

Bright-colored toucans and other exotic birds fly among the forest. Emerald tree boas curl up on branches to stalk prey. Endangered jaguars slink through the thick brush in search of food. These are just a few of the thousands of animals that call the Amazon rain forest home.

A tropical rain forest is warm and has heavy rainfall. The Amazon, in South America, is the largest rain forest in the world.

Yet the Amazon's future is grim. Farmers are rapidly destroying this lush landscape. **Deforestation**¹ has been a huge problem in the Amazon since the 1960s. Deforestation occurs when farmers and loggers cut down trees to make room for farms, homes, and roads. Until recently, scientists thought the rain forest was losing about 5,800 square miles a year. However, using the latest **satellite**² technology, researchers have discovered that the Amazon is shrinking at about twice that rate.



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Toucans and other creatures hold on as their rain forest home disappears.

Cause for Concern

Why should we worry about a rain forest that is thousands of miles from where we live? Deforestation reduces the rain forest's **biodiversity**, or the variety of plants and animals in a particular area. The Amazon is one of the richest areas of the world in animal and plant diversity. It is home to the biggest flower in the world, a bird-eating spider, and a monkey about the size of a toothbrush.

¹ **deforestation**: the clearing of a forest by cutting down trees and plant life

² **satellite**: a man-made object that orbits Earth and has the ability to take detailed pictures of life on Earth

Scientists estimate that they have identified only a small number of all species that live in the rain forest. As loggers and farmers destroy the forest, animals and plants may become extinct before they are discovered.



Deforestation affects people too. Many of the foods, spices, and medicines we need come from the rain forest.

The Amazon is often called the "lungs of the world." Its trees clean the air by taking in carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen. Too much carbon dioxide in the air is harmful to humans. Carbon dioxide is a **greenhouse gas**.³ Greenhouse gases trap the sun's heat close to Earth. Without the trees in the rain forest, the Earth's climate would become much hotter.

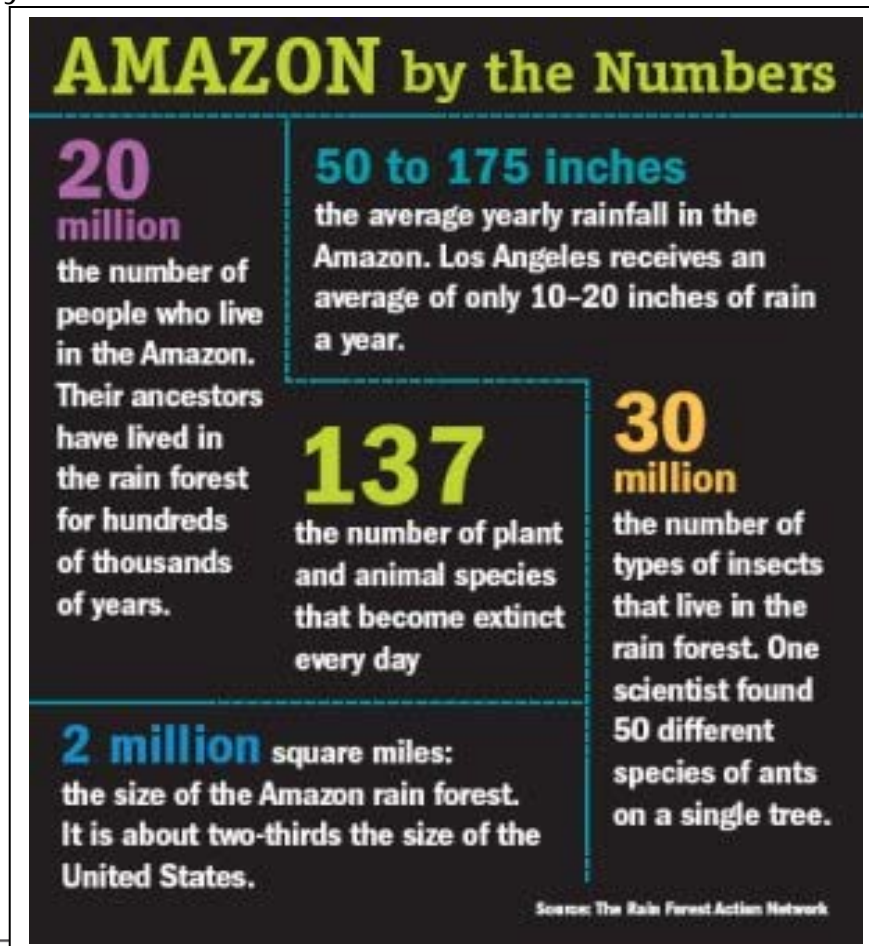
³ **greenhouse gas:** harmful gas that causes the Earth's climate to become hotter

Fixing the Problem

Stopping the destruction of the rain forest is not an easy task. Brazil's government created two national parks in the Amazon rain forest. The government's efforts placed 3.7 million acres of rain forest off-limits for development. The protected area is more than twice the size of Maryland.

Others think that this is not enough. "The single most important factor contributing to forest loss is population growth in Brazil," scientist Jim Bowyer of the University of Michigan told *Weekly Reader*. "People make the forest their home. All these people need land for farming and wood for heat and cooking. They are looking for a way to survive."

Scientists estimate that if deforestation continues at its current rate, the rain forest may survive only another 40 to 50 years. "We need to address the real causes of deforestation, like poverty and population growth," says Bowyer. "Solutions need to involve the very people who destroy the forest."



Name: _____ Date: _____

1. According to the passage, deforestation is being caused by
 - A climate
 - B animals
 - C people
 - D rainfall

2. According to the passage, the clearing of trees is to blame for endangering the rain forest. Which of the following *solutions* is presented as a way to help fix the problem?
 - A identifying all the species that live in the Amazon
 - B planting more trees and flowers in the rain forest
 - C persuading more people to move to the Amazon
 - D placing part of the Amazon under government protection

3. Which of the following conclusions is supported by the passage if rain forest deforestation continues?
 - A Many plants and animals will become extinct.
 - B Earth's temperature will drop.
 - C Fewer people will call the rain forest home.
 - D More trees will grow in the Amazon.

4. Read the first sentence from the passage: "Bright-colored toucans and other exotic birds fly among the forest."

In this sentence, the word **exotic** means

 - A common
 - B feathered
 - C unusual
 - D familiar

5. Which statement best supports the main idea of this passage?
 - A The Amazon is the largest rain forest in the world.
 - B Brazil's government created two national parks in the Amazon.
 - C Millions of plants and animals live in the Amazon.
 - D Deforestation is destroying the Amazon.

6. According to the Amazon by the Numbers box, the Amazon rain forest covers about 2 million square miles. Now look at the map. In what South American country is most of the rain forest located?

7. Why is the Amazon rain forest important to us even though it is so far away?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Scientists thought that the rain forest was losing about 5,800 square miles a day; _____, they later learned that it is disappearing about twice as fast.

- A such as
- B first
- C like
- D however

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Using satellite technology, scientists recently discovered that the Amazon rain forest is shrinking at an alarming rate because of deforestation.

Who? _____

(did) What? _____

When? recently

Why? _____

(discovered this) How? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** prey: an animal hunted and killed by another as food.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____

Teacher Guide and Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 950

Featured Text Structure: Problem/Solution – the writer poses a problem and suggests possible solutions

Passage Summary: In “Can the Amazon Be Saved?”, the author describes why the Amazon is in trouble and what can be done to help save the world’s largest rain forest. Reasons why the rain forest should be protected are provided along with suggested ways to fix the problem.

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6. According to the Amazon by the Numbers box, the Amazon rain forest covers about 2 million square miles. Now look at the map. In what South American country is most of the rain forest located?

Suggested answer: Most of the Amazon rain forest is found in Brazil. [map]

7. Why is the Amazon rain forest important to us even though it is so far away?

Suggested answer: We depend on the Amazon rain forest for foods, spices, and medicines. The rain forest also cleans the air and keeps the Earth from getting too warm by taking in carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen. [paragraphs 6 and 7]

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(did) What? **discovered that the Amazon rain forest is shrinking at an alarming rate**

When? **recently**

Why? **because of deforestation**

(discovered this) How? **using satellite technology**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** prey: an animal hunted and killed by another as food.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.