

The Vanishing Rainforest

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The Vanishing Rainforest contains two texts with the same message. The first is a story about the Yanomami tribe who live in the Amazon rainforest. You can read the beginning of the story, together with the non-fiction text.

The Vanishing Rainforest

Remaema walked lazily through the rainforest towards the river, sucking her favourite wild berries. At the water's edge, she washed her sticky hands. The muddy water hurried past her to join the world's largest river – the Amazon.

Remaema heard a noise. It sounded like an insect close to her ear, but it came from the distant river bank. When the buzzing stopped, the tree-tops moved and one of the tallest trees fell.

She hurried home and told her mother what she had seen. "Child, it is the *nabë*. You heard the machine they use to cut trees."

Remaema nodded. The *nabë* were white people – strangers. They had come to take away her forest.

As the sun set, Remaema's uncle Moawa returned to the *yano* – the round house which all the families shared. He proudly carried a new *machete*, and wore a red T-shirt.

Remaema's father asked where he got such precious things.

"From the *nabë*," he replied.

"Brother, you are helping the *nabë* who are cutting down our trees?"

"These people are powerful ...!" Moawa replied angrily. "They have guns. They can kill us before we get close enough to hit them with an arrow. If we give them what they want, they will reward us. If we don't help them, they will take it anyway."

Then everyone spoke at once and started arguing.

"STOP!"

Her grandfather's shout made Remaema jump. Everyone went quiet. "I have travelled far, and I have seen the *nabë* cutting down trees, destroying our world. If we help them, we make our own ruin."

Moawa defended himself, "The forest will return: we make clearings, too, for growing bananas and *cassava*. When we move on, trees soon cover our gardens ..."

"No!" The old man stopped him. "We make small clearings. But when the *nabë* come, they take away every tree. When all the trees have gone, the animals die. It is the

animals that spread the seeds of the trees. No animals, no forest. No forest, no food. Then we will all starve.”

Remaema’s grandfather was right. To grow their plants, the farmers cut down trees and set fire to the forest. They soon moved on, but the trees did not grow back.

The fires scared away the forest animals. Peccaries used to be common once, but after the nabë came, hunters no longer caught these tasty forest pigs. Many fruit trees had vanished too. Finding enough food took much longer. Sometimes there was nothing at all.

The nabë needed the help of guides such as Moawa. They offered tools, clothes and money in exchange. But afterwards, the farmers only paid the guides half what they had promised. Villagers tried to hunt down the nabë who had cheated them, but the farmers kept them away with their guns.

Then, Remaema met a nabë who was not like the others. She was washing when the sound of a motor boat drifted upriver. Remaema watched from the forest shadows. A young woman began unloading. Remaema started to creep away.

“Wait! Don’t go!” To her surprise, Remaema could understand the tall, blond woman’s word.

“Take this ...” The woman held out a shiny square. It reflected Remaema’s face like a puddle, only brighter. “My name is Jane.”



Why Rainforests Matter

Rainforests once ringed the world like a belt. They covered much of the wettest land around the Earth’s middle. The forests are shrinking fast. Nearly half have gone because people cut trees wastefully for timber or to make paper. Every second, timber workers cut down an area of rainforest as big as 16 tennis courts.

Jane, the scientist in the story, knows that we must preserve the rainforest because of the huge variety of useful and beautiful plants and animals that live there. For each kind of rainforest plant that scientists have found and named, there may be as many as six more yet to be discovered. Forest people are the only ones who know how to make food or healing drugs from these plants. Some South American groups use as many as 1300 different plants.

But there is another reason for preserving the world’s greatest rainforests. They control our planet’s climate, its weather pattern. The trees soak up waste gases that pollute the atmosphere. Cutting down the trees frees the gases. This changes the climate, making it hotter and stormier.

By preserving the rainforests and the plants, people and other animals they contain, we are safeguarding our own health – and the health of our planet.