Art/Crafts

CATEGORY: BRAZIL: NINETEENTH CENTURY

CONCEPTS: EXPLORATION, flora and fauna

ACTIVITY: WRITING AN AMAZON EXPLORER'S JOURNAL OF FLORA AND FAUNA. The Amazon has provided a living laboratory for biologists, zoologists and anthropologists for centuries. Over 90% of the planet's plant and animal life is located within the Amazon Basin. The 19th century particularly saw a boom in Amazon exploration. In this exercise students can relive some of the adventure and wonder of these explorations.

OBJECTIVES: The class will prepare a journal of the plants and animals they would find in the Amazon region.

MATERIALS: Information on Amazon flora and fauna from encyclopedias and books. Also, reproductions of the following journal entry as an example.

PROCEDURE: Have the students read the following example of a 19th century journal entry. Then assign each student one or several plants and animals. They should research each and write a description. Drawings can be included. All the descriptions should be put into a folder or loose-leaf notebook. The class can choose a title for their journal. A map might also be included.

HELPFUL HINTS: Here is a list of plants and animals you can assign for the journal. Any encyclopedia will provide more ideas.

ceiba
Brazilnut
cashew
coconut palm
mahogany
balsa
rosewood
Amazon butterflies
tapir
two-toed sloth
alligator
electric eel
orchid
parrot
macaw
heron
puma
anaconda
piranha
jaguar
armadillo
boa
capybara
pirarucu

RELATED ACTIVITIES: You may wish to broaden the exercise by including Indian groups and customs of the Amazon.

LEVEL: MIDDLE GRADES
Source: Gibbs, Virginia G. *Latin America: Curriculum Materials for the Middle Grades.* Center for Latin America, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. 1985. 1989.

AN AMERICAN BIOLOGIST VISITS THE AMAZON
The Journal of Professor and Mrs. Louis Agassiz
1875

There is much to be learned on these Amazon beaches; they are the haunts and breeding-places of many different kinds of animals, and are covered by tracks of alligators, turtles, and capybara. Then there are the nests, not only of alligators and turtles, but of the different kind of fish and birds that lay their eggs in the mud or sand. It is interesting to see the way the Indians find the turtle nests. They walk quickly over the sand, but with sort of an enquiring tread, and the moment they set their foot upon a spot below which eggs are deposited, though there is no external evidence, they recognize it at once. Stooping, they dig straight down to the eggs, generally eight or ten inches below the surface.

Besides these tracks and nests, there are the rounded, shallow depressions in the mud, which the fishermen say are the sleeping places of the skates. The vegetation on these beaches is not less interesting than these signs of animal life. In the rainy season more than half a mile of land, now uncovered along the margins of the river, is entirely underwater. The river rises not only to the edge of the forest but far into it. At this time of year, however, the shore consists, first of the beach, then of a broad band of tall grasses, beyond which are the lower shrubs and trees, leading up to the full forest growth. During this dry season the vegetation makes an effort to recover its lost ground. You can see the little Imbauba (Cecropia) and a kind of willow-tree (Salix humboldiana), the only familiar plant we met, springing up from the sand, and creeping down to the water's edge, only to be destroyed again with the next rise of the river.

For several hours after breakfast this morning the heat was intense, and we could do little but rest in the shade, though my husband, Mr. Agassiz, was busy in making skeletons of some fish too large to be preserved in alcohol. Towards evening it grew cooler and we walked to a banana plantation near the house, and sat under an immense gourd tree. The tree made a deep shade for it was clothed not only by its own foliage, but the branches were covered with soft, dark moss. The lighter green, glossy fruit of the tree seemed to gain new lustre against the dark, mossy background.

I call this tree a gourd-tree, simply from the use to which the fruit is put. But here it goes by the name Cuieira-tree (Crescentia Cajeput); the cup made from the fruit is called a Cuia. The fruit is round, of a light green, shiny surface, and grows from the size of an apple to that of the largest melon. It is filled with a soft, white pulp, easily removed when the fruit is cut in half; the rind is then allowed to dry. Very pretty cups and bowls are made in this way. The Indians, who are skilled at preparing a variety of brilliant colors, paint them in a beautiful fashion.

(From A Journey in Brazil, Professor and Mrs. Louis Agassiz, James R. Osgood and Company: Boston, 1875.)