

SOUTH AMERICA: THE AMAZON:

What is life like in the Amazon?

Unit overview

In this unit, children find out about the Amazon region of South America, considering what it is like to live in the region as well as how it is being damaged and how it can be protected. The unit builds on previous work the children may have done in Key Stage 1 on rainforests and climate, and the units of work on North America and Climate, earlier in this series.

Cross-curricular links

- **English:** speaking and listening (Week 1); poetry (Week 2); research skills, note-taking, non-chronological reports (Week 3).
- **Maths:** direction and compass points, distance (Week 1).
- **Science:** habitats and adaptation (Week 2); states of matter – properties of liquids (Week 3).
- **Computing:** making an animation (Week 6); e-safety – using the internet safely and effectively for research (Week 3).
- **History:** exploration (Week 1); food and farming (Week 4).

This unit also includes many opportunities to explore issues involving sustainability and global warming.

Knowledge, skills and concepts

In this unit, the children will:

- extend their knowledge and understanding beyond their local area to include South America
- develop their use of geographical knowledge, understanding and skills to enhance their locational and place knowledge
- locate the world's countries using maps, and concentrate on their environmental regions, key physical and human characteristics, countries and major cities
- understand geographical similarities and differences through the study of human and physical geography of a region in South America
- Describe and understand key aspects of physical and human geography
- Use maps, atlases, globes and digital/computing mapping to locate countries and describe features studied.

Background information

The Amazon is a vast region that spans nine countries: Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, Guyana and Suriname, as well as French Guiana (an overseas territory of France). The Amazon River Basin is home to the largest rainforest in the world and covers almost 40% of South America.

The region consists of a variety of ecosystems including rainforests, seasonal forests, deciduous forests, flooded forests and savannahs. However, the region is most renowned for its rainforest, which covers most of the Amazon Basin. 5,500,000 square kilometres of the basin are covered by the rainforest, 60% of which is in Brazil. The Amazon represents over half of the planet's remaining rainforests and has an estimated 390 billion individual trees comprising of 16,000 species.

The Amazon is home to an estimated 10% of all species found on Earth. Scientists estimate that there are at least 40,000 plant species, 427 types of mammal, 1,300 types of bird, 378 types of reptile, 400 types of amphibian, and around 3,000 types of freshwater fish.

The Amazon is also home to more than 30 million people, and about 9% of these are indigenous people – 350 different ethnic groups, more than 60 of which still remain largely isolated.

The Amazon River is the largest river by discharge of water in the world – greater than the next seven largest rivers combined. It is the second longest river in the world after the Nile, and has the largest drainage basin in the world – about 7,050,000 square kilometres – which accounts for approximately one-fifth of the world's total river flow.

The Amazon has a tropical climate, which is typical in areas close to the equator (12 degrees north or south of the equator). There are only two seasons: wet and dry.

The region is undergoing change due to commercial development, particularly mining (for iron ore/gold), hydro-electric schemes, road building (Trans-Amazon highway), logging and forest clearance fires.

The Amazon region is globally significant both ecologically and environmentally, but it is also an important comparison to many areas of the UK which are also special and threatened. There are currently 1,150 species and 65 habitats on the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, which is a published list of conservation priorities that are under threat because of their rarity and rate of decline.

The Big Finish

This unit culminates in children producing an exciting stop-motion animation, where they can share their learning from the topic with a wider audience, via the school website or even a film screening in assembly! They can use their animations to explain what the Amazon is like, why it is important and how it is changing.

Map work

This unit has lots of opportunities for both using and creating maps at a range of scales, particularly during Week 1. During this unit, children will begin with world maps, before moving on to maps of South America and Brazil. This allows them to develop their skills in locating and describing features studied.

Fieldwork

The Amazon is a little too distant for fieldwork; however this unit does lend itself to opportunities for local area fieldwork. Children can investigate their local area, considering its change in their locality, as well as studying any protected areas using the same enquiry process as their study of the Amazon region. This could include a field visit to a local forest or wood, preferably deciduous.

Independent learning area

Create an 'Amazon Enquiry Centre' in the classroom where children can pose their own questions about the Amazon, with the resources to research the answers. Provide a selection of books, photographs, artefacts (such as everyday items that originate in the rainforest: brazil nuts, coffee, etc.) leaflets and suggested websites.

Create a tree display on the wall and provide the children with blank leaves in two colours. Ask the children to write their research findings on a leaf and add it to the tree. Challenge children further by asking them to write information relating to human geography on one colour and physical geography on another.

Pose several enquiry questions to get the children started, e.g. Where is the Rio Hamza? (The Rio Hamza is an underground river, or aquifer, running 4 km below the Amazon.)

Assessment

All children can:

- use an atlas, map or globe to locate the Amazon rainforest and Amazon River
- explain some of the ways in which the Amazon rainforest is valuable
- correctly use some of the key vocabulary
- understand how they can play a role in preserving the environment
- name at least one animal that lives in the Amazon and describe how it has adapted to its habitat.

Most children can:

- identify and name some of the countries in which the Amazon is located
- choose and use appropriate sources for geographical research
- explain the value of the Amazon rainforest and some ways in which it can be protected
- describe some similarities and differences between their local area and a region in South America
- describe what the climate is like in Amazonas.

Some children can:

- evaluate and refine the effectiveness of their research methods
- correctly use all the key vocabulary
- understand that communities change over time.