

I Bought a Rain Forest

Rain forests are often called the lungs of the Earth, because they play a key role in oxygenating the air we breathe. "I Bought a Rain Forest" describes the situation and the problem in a clear, straightforward way, showing how everything is interconnected – economy, politics and environmental responsibility, including the personal responsibility that we all have.

An excellent film to build on and ask questions about the environment and climate change both in the world at large and here at home. What can we do ourselves?

Recommended for year 6

A FILM GUIDE BY ELSA COJNBY

About the film

Jacob thinks back to his primary school days. He wonders what happened to all the rain forest trees that he and his classmates bought with the money they collected in a jumble sale. He remembers they got a certificate. But that was nearly 20 years ago. Did their efforts make any difference?

Jacob decides to dig deeper, and starts looking for the certificate. But it's hard to trace. Through his efforts, he learns that 400,000 other Swedish schoolchildren have also bought rain forest. And even more children in other countries. But what defines a rain forest, really? And what threats do rain forests face today, compared with 20 years ago? And most importantly: is the rain forest still there? If so, where?

The questions mount, and they demand an answer.

What is a rain forest, and where is it?

The efforts of Jacob and his classmates resulted in 2,800 square metres of rain forest somewhere in Central America. However, where in Central America is somewhat unclear – and anyway, what kind of special trees constitute a rain forest?

- What characterises a rain forest? What is the difference between tropical and temperate rain forests? Where on Earth are rain forests found?
- What kinds of animals live in the rain forest?
- The search for Jacob's rain forest takes him to Nicaragua, Honduras and Costa Rica. Fortunately, he was prepared and took Spanish lessons before he left. Spanish is the language spoken in all three countries. Why?
- Look at a map and find out more about the countries Jacob visits. Costa Rica is the most economically stable of the three, while Honduras is one of the poorest countries not only in Latin America, but in the world. The country is unstable in many ways; as recently as 2009 it experienced a military coup. What happened? Why? And how did the world react?
- Analyse the terms. What countries are included in the terms "Central America", "Latin America", "South America" and "North America"?
- Compare Costa Rica, Honduras and Nicaragua. Take a closer look at their governmental systems, history, political situation, geography, natural resources, economic geography,

educational systems, religion... What similarities and differences are there? What is their situation in terms of democracy, social safety nets, literacy, crime, justice and equality? What threats and opportunities do these countries face?

- Why are the rain forests of Central America being destroyed? Is the reason the same everywhere, or are there different reasons in different parts of the world?

Rain forests – the lungs of the Earth?

Rain forests are often described as the lungs of the Earth, as they bind carbon dioxide while also producing oxygen. This process is not unique to the rain forest, but it is particularly significant there, because rain forests have such a huge capacity.

- Describe the process called photosynthesis!
- What are the chemical designations of oxygen and carbon dioxide? Why? Explain!

However, not everyone agrees with likening rain forests to the Earth's lungs. While the rain forests are very important, and deforestation definitely has a great influence on the climate, there are more processes to consider. One of them is "respiration", which means that the forest also consumes oxygen.

- Explain the significance of respiration in more detail. How do we calculate the actual effect of the rain forest on carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere?
- In the film, Jacob meets a man, Daniel Janzen, who is saving rain forests by buying parcels of land and allowing it to recover. What are other reasons for saving the rain forest, besides the climate? Why does the forest need to recover? How long does it take for the forest to recover? Is the same true of our own forest in Sweden?

The government of Costa Rica has announced that it aims to become the first carbon-neutral developing nation in the world by 2021. Although very small geographically, Costa Rica has greater biodiversity than almost anywhere else in the world, boasting about 5% of all of the world's species.

- What does biodiversity mean? Why is it important? Explain what an ecosystem is.
- What is a developing country? What criteria are used to distinguish between developing and developed countries? Sometimes we hear the expressions "First World", "Second World" and "Third World" – what do these expressions mean?
- When forestry companies and big business make claims on the lands of native populations, there is little the people can do; in one way or another they are forced to leave. In this film we meet people who have been affected by the destruction of the rain forests. What stories do you remember?
- What is it called when workers get together to protect their rights and negotiate collectively? Do you know of any organisations of this kind in Sweden? What does Swedish law say about this type of organisation – and why?

Global warming, climate conferences and a green future

According to the UN's International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere – called the greenhouse effect – is primarily responsible for the changes we see in our climate. The destruction of the world's forests is responsible for about 17% of greenhouse gas emissions, and when deforestation happens faster than forest growth, the result is that the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere increases, contributing to the greenhouse effect.

- The rain forests affect global warming, but the effect is reciprocal. How are the rain forests affected by global warming?
- Draw and explain how the greenhouse effect works! The greenhouse effect is a necessity for life on earth, but what is it about it that is so problematic these days? What are the other greenhouse gases, besides carbon dioxide?

At the UN's climate change conference in 2009, COP15 in Copenhagen, the role and influence of forests on climate was a key issue. In the poor nations of the world, many people are dependent on the forest for subsistence, so other countries have developed a joint project called REDD, which aims to create financial pressures to decrease deforestation.

- What does REDD stand for? What is the REDD programme about?
- The climate conference in Copenhagen is described as a fiasco. Why?
- When is the next climate conference, COP16? Where? What are its prospects for success?
- Do you think a lot about the environment and the climate? What do you do to contribute to sustainable development? What things can be done?
- Explain and discuss: renewable energy, nuclear power, low-energy light bulbs, electric cars, recycling, the paperless society, public transport...

Rain forests and grassroots: making your voice heard

You may have encountered the term "grassroots movement". It refers to people far down on, or perhaps even at the bottom of, a perceived power pyramid, who work together to influence the upper echelons. Grassroots influence has been proven to be very effective – for example when hundreds of thousands of children in Swedish schools rescue the rain forests.

- Consider the concept of power. What is power? Who has power? How?
- What does "hierarchy" mean?
- Draw your own power pyramid of society (or a smaller, less complex system), as you see it. Where are you? Are you powerful? In what way? Consider the different positions in the pyramid and ask yourself why you placed them where you did.
- Do you think the pyramid shape is an accurate representation of the distribution of power? Why/why not?
- Is power related to responsibility? How?
- What does it take for a person to be able to take responsibility and be viewed as responsible?

- Who is responsible for the destruction of the rain forests? Is it the people operating the machines? What if those are poor people, just doing their job? What if they don't understand how important the forest is? Or is it the politicians who are not doing enough to protect the forests? Or is it the consumers who buy the products that have contributed to the destruction of the forests?

Since Jacob bought rain forest 20 years ago, more than 300 million hectares of tropical rain forest have been destroyed. In the Amazon alone, an area of rain forest 38 times the size of the province of Skåne has been destroyed in the past 15 years. Nearly all the soy produced in the Amazon goes to the European market, and as recently as 1 March 2010, Swedwatch released a report showing that Sweden still imports meat and soy from companies in Brazil that contribute to the destruction of the rain forest and savannah, and that banned toxins are sprayed on the plantations.

- What other products are produced at the expense of the rain forest?
- What is consumer power? How can you know what effect your choice of products has on the environment, the climate, and the rain forests? (Can you know?) And how far does responsibility go – if Swedish meat requires Brazilian soy, which leads to the destruction of the rain forest, is that still the responsibility of hungry Swedish consumers? What do you think?

Media and power: the film and its format

When we talk about power, we sometimes hear the expression that “the media is the fourth estate”. What does that mean? In what way do the mass media have power?

- “I Bought a Rain Forest” may make other people interested in doing the same thing Jacob did. Does that mean that the film has a certain power? What does “public opinion” mean? Is it accurate to say that the media can shape public opinion? Explain.
- If the media is the fourth estate, what are the first three?
- “I Bought a Rain Forest” is a documentary. This means that it portrays an aspect of reality, with real people and real situations. But is that really accurate? Is it really that easy to distinguish documentary film from fiction?
- Nearly all films are a story about a small part of reality; a little slice of the big picture, cut and pasted in a specific order to create a cohesive story. Someone has interpreted, selected and re-created a piece of reality. What do you think – is it possible to portray “reality” as it really is?
- What does it mean that something is real? Does reality look the same to everyone? Or can we perceive the same object or phenomenon in different ways? (What does it mean to interpret impressions?) Does this mean that reality and truth are subjective? Consider and explain!
- Are there any aspects of the film that feel more or less “documentary”? If so, what and why?

To compress reality into an hour-long film, the themes and characters must be refined and simplified. Even a documentary film requires a script and a director (or even more than one!) to make the story clear.

- What does “authenticity” mean, or that something is “authentic”?

- In many ways, "I Bought a Rain Forest" is set up as a classic thriller, rather than an environmental documentary. How is tension created in the film?
- What steps are involved in filmmaking? What people and skills are required?

What do you want to change?

As we see in the film, Jacob's and his classmates' efforts made a difference. Even though they were children, living on the other side of the world, they had an effect on a geographical place far away and on the people who live there, the animals in the forest, and the climate itself.

- Do you do anything to change the world? What do you think is important, and what would you like to donate money to if you took up a collection?
- Do you have any ideas about how to make a difference on something you think is important? How can your class improve the earth and our common future?

If you'd like to read more

The film's website: www.iboughtarainforest.com

The Barnens Regnskog (Children's Rain Forest) Association: www.barnensregnskog.se

Monteverde Conservation League – Children's Eternal Rainforest: www.acmcr.org

Daniel Janzen's website: janzen.sas.upenn.edu

Production information

Sweden, Germany, 2010

Produced by: Margarete Jangård & Fredrik Gertten

Directed by: Jacob Andrén & Helena Nygren

Photography: Helena Nygren

Editing: Erik Bäfving & Johan Bjerkner

Music: Andreas Eklöf

Starring

Jacob Andrén

Eha Kern

Antonio Ruiz

Father Andrés Tamayo

Daniel Janzen

Irene Ströberg

Technical information

Length: 58 minutes

Format: DVD & TViX and DVCAM

Sound: Stereo

Suitable for: All audiences

Swedish premiere: 29 January 2010

Distribution

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