

# The Amazing Amazon

A Reading A-Z Level U Quick Reader

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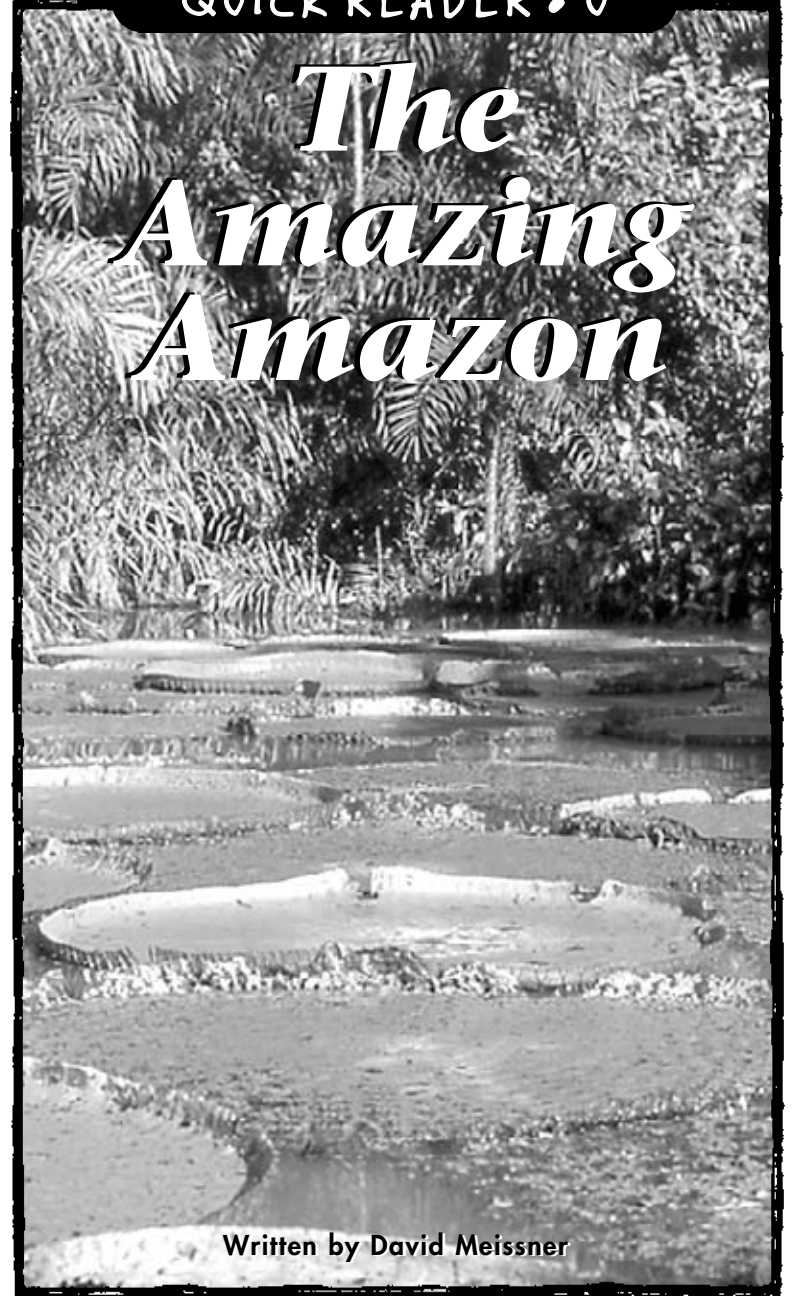


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QUICK READER • U

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Written by David Meissner

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Level U Quick Reader  
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**NOTE:** Rainforest can be spelled in two ways: *rainforest* or *rain forest*. We will use the one-word spelling. And when this Quick Reader uses the word *rainforest*, it means tropical rainforest.



In the Amazon rainforest

## **Chapter 1: There Is a Place**

There is a place where monkeys swing and howl. There is a place where jaguars leap from tree to tree. In this place, bananas and pineapples grow for free. In this place, tiny frogs live in flowers. This is where pink-colored dolphins swim in the river. This is where storms come often, and where the air is sweet.

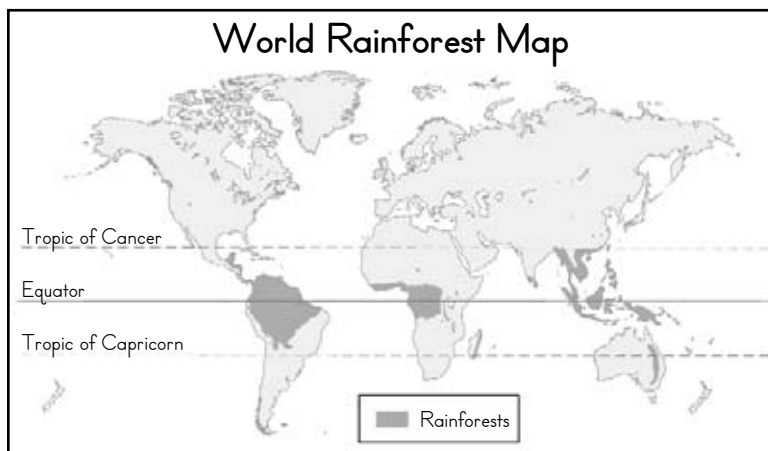
Some sunlight filters through the vines and leaves, but it is mostly dark here on the ground. It is hot, steamy, and surprisingly still. Rainwater trickles down from leaf to leaf. You hear a slow sound: drip, drip, drip.

Your skin is sweaty. An insect lands on your neck. An ant quietly walks across your sandal. Suddenly a little brown monkey swings to a nearby branch. Then a bright green bird flutters past. Welcome to the Amazon rainforest.

## Rainforests

Tropical rainforests live up to their name: They are forests where it rains a lot. In fact, a typical tropical rainforest receives between 150 and 400 centimeters (55–160 in.) of rain each year. They are also warm. Their temperature averages between 25° and 35° Celsius (77°–95° F). Rainforests are green year-round. Their hot, humid, and rainy climate is perfect for tall trees, vines, ferns, and other plants. The really thick part of rainforests is what we call “jungle.”

Tropical rainforests cover a small part (about 6 percent) of the earth’s surface. But over half (50 percent) of the world’s plant and animal **species** are found in them! Rainforests usually lie in tropical areas near the Earth’s equator. Most of the world’s rainforests are in Africa, Southeast Asia, and South America.



The rainforest’s dense foliage

## The Amazon

The Amazon rainforest lies in South America. It is the largest tropical rainforest in the world. It has more kinds of insects, plants, and animals than any other place on earth. Every year, scientists discover new species of insects and plants here.

The Amazon River flows through the heart of this rainforest. It is like a huge sea of fresh water. Thousands of other rivers and streams empty into it. Catfish, **piranhas**, and dolphins all live in the Amazon River.

This Quick Reader will take you on a tour of the Amazon rainforest. You will travel from the tallest trees to the rainforest floor. Along the way, you will meet an eagle, monkey, jaguar, and ant. You will even hear what these Amazon natives would say—if they could talk.

## Map of Amazon Basin



### *So just how big is the Amazon River?*

- The Amazon River is 56 kilometers (35 mi.) across at its widest point.
- It flows 6,437 kilometers (4,000 mi.) to the Atlantic Ocean.
- Within its mouth is an island the size of Switzerland.
- The river's Arapaima fish can grow to be 3 meters (10 ft.) long and weigh 136 kilograms (300 lbs.)!



The Amazon is the world's widest and largest river. Its **volume** is greater than the next eight largest rivers combined!

## *From the Amazon Yearbook*



**Sammy "Slowpoke"  
Sloth**

Sloths are slow-moving animals. They seem to just hang out (upside down!) in the trees. Sloths get covered in algae, which helps them blend into the forest.

Sammy was voted: *Most Likely to Survive, but Least Likely to Succeed*



**Tamara  
the Tapir**

The tapir is a big hooved animal that is related to the horse and the rhinoceros. Tapirs often weigh well over 136 kilograms (300 lbs.). Tapirs like to take baths in the river and look for food when it is dark.

Tamara was voted: *Best Personality*

## ***From the Amazon Yearbook***

At 1.2 meters (4 ft.) long, the capybara is the world's largest rodent. (But Katie doesn't like to be called a big rat.) Capybaras' webbed feet help them swim.



**Katie Capybara**

Katie was voted:  
*Most Likely to Win  
a Rat Race*

The poison arrow frog has super-bright colors (this one is red). These colors warn other animals that its skin is poisonous. Indians in the Amazon rainforest dip their arrows into this poison for hunting.

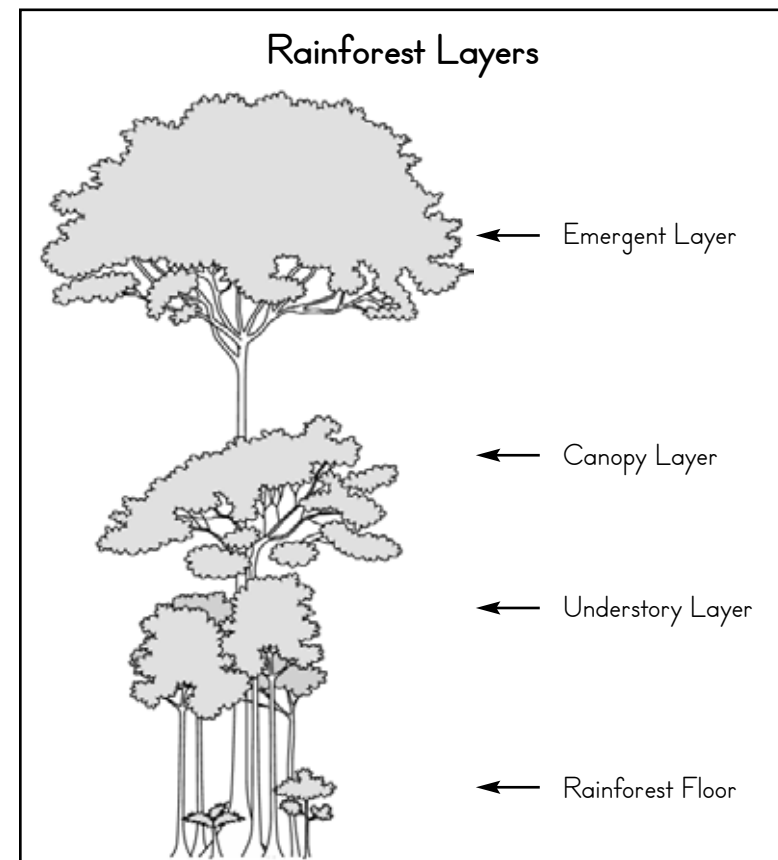


**Paulo the  
Poison Arrow Frog**

Paulo was voted:  
*Most Dangerous  
Amphibian*

## **Chapter 2: Layers of the Rainforest**

To better understand the rainforest, scientists have "divided" it into four layers, or sections. You can think of it like a four-story building. The highest trees make up the top floor, or the emergent layer. The next highest trees make up the canopy layer. Below them is the understory layer. At the bottom is the rainforest floor.



**High Risers** The tallest trees of the rainforest are called the emergents. They are like big umbrellas that rise high above the thick forest. Emergents are exposed to lots of sun, wind, rain, and lightning.

Big roots support these giant trees. Because rainforest soil is shallow, tree roots often grow above the ground. The kapok tree, for example, has roots that extend out like wooden walls. These roots are so big that your whole class could hide behind just one of them!

Not many animals live in the emergent layer. Some birds and butterflies do visit to eat leaves and fruit. One huge bird, the harpy eagle, actually lives up there, high above the Amazon.



Harpy eagle

SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW:

## *The Harpy Eagle*

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*Quick Reader:* Hello there, Harpy. Is it true that you are the largest eagle in the world?

*Harpy:* I think so. In your people terms, I am about one meter tall, which is over three feet high.

*Quick Reader:* It looks like you have some big wings as well.

*Harpy:* Oh, these things? I was born with these. If I stretch them out like this, they are longer than most people. You see? My wingspan is two meters across—about six and a half feet. Flying fast really helps me find food.

*Quick Reader:* What is your favorite food?

*Harpy:* Oh, I like pizza delivered to my door. Just kidding—there's no pizza here in the rainforest! I hunt sloths, monkeys, and fellow birds. Monkeys are probably the tastiest.

*Quick Reader:* Is that what your big **talons** are for?

*Harpy:* Yep. These yellow meat hooks can scoop **unsuspecting** animals right off of tree branches.

*Quick Reader:* Do you ever fear revenge, like a monkey uprising?

*Harpy:* No, I'm the top bird around here. I build my stick nests in the tallest trees where monkeys don't normally go. Hey, there's a monkey now! I'll see you later!

**Crazy Canopy** The rainforest's real action is in the canopy layer. This is where most plants and animals live. It is like a thick roof woven out of tree branches, plants, and vines.

Many trees in the canopy are covered with climbing vines and epiphytes. **Epiphytes** are plants that grow on top of others. Most of the rainforest's flowers, fruit, and seeds are found in this layer.

With so much good canopy food, it makes sense that animals hang out here. Many animals rarely come down to the ground. They eat, sleep, hunt, and give birth high up in the trees. Sloths, toucans, and parrots are just some of the canopy's **residents**. The hardest one to ignore is probably the howler monkey. Its name befits its behavior, as these monkeys howl and scream to keep other animals out of their territories.



Bromeliads are cone-shaped plants that grow on trees. Their cones catch a lot of rainwater and form little swimming pools high above the ground. Tiny frogs, salamanders, and crabs live in these pools. Mosquitoes and dragonflies lay eggs in them.

SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW:

## ***The Howler Monkey***

*Quick Reader:* Wow, that was one loud howl! Excuse me, but could you please stop screaming for one moment? I would like to ask you a few questions!

*Howler:* Okay, but hurry up. If I don't scream like this, other monkeys may come into our territory.

*Quick Reader:* Do you always stay up here in the canopy?

*Howler:* This is our home, my man. On the ground, there are some really big animals—it's a jungle down there. When it comes to safety, we don't monkey around. Up here, we can eat fruit, leaves, and flowers, and we can live in safety.

*Quick Reader:* Does your long tail help you? It looks **prehensile**.

### ***Reaching the Top***

Scientists have found creative ways to study the top layers of rainforests. They have climbed with ropes and ladders. They have built platforms like tree houses. Some have gone up in cranes. A blimp has even lowered a raft of scientists down to the canopy.





Howler monkey

*Howler:* Yeah, if by prehensile you mean “grab onto.” My tail helps me climb, but my hands and feet are very useful for climbing, too.

*Quick Reader:* You sure use big words for a monkey. Hey, stop the howling! If you can be heard from miles away, just think how loud it is for me. What makes you so loud anyway?

*Howler:* I have a special bone in my windpipe. My throat is like a hollow sound box. See the big swelling under my chin? Here, touch it.

*Quick Reader:* Oww! That’s not funny—you have sharp teeth! Okay Mr. Monkey, you can go back to howling now.

***The Darker Story*** The “understory” is the third level of the rainforest. It is below the canopy and above the ground. This is where ferns, plants, and young trees grow. It is dark in the understory because very little light shines through the thick canopy. Understory plants grow leaves that are big and wide. That way, they have a better chance of catching some rays.

Animals like to eat these big leaves. The understory is not nearly as busy as the canopy, but animals do live here. Poison arrow frogs hide in



Jaguar

the **foliage**. Snakes wrap around trees like vines. Birds peck and pull insects from the wood. Large cats like jaguars leap between branches.

SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW:

## *The Jaguar*

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*Quick Reader:* Hey, put me down! And don't bite. Bad cat, bad big cat!

*Jaguar:* Sorry, I thought you were a monkey. Lucky you're not as tasty. Hey, what do you think you're doing here anyway?

*Quick Reader:* I came to interview you, the biggest cat in the Americas. Mr. Jaguar, are you really 2.6 meters (8.5 ft.) long?

*Jaguar:* That's what they say. And I weigh 136 kilograms (300 lbs.), too. Not many animals mess with me. By the way, you can just call me Jag.

*Quick Reader:* Okay, Jag, what do you do for exercise?

*Jag:* I get bored with just one sport. That's why I cross-train: I run, swim, climb, fish, and hunt.

*Quick Reader:* What do you hunt?

*Jag:* Lots of things. Sometimes I climb up in the canopy to eat sloths and monkeys. On the ground, I hunt **peccary**, tapir, and yummy capybaras. On lazy days, I lie near the river and catch fish with my claws. When I'm really hungry, I kill alligators.

*Quick Reader:* Wow, I don't want to be in your powerful jaws ever again! If you'll excuse me, I need to go now.

## Chapter 3: Keeping It Clean

If you walked around the rainforest floor, you might be surprised. It is not just one thick jungle. Sure, you would see roots, ferns, herbs, and baby trees. But most of the green would be high above you. The ground itself would look surprisingly clean, almost as if somebody had swept it.

But the clean rainforest floor is no accident—millions of little creatures clean it every day! Earthworms, termites, fungi, and bacteria eat up the fallen fruit, leaves, and branches. They recycle it back into nutritious soil. When a big tree falls, they quickly munch it down into small pieces.

Also on the ground are big animals like deer, tapir, peccary, and capybara. But they are far outnumbered by the smaller spiders, beetles, and ants. Ant highways crisscross the rainforest floor. One kind of ant even parades around with leaves and flower petals in its mouth. It is the famous leaf-cutter ant.

### Trivia Question

In the Amazon rainforest, are there more mammals, birds, insects, or reptiles?

**Answer:** Insects! (There are more than 200 types of mosquito alone. There are well over 1,000 different kinds of butterflies. And just think of all the ants!)

SPOTLIGHT INTERVIEW:

## ***The Leaf-cutter Ant***

*Quick Reader:* Hey down there! Yeah, you—the one carrying the big leaf over your head! I'd like to ask you a few questions. Do you have a moment?

*Ms. Ant:* Sure, but I do need to hurry back to the **fungus** garden. We're low on food.

*Quick Reader:* Did you really just climb up a tree and cut off that leaf?

*Ms. Ant:* That's correct. And now I'm carrying it back to our underground colony. That's where smaller ants will chew it up into little spongy bits.

*Quick Reader:* So you don't eat the actual leaf?

*Ms. Ant:* No, we use the leaves to grow fungus. Then we eat the fungus. Want to try some?

*Quick Reader:* No, thank you—I, uh, just had lunch. So tell me, what is it like underground?

*Ms. Ant:* We have deep nests with hundreds of chambers. In the middle rooms, small ants tend to our fungus gardens. Our only queen is in a different room. She can lay up to 30,000 eggs in one day. That's why there are almost eight million of us here! Now if you'll excuse me, I need to sniff my way home. And please watch your feet—if you step on our trail, I might get lost!



Leaf-cutter ants



### **Chapter 4: Who, Me?**

Yes, you. Do you eat bananas? Do you like chocolate? Have you ridden a bicycle with rubber tires? Well, guess what? Bananas, chocolate, and rubber all grow in the Amazon rainforest. Many more things come from the Amazon, too, like medicines, wood, pineapples, and fresh air.

The Amazon is a rich, living treasure. Insects buzz by that do not even have names yet. Trees grow, fall, and turn back into soil. Rainstorms fill up frogs' swimming pools. And perhaps most importantly, plants of the rainforest take carbon dioxide from the air and replace it with oxygen. Humans and other animals need oxygen in order to live.



The Amazon rainforest is home to many living things.

The Amazon rainforest is a real place. Even if it is far away from you, the Amazon lives at this very moment. As you read these words, a jaguar slinks through the understory. Right now, a leaf-cutter ant marches back to a fungus garden. Somewhere in the Amazon, the scream of a howler monkey echoes throughout the forest. Can you hear it?

## Explore More

Did you like learning about the Amazon rainforest? Well, there is much more to see. If you do some research, you're bound to find some very interesting animals!

### 1. At the Library

Tell your librarian that you are interested in books about the Amazon rainforest.

### 2. On the Web

In the address window, type: *www.google.com*

Then type: *Amazon rainforest*. Click on "Google Search."

Read the colored links. Click on one that looks interesting.

When you want to explore other links, click the back arrow on the top left.

Or try a new search: *Amazon River*



Capybara

### 3. Try This!

Where do you live? Do you live in the rainforest? What about in a desert, tundra, or pine forest? Do you live on the coast, up in the mountains, or out on the plains? You must live somewhere, right?

If we live in a town or city, sometimes it can be hard to tell what kind of region we live in. But there are clues all around. What kinds of trees and bushes grow nearby? What kinds of birds fly overhead? What is the weather like? Look around and investigate. If you are not sure, ask your teacher, librarian, parent, or friend.

Once you figure it out, make a report. Draw a picture like the one on page 10, but make it for your area. What kind of insects, plants, and animals are native to your home? You could find this information by walking around outside. You could also ask other people. Or you could read a book, or search the Web. You'll probably be surprised by the cool things you learn about your neighbors!

### Glossary

<b>epiphyte</b>	a plant that grows on top of another plant (p. 13)
<b>foliage</b>	plant leaves (p. 16)
<b>fungus</b>	a small living being that grows on organic material. Some examples of fungi are molds, mushrooms, and yeast. (p. 19)
<b>peccary</b>	a pig-like mammal that is found in the Americas (p. 17)
<b>piranha</b>	a South American freshwater fish that has very sharp teeth (p. 6)
<b>prehensile</b>	able to grab on to things (p. 14)
<b>resident</b>	a person (or animal) who lives in a place for a long time (p. 13)
<b>species</b>	a group of similar living beings. Human beings are one such group. (p. 5)
<b>talon</b>	a claw, particularly of a bird that hunts (p. 12)
<b>unsuspecting</b>	unaware of potential dangers (p. 12)
<b>volume</b>	the amount of space that something takes up (p. 7)