Anchor Text Guidance: Grade 5, Module 2

Biodiversity in the Rainforest

Texts and authors

The Great Kapok Tree by Lynne Cherry
Lexile®: 670

Seeds of Change by Jen Cullerton Johnson
Lexile®: 820

The Most Beautiful Roof in the World by Kathryn Lasky
Lexile®: 1160

Text Overview

EL Education's Grade 5, Module 2 is designed to prompt consideration of these compelling questions:

- Why do scientists study the rainforest?
- How do authors engage readers in narratives?

Author and illustrator Lynne Cherry's book *The Great Kapok Tree* focuses on life in the South American Amazon rainforest. The picture book is dedicated to Chico Mendes, a Brazilian activist who worked to preserve the rainforest in the mid- to late-20th century. Cherry herself is a white author, illustrator, filmmaker, environmental lecturer, and activist who crafts a story to illustrate the ecological importance of the rainforest. *The Great Kapok Tree* tells the story of one man—a man of color—who falls asleep as he is cutting down a kapok tree. In his dreams he is visited by snakes, butterflies, a jaguar, and a child of the rainforest who all share with him the importance of the tree, the interconnectedness of all things, and the consequences of a world where there are no trees and no beauty. After he wakes, he decides not to cut the tree down. Is it likely that this man would have had this choice? This myth-like story portrays it that way, as it highlights the importance of the kapok tree for the health of the local ecosystem and encourages readers to consider that one person can make a difference.

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Seeds of Change is the biography of Wangari Maathai, the first African woman and first environmentalist to win the Nobel Peace Prize. When Wangari was growing up in Kenya, her mother taught her to respect nature. At a time in Kenyan history when few girls were formally educated, Wangari went to school; she eventually continued her schooling in the United States. After achieving academic success, Wangari returned to Kenya to champion the rights of Kenyan women and help save her land.

The Most Beautiful Roof in the World is the story of Dr. Meg Lowman, a scientist who studies the rainforest in Belize. This book offers a detailed description of living things in the rainforest, as well as a window into the life of a scientist working in the field. The text is written in a narrative format, focuses on the daily activities of Dr. Lowman, and includes photographs of the plants and insects she studies in the canopy of the rainforest.

Text Rationale

The Most Beautiful Roof in the World is used throughout the module to build knowledge about the rainforest and encourage students to analyze the author's craft. In Unit 1, students build background knowledge on biodiversity in the rainforest as they follow Dr. Meg Lowman and her scientific studies. Students closely read excerpts of the text to identify text structure and practice summarizing text (RI.5.1, RI.5.2, RI.5.5).

Students also listen closely to a read-aloud of *Seeds of Change*. They then summarize information from the text and begin to explore ways in which they, like Wangari Maathai, can help the rainforest.

In Unit 2, students explore how authors help readers understand what it is like in the rainforest by analyzing the use of figurative, concrete, and sensory language (RI.5.4, L.5.5) in texts such as "The Dreaming Tree," a folktale from Brazil, and *The Great Kapok Tree*. With a deeper understanding of an author's craft, students build understanding of key elements of narrative writing, including the use of figurative language, rich description, and point of view (RL.5.4, RL.5.6).

In Unit 3, students write first-person narratives, building out a scenario from *The Most Beautiful Roof in the World* and using concrete and sensory language to describe the rainforest as though they were actually there (W.5.3, W.5.4).

Central to the EL Education curriculum is a focus on "habits of character" and social-emotional learning. In this module, students work to contribute to a better world by putting their learning to use to improve communities through citizenship and service. Throughout Unit 1, students practice using their strengths to help others grow as they provide peer feedback. They also practice taking care of shared spaces and applying their learning to help their school, community, and the environment as they research things they can do to help the rainforest.

Additional Considerations

EL Education recommends that school leaders and teachers read the texts in advance, with their specific school community in mind, to become familiar with the issues presented so that they can discuss them with students and families as needed.

Examples of sensitive topics that teachers should be prepared to address are detailed below.

1. Gender Bias and Cultural Beliefs

Seeds of Change centers around the life and journey of Wangari Maathai, a Nobel Peace Prize-winning environmentalist. Wangari grew up in Kenya where her mother taught her to respect the land and nature. At that time, few Kenyan girls were formally educated, yet Wangari was so curious that her family allowed her to attend school, where she excelled at science. She went on to study in the United States, then returned home to use her knowledge of environmental studies to save her land by planting trees and becoming a champion for women's rights. An extensive biography of Wangari Maathai can be found on the Nobel Prize website (https://eled.org/2924).

Be aware that gender inequality is still the norm in some cultures, and be sensitive to and respectful of students who may come from communities where this is the case. Monitor students and determine whether there are any issues surfacing that need to be discussed in more detail as a whole group, in smaller groups, independently, or with families. Students' feelings may be personal, and they are not required to share them. Be especially sensitive to students' experiences and perspectives on this topic based on cultural background and family history. Foster inclusive action by creating space for students to express their feelings, while being aware that discussions may unearth trauma or social stigma. Consider explaining to families that students will be reading about and discussing educational and cultural norms specific to a particular time and place. Consult with a guidance counselor, school social worker, or ESL teacher for further investigation of diversity and inclusion.

2. Single Story

Be aware that *Seeds of Change* represents a single story of Kenya and may give students an overly simplistic view of the country. This single story could contribute to students forming stereotypes of Kenyan people and give a false perception of the country. Consider engaging students in conversations to support their thinking and deepen their knowledge of Kenya. One suggestion is to engage students in partner or triad discussions to support them in recognizing how stereotypes can lead to assumptions and allow prejudice and discrimination to grow. A possible discussion prompt is, "What assumptions do you have about the country of Kenya?"

After this discussion, invite students to locate Kenya on a map or globe. Share additional research, articles, and content knowledge about the country—its population, language, history, economy, and current education system in urban, suburban, and rural locations. Continue to support students' content knowledge of the country and culture. After reading *Seeds of Change* and building students' background knowledge about the current events, culture, and peoples of Kenya, bring students back to discussion again. In partner groups or triads, ask students if their thinking or assumptions about Kenya and Kenyan people have changed. Encourage productive and equitable conversation with Conversation Cues, which are questions teachers can ask students to help achieve four goals: (Goal 1) encourage all students to talk and be understood; (Goal 2) listen carefully to one another and seek to understand; (Goal 3) deepen thinking;

and (Goal 4) think with others to expand the conversation. Identify effective ways to develop culturally responsive practices, celebrating diversity and practicing inclusion.

3. Exploitation of Natural Resources, Indigenous Peoples, Scientists, and Pioneers

Be aware that some students may have ties to or experience with the setting for the texts in this module. In Unit 1, students build background knowledge about the rainforest, including rainforest destruction, to understand why scientists study the rainforest. When discussing *The Most Beautiful Roof in the World*, help students understand that Indigenous people have been living in the rainforest canopy for a long time. Be aware that on page 1 of the book, there is a subheading of "Pioneer in the Rainforest" and later, on page 9, the text states:

> "These women and men are the pioneers of a newly discovered continent as they feel their way up to the brightly lit canopy."

Be sure students know that the definition of a *pioneer* is somebody who is the first (or among the first) to explore or settle a new place, country, or area. In *The Most Beautiful Roof in the World*, Dr. Meg Lowman is described as a pioneer, yet she is not the first to explore this rainforest. Be conscious that page 9 may be problematic, as it describes the canopy as an "undiscovered continent"; consider prompting students to ponder this and ask themselves: an "undiscovered continent" to whom? It might not be undiscovered to the Indigenous people who live in that area, such as the Korowai tribe in Papua New Guinea.

Teachers should also be aware that there is no reference in the text to the idea of what can be learned about this land from Indigenous people by Dr. Lowman and other scientists. Scientists systematically gather evidence, research and test theories, and share their knowledge and understanding. Scientists are often credited with discoveries based on their research. The text positions Dr. Lowman as a scientist, painting a picture of her being the first to see things as she is "discovering" animals and plants, yet Indigenous people may well have known about those things for a very long time. In rainforests, biological and cultural diversity often mirror one another. For example, hundreds of different languages are spoken in "biological hotspots" such as Papua New Guinea and the Amazon basin. It is not surprising, then, that the people who understand rainforests best are those whose cultures were shaped by them: the Indigenous peoples of the tropical rainforests.

Rainforest destruction is being driven by an economic worldview which originated externally in Western capitalist cultures. Unfortunately, ecosystem destruction has gathered pace over the last 200 years, with the advent of consumer culture and exponential population growth.

Consider providing information about Indigenous communities that live in and explore the forest canopy. Investigate the routines, practices, rituals, beliefs, norms, and experiences that are important to your students and their families. Consider weaving this background into the curriculum.

Tasks

Throughout the module, there are tasks that intentionally or incidentally serve to mitigate possible concerns and support students' enthusiastic, informed, and safe reading.

Unit 1

Lesson 1: This lesson begins students' study of the rainforest as they infer the topic for the module. As stated above, be sure students know that the definition of a *pioneer* is somebody who is the first (or among the first) to explore or settle a new place, country, or area. In *The Most Beautiful Roof in the World*, Dr. Meg Lowman is described as a pioneer, yet she is not the first to explore this rainforest. Explain to students that the Korowai tribe in Papua New Guinea was living in the rainforest canopy long before Dr. Lowman began researching this ecosystem. The Korowai are an example of local people who have been exploring, experimenting, building technology, and living in the canopy for many years. Consider providing additional context about Indigenous communities that live in and explore the forest canopy, for example, by showing photographs of the Korowai tribe.

Students spend time in this lesson reading for the gist of the text. The word *slavery* appears in *The Most Beautiful Roof in the World* in the context of Harriet Tubman leading African American people to freedom. For example, on page 4, the text gives background on Dr. Lowman and describes the two women she was intrigued and influenced by as a scientist—Rachel Carson and Harriet Tubman. This passage also contains the phrase *slave-hunting dogs*:

> "Threading through the countryside and deep woods on long, frightening nights, Harriet Tubman guided countless African Americans out of slavery to freedom . . . She had to know which berries and nuts could be eaten, which could make the difference between starvation and survival. She had to know how to find a swamp to plunge into when **slave-hunting dogs** bore down; the sulfurous mud and lime could disguise a human scent and confuse the dogs. She had to be attuned to the environment in order to guide her people on their perilous journey. Harriet Tubman, says Meg, was a pioneer field naturalist, one of the first field naturalists in this country." (page 4)

Explain to students that the terms *slavery* and *slave-hunting dogs* are reflective of the time period that Harriet Tubman lived in, as she worked to free enslaved peoples at great personal risk. This can be a very sensitive issue to discuss, and depending on the population of the class, this may require more time than is allocated. If that is the case, consider not reading the full text outlined, and instead extending the discussion. Be sensitive to students' and families' feelings and experiences, specifically those who have experienced issues of racism, as racism is still very much a part of the culture of our country. Monitor students and determine whether there are any issues surfacing that need to be discussed in more detail as a whole group, in smaller groups, independently, or with families. Use Conversation Cues to promote productive and equitable conversation and continuously remind students of what respect, empathy, and compassion look and sound like, using the Working to Become Ethical People anchor chart.

Lesson 11: In this lesson, students hear a new story, *Seeds of Change*, read aloud. This story introduces the idea of saving the rainforest. It focuses on girls' access to formal education in Kenya and how one girl used her education to work to save rainforest land.

Unit 2

Lesson 5: In this lesson, students engage in a close reading of *The Most Beautiful Roof in the World*. Students analyze the use of concrete and sensory language in an excerpt from the text (pages 41–42) and discuss what it helps the reader understand. Page 42 contains a reference to Harriet Tubman:

> "It is easy for her [Dr. Meg Lowman] to bridge the chasm of more than one hundred years and reach out toward the one who navigated the path to freedom by feeling for the moss on the north side of trees. Were Harriet Tubman's experiences so different from her own? Didn't they both have to trust their knowledge of the earth to find their way through a tangled darkness?" (page 42)

While Harriet Tubman was an influence on Dr. Lowman and they both used their knowledge of earth and the environment in their daily lives, Dr. Lowman's life cannot be compared to the life of Harriet Tubman.

Unit 3

Investigate the routines, practices, rituals, beliefs, norms, and experiences that are important to students and their families. Integrate this background into the classroom as students explore first-person narrative writing.

Including Families

Families of students working through this module are invited to discuss any concerns they have about the texts with their children and the teacher. Teaching notes throughout the module recommend that teachers speak to families of students who may be particularly affected by the topics encountered. Notes in the homework materials distributed to families recommend that they reach out to teachers with questions or concerns about the texts. These materials also encourage families to talk with their children about the texts they are reading, particularly if any of the topics raised might be sensitive to a particular student.