

BUILDING A RAINSTICK

This is a South American or African instrument which amazingly mimics the sound of a tropical downpour. It can be very effective for creating a tropical atmosphere at the beginning of a story. The following is an inexpensive version that can be made by your students.

Materials: (per Student)

2 or 3 paper towel tubes
100 or so round toothpicks
masking tape
paper or plastic wrap
multicolor rubber bands
popsicle sticks
push pin
3/4 to 1 cup lentils
markers, paints, crayons, yarn, ribbon, glitter, etc.

Background: Authentic rain sticks consist of a hollow wood tube with many wood cross-spokes inside. It is filled with beans, seeds, beads, or small stones. When tilted, the seeds cascade through the tube, bouncing off the cross-spokes creating a sound remarkably like rain- both realistic and musical. Genuine rain sticks may be purchased at import stores, but students can create their own by using the above materials.

Activity: Tape tubes together to make one long tube. Reinforce joints with a couple of craft sticks, taping securely. Decorate tube with markers, paint, etc. as desired. Cover one end of tube with plastic wrap or paper held in place by rubber bands or masking tape. Use a push-pin to poke holes in the tube. Start at one end, spacing holes 1/2 inch to 1 inch apart, spiraling up to the other end of the tube.

Blunt one end of toothpick by pressing points on table. Insert pointy end through pin hole and press into tube as far as it will go. Repeat this process for the entire length of the tube.

Remember, the more toothpicks, the more convincing the rain sound. Pour in the lentils and cover the open end of tube with plastic wrap or paper and secure with tape or rubber bands. Experiment with different tubes and fillings to change the sound.



A STORMY BEGINNING

Recordings of natural sounds can add a sensory dimension to studying the rainforest. A tropical thunderstorm is a particularly good ice-breaking activity or the end to a day of rainforest activities. There is a wide selection of environmental-type tape recordings on the market today that you may wish to purchase, but the following activity is a way that you and your students can create your own indoor thunderstorm.

Background: Contrary to popular belief, it doesn't rain constantly in the rain forest. Some tropical areas have distinct wet and dry seasons, while in others rainfall is more even year round.

Rainstorms often follow a daily pattern. After the cool hours of early dawn, the air starts to heat up rapidly. Thunderstorms grow during the heat of late afternoon.

When the storm breaks, very heavy rains drench the landscape. A few minutes later, the sun may be shining brightly.

Activity: Have students sit cross-legged in a circle or semi-circle. Have them imagine that the air is becoming quite humid and still. Start by quietly rubbing your palms together, making a soft rustling sound. Begin on one side of the group, make eye contact with the students one by one, and have them imitate the action. When everyone is rubbing his or her palms, begin snapping your fingers. Again, begin at one side of the group, cueing people into action one by one. Have the action sweep over the group in a wave. Follow finger snapping by patting your hands on your legs and finally by stamping your feet.

As the storm subsides go through the first three steps in reverse order, patting legs, snapping fingers, rubbing palms. Emphasize that it is now quite cool and that the storm you just created is part of a daily cycle in many forests (a fan could bring this point home).

*Adapted from "A Stormy Ending" Rainforest Curriculum Activity copyright 1991, Alexander Goldowsky, Education Department, New England Aquarium, Boston, MA.