

People in tropical rainforests

Tropical rainforests are home not only to many plants and animals, but also to people. Most of them are native tribes and live as hunters and gatherers in tropical rainforests. They live on the fruits, plants, and animals of the rainforest. The peoples living in the tropical rainforests of South America, Africa, and Asia are as different from each other as the rainforests. However, they have two things in common: They live in harmony with nature, and they are threatened by extinction. Let's take a closer look at two tribes:

The **Yanomami** live in the South American rainforest in Venezuela and Brazil. This tribe has around 30,000 members. The Yanomami live from hunting, gathering, and fishing. However, they also grow many different types of plants to eat, mostly cassava and bananas. To make space to grow the plants, they burn small areas of the forest, but only as much as they need. This way, they do not destroy the tropical rainforest. The Yanomami live in houses in the shape of a ring. And there is a communal center that provides space for 400 people. The Yanomami not only eat the many plants in the rainforest, but also make everyday objects from them, such as bows and arrows. That's because they also live off of hunting animals. The Yanomami know precisely how they can heal diseases with the plants. They are particularly good at making medicines from plants. The Yanomami are threatened by extinction. In the past, many of them died in conflicts with gold miners or from diseases that the gold miners brought with them. Although gold diggers have long since been banned from entering the Yanomami territory, there are new dangers. The biggest danger comes from logging of the rainforest. As a result, the Yanomami are losing their habitat.



Yanomami woman with her child.
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The **Penan** live in the rainforest of the Asian island Borneo. The island is in the Indian Ocean. The Penan tribe has around 10,000 members. In the past, the Penan lived as nomads. (Nomads are people who do not have a permanent home, but live under the open sky or in tents.) Today, the Penan live in long, narrow houses built on stilts ("longhouses").



Borneo island. The Penan live here.

The forest is very important to the Penan, because the forest has everything they need to live: They hunt, fish, and gather fruits. The most important plant to the Penan is the sago palm. This tree provides building material for houses or everyday objects, such as baskets. Or it is used for food. The Penan make "sago" from the pith of the plant. Sago is similar to our potato starch and can be processed into porridge and flat bread. However, the Penan are also hunters, fishermen, and gatherers. They hunt with blowpipes, which they use to shoot poison darts. They get the poison from the sap of plants. Their favorite animals to hunt are birds, monkeys, and wild boar. The Penan are also greatly threatened by extinction. Their land is being taken away to get at the wood and to build dams and plant oil palm plantations. If the vital forest is destroyed, the Penan can no longer hunt and gather. Then sago palms will also no longer exist.

Many other native tribes in tropical rainforests are experiencing the same thing as the Yanomami and the Penan, such as the Baka Pygmies in the tropical rainforests of Central Africa, the Batak in the Philippines, the Awá in Brazil, and the Nukak Maku in Colombia. They are all losing their homes, because larger and larger areas of tropical rainforests are being destroyed as a consequence of our modern lifestyle. Rainforest-friendly behavior therefore protects not only the plants and animals that are found in tropical rainforests, but also the people who live in them.

Worksheet

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Assignment:

Carefully read the text and create profiles of the two tribes from the information that you find in the text.

| Profile: The Yanomami | |
|--|--|
| The Yanomami are found in: | |
| The Yanomami live off of: | |
| | |
| The Yanomami dwell in: | |
| Number of members: | |
| Important foods: | |
| The Yanomami hunt with: | |
| The Yanomami can do the following really well: | |
| | |
| The Yanomami are threatened by: | |
| | |

| Profile: The Penan | |
|---|--|
| The Penan are found in: | |
| The Penan live off of: | |
| | |
| The Penan dwell in: | |
| Number of members: | |
| Important foods: | |
| The Penan hunt with: | |
| The Penan can do the following really well: | |
| | |
| The Penan are threatened by: | |
| | |