3 WEEKS IN THE RAINFOREST

ACTIVITY KIT

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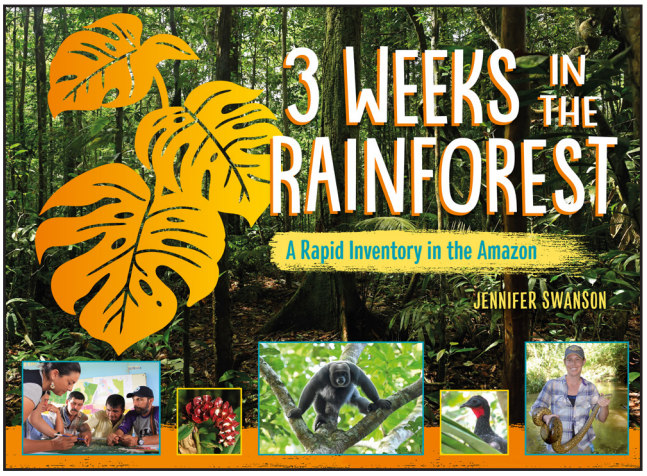

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by Jennifer Swanson
e-book available

About the Book

Follow an amazing women-led team of scientists as they race to gather data over three precious weeks in the Amazon rainforest! During Rapid Inventory 30, information is gathered in two ways. Biologists trek through mud and rain and count every animal and plant they see, recording everything that flies, swims, crawls, slithers, or walks. Meanwhile social scientists visit the villages, speaking with local people about their desires and goals for the land. The team brings both halves together to make a compelling, evidence-based case for conservation to local governments and international organizations.

About the Author

Jennifer Swanson is a former middle-school science teacher and the award-winning author of more than fifty-five nonfiction books for children, including *Super Gear: Nanotechnology and Sports Team Up*; *Brain Games*; *Footprints Across the Planet*, and *The Atlas Obscura: Explorer's Guide to Inventing the World*. An accomplished and dynamic speaker, Jennifer has presented at national NSTA conferences, the World Science Festival, and the Library of Congress's National Book Festival. She is also the creator and co-host of the award-winning Solve It! Science Podcast for Kids.

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Discussion Questions

Use these conversation starters to get kids thinking and learning.

Before Reading

1. After looking at the cover of the book and reading the title and subtitle, ask kids what they think *3 Weeks in the Rainforest* is about. Write their responses on chart paper.
2. Invite kids to discuss the following questions in small groups and record their responses to share with the class:
    - What is a scientific expedition? How is it different from other kinds of travel?
    - How many species of plants and animals live in the Amazon rainforest? Why does this region have so much biodiversity?
    - How do scientists know when a new species has been discovered?
3. This cover is illustrated with photographs. Would kids' expectations be different if this book had an artist's illustrations instead?

During and After Reading

1. Revisit the predictions kids made before reading. What predictions (if any) were correct? Did *3 Weeks in the Rainforest* surprise them?
2. What are some of the biggest threats facing the Amazon rainforest? Why is protecting the rainforest important? How does the rainforest help fight climate change?
3. Take a look at "Meet the RI30 Team!" on pages 14–15. How many people are on the team? Where are they from? Why is it important that the team includes local experts as well as scientists from the Field Museum? The team is made up of smaller teams specializing in different areas of science. Which team would you want to join?
4. On a globe or map of the world, locate the Colombia and the Bajo Caguán-Caquetá Region. What do you notice about this area? Read "A Long Trek to Colombia" on page 19. How long in total did it take the scientists from the Field Museum to reach the area? What are some of the challenges of travel in the Amazon?
5. What are some of the challenges that the expedition members faced in the field?
6. Discuss the questions that the social sciences team asked local communities. How would you answer these questions about your own area? What do you think a social scientist would learn about your area by talking to you and your community?

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Extension Activities

Get the wheels turning with these fun and learning-forward extension activities!

Bedroom Rapid Inventory

Just like the scientists on the Amazon Rapid Inventory team, do a rapid inventory of your bedroom! Set a timer for 15 minutes. In that interval, use the chart on page 5 of this kit to document the toys, clothes, books, and furnishings in your room.

Discussion Questions:

- Did you get all the items in the room?
- About how much do you think is left to document?
- How long do you think it would take to inventory every single item in your room?
- The researchers in *3 Weeks in the Rainforest* had more time to do their rapid inventory, but they were documenting a much bigger area than one bedroom. Did they get every single plant and animal in their inventory? What methods did they use to make good estimates and cover as much ground as they could?

Optional decluttering variation: Do a 15-minute rapid inventory focused only on listing toys. Once the inventory is over, sit down with your grown-up and identify which toys are "keystone species" that must stay and which toys can be passed on to friends and relatives or donated.

Backyard Rapid Inventory

In a backyard, park, or other available nature space, set a timer for 15 minutes. In that interval, use the chart on page 6 of this kit to document as many species of plant, insect, and animal as you can.

Discussion Questions:

- How many species did you document? Did you get all of them? About how many do you think are left?
- Look up the species you couldn't identify in the moment. Are these species native to the area or not? About how many of the documented species in total are native species?
- How do your species counts stack up against the numbers reported by Rapid Inventory 30 on page 72 of the book?

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In My Museum

The rapid inventory expedition in *3 Weeks in the Rainforest* is staffed by scientists from the Field Museum in Chicago. What do scientists at the local science museum do? Choose a local museum and visit their website. You might be surprised by the programs they offer and the research they conduct. Call or write an email to the museum to learn more if you find a particularly interesting program.

Bird Feeder Camera Trap

Camera traps are one of the ways that scientists in the Amazon document animals on a rapid inventory trip. These traps are great at catching nocturnal creatures and animals that avoid human activity. You can set up a camera trap of your own to see which birds like to visit your yard or window bird feeder!

Set up a bird feeder with a motion-activated camera. Remember to clean the feeder regularly and replace the feed inside. For one week, check the camera feed at the end of the day and document how many birds of each species came to the feeder.

Pressing Plants

See page 32 of *3 Weeks in the Amazon* for an easy step-by-step guide for pressing plants just like scientists in the field! This method is great for preserving large numbers of samples that you need to take from the rainforest all the way back to Chicago. But for a backyard operation, try something like this:

1. Use garden clippers to remove a leaf or flower from a plant in your yard or ask an adult to help you safely take the sample. This is your specimen.
2. Open a large book such as an encyclopedia and lay a sheet of plain paper on the page. Lay the specimen flat on the paper. Make sure that the surface you want to see when it's pressed is facing up.
3. Lay another sheet of plain paper on top of the specimen. Gently close the book. If necessary, stack another book or two on top to increase the weight.
4. Leave the specimen undisturbed for four to six weeks.

See page 7 of this guide for step-by-step instructions to make your own flower press for dedicated young botanists!

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Community Dreaming Session

The Rapid Inventory 30 team listened to local communities before bringing their recommendations to local governments and international agencies. They ended each workshop with a dreaming session to understand local people's hopes and goals. Your community can do a dreaming session, too!

1. **Choose your group.** Identify a group you belong to that lives in the same area. This could be your classmates, your family, your faith community, or another group.

2. **Logistics.** Pick a date and time when your group can meet for two hours. Find an appropriate venue. Prepare for the session by offering refreshments, name tags, and writing supplies. Bring along a large sheet of poster paper. You can also bring copies of the "My Dreaming Session" worksheet on page 9 of this kit.

3. **Warm-up questions.** Like the Rapid Inventory 30 team, begin by talking about what your area is like. What is your biome? Is there a body of water nearby or another major natural feature like a mountain? What is the weather like throughout the year? What kinds of plants and animals call this place home? Do you or your community members farm, hunt, fish, or forage for food? Is there an important natural feature where people gather, like a park or a beach? Some of these questions may be different if you live in a city, a suburb, a small town, or a rural area.

4. **What is your dream?** Once you've got a good understanding of what the group members' relationships to your local area are like, ask the big question: If you could have anything done with your town and this area, what would you want? Invite people to talk about their ideas aloud and jot them down on poster paper. Some people may have very different ideas, and that's okay! The point of the dreaming session is to understand how many ideas there are. You can also distribute copies of the "My Dreaming Session" worksheet for people to brainstorm their ideas before sharing.

5. **Optional: Start a petition.** Someone in your group might have an idea that sparks a petition! Consider inviting your group to help you sign and circulate a petition that will bring these ideas to your local elected officials.

Bedroom Rapid Inventory

Name: _____

Date: _____

Use the chart below to tally as many items as you can in your bedroom in 15 minutes!

Beds	
Chairs	
Clothes	
Books	
Toys & Games	
Shoes	
Other	

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Backyard Rapid Inventory

Name: _____

Date: _____

Identify and tally as many species as you can in your backyard or nature space in 15 minutes!

Plants

Birds

Mammals

Reptiles & Amphibians

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Make Your Own Flower Press

While the method on page 32 of *3 Weeks in the Rainforest* is great for a big team to quickly preserve lots of specimens, it's a lot for one scientist gathering wildflowers. Make this quick and easy flower press to take along on all your outdoor adventures!

Materials

- Cardboard
- Scissors
- Rubber bands
- Tissue paper or blotting paper
- Markers

Procedure

1. Cut two identical pieces of cardboard, approximately 5"x11". Take care not to cut a piece that includes a crease, tear, or other structural flaw.
2. Decorate one or both of the cardboard pieces with marker. You might write "Andrea's Flower Press," "Flowers of Central Park," or simply draw a flower on the front.
3. Cut several sheets of tissue or blotting paper so that they fit neatly between the cardboard pieces with no edges sticking out. Layer this cardboard and blotting paper sandwich and secure it with a rubber band on each end.
4. Bring the flower press along on your nature walks or when you play in your backyard. When you see a flower you'd like to sample, if you have permission, use garden clippers to remove it or ask an adult to help you safely take the sample. This is your specimen.
5. Place the specimen in your press, sandwiched between two layers of blotting paper, and close the press by wrapping it with rubber bands again.
6. To add a new specimen, stack it atop the other specimens, tucking each specimen between two sheets of blotting paper. This will keep specimens from sticking to each other.
7. Between nature walks, keep the press in a dry, undisturbed place. You can speed the process by stacking a heavy book on top of the press. Your specimens will be ready in approximately four to six weeks.

My Dreaming Session

When the social scientists on Rapid Inventory 30 talked with local communities in the rainforest, they ended their workshops with a dreaming exercise focused on what the community wants to happen in their town and region. What is your dream for your area?

I live in . . .

This is what makes my area special . . .

This is what I do in nature here . . .

This is my dream for my area . . .

Native Land

Name: _____

Date: _____

The researchers of Rapid Inventory 30 listened to Native communities in the Bajo Caguán-Caquetá region of the Amazon to learn more about the forest and their goals for the area. Research whose Native land you live on and list all of those Native Nations on the line. Select one of those tribes and complete the sections below.

I live on _____ land.

What I know about this tribe's history:	What I learned from this tribe's website & sources:

On the back of this page, write a paragraph about an environmental project being undertaken by this Native Nation.

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Further Reading

Make connections and enrich the learning experience with these additional resources!

About The Rainforest

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Cusolito, Michelle. *A Window into the Ocean Twilight Zone: Twenty-Four Days of Science at Sea*. Charlesbridge, 2024.

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About Climate Change and Conservation

Heffernan, Nanette, and Bao Luu. *Earth Hour: A Lights Out Event for Our Planet*. Charlesbridge, 2020.

Herman, Gail, and John Hinderliter. *What Is Climate Change?* Penguin Workshop, 2018.

King, Heidi Tyline, and Ekua Holmes. *Saving American Beach: The Biography of African American Environmentalist MaVynee Betsch*. Putnam, 2021.

Messner, Kate, and Matthew Forsythe. *The Brilliant Deep: Rebuilding the World's Reefs*. Chronicle, 2018.

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Reynolds, Emma. *Drawn to Change the World Graphic Novel Collection: 16 Youth Climate Activists, 16 Artists*. HarperAlley, 2023.

Spiro, Ruth, and Teresa Martínez. *How to Explain Climate Science to a Grown-Up*. Charlesbridge, 2025.