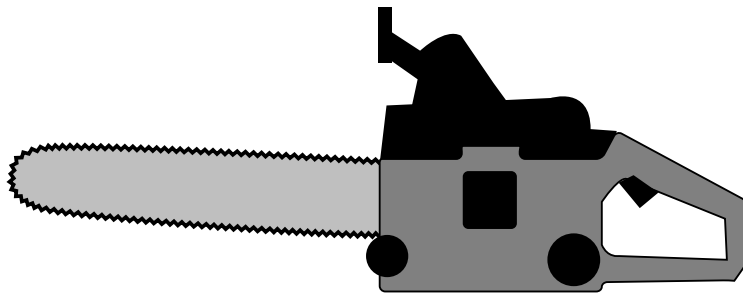


Soil, Forest, and Land Exploitation



Objectives

- ▶ understand the reasons why tropical deforestation is occurring
- ▶ understand the controversies surrounding preservation of the rainforest
- ▶ develop critical thinking skills

Vocabulary

deforestation

Background

Forests in the tropics are being cleared for many of the same reasons that the eastern United States was deforested early in its development: to accommodate a growing population and for short-term profit.

Tropical forests are, for the most part, located in developing countries, and the \$1 trillion foreign debt borne by these developing countries has fueled deforestation. To relieve some of the debt, large tracts of tropical forest have been logged to produce timber for export. Forestland has also been converted to plantations for growing export crops such as coffee, cacao, or rice.

Many poor countries also have burgeoning populations that seek out land for farms and wood for fuel. In many places, people with no land follow the logging roads into the forests to find farmland. But these new farms carved out of the rainforest rarely remain productive. The topsoil becomes depleted after a few years of cultivation and farmers must often then abandon them and clear new forest for crops.

Activity

1. Discuss with students the reasons why rainforests are disappearing and why the deforestation is a cause for concern. Refer to the information in Background and the Overview. Make sure that the students understand that the Australian rainforest has suffered the same fate as most other rainforests and that agriculture, ranching, mining, and logging have destroyed and disrupted habitat.
2. Remind students of the importance of the rainforest by having them recall the names of foods and medicines derived from the rainforest plants. As students respond, create a concept web on chart paper.
3. Divide the students into two groups. Choose a volunteer to moderate the debate. Explain that one group will present arguments in support of cutting the rainforests in order to put people to work, improve the standard of living, and generate money for the economy. The other group will present arguments in favor of preserving the rainforest.
4. Conclude the debate by having students brainstorm ways it may be possible to provide food and jobs for people and to preserve the rainforest, such as by creating extracted reserves. The reserves are protected forests that allow traditional harvesting of rubber, nuts, and other forest products.

Extend the Activity

Have students examine the exploitation of a resource in their area. Have them explain why the resource is being exploited and the long-range effects of the exploitation on the environment and the local inhabitants.