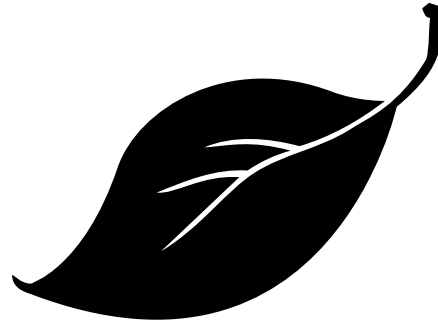


# Plant Life of the Rainforest



## Objectives

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- ▶ describe the characteristics of a rainforest
- ▶ create a scale drawing of the rainforest strata

## Vocabulary

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canopy  
emergent

epiphytes  
strata

understory

## Background

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The trees of the tropical rainforest grow in fairly consistent layers, or strata. The highest level of the tropical rainforest is the height reached by the tallest trees, the emergents, which usually top 150 feet and occasionally reach 200. Only one or two of them can be found per acre. Below the emergents is the forest canopy, a mesh of leaves, branches, and tangling vines. The canopy, which catches most of the sunlight, tends to be composed of trees that are 60 to 90 feet tall. Sunlight that filters down below the canopy falls mostly on the forest understory, a layer of tree crowns between 15 and 45 feet tall. Seedlings, herbs, and ferns grow on the forest floor. The lateral branches of trees are colonized by populations of ferns, mosses, orchids, and bromeliads, called epiphytes. These plants depend on other plants for their structural support.

## Materials

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graph paper

pencils

rulers

## Activity

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1. Display pictures of tropical rainforests. Have students describe the landscape. As they respond, create a word map on chart paper.
2. Tell students that if they looked at the forest from within, they would not notice the stratified character of the woods, because one layer tends to obscure the next. Help students understand the stratified character of the rainforest.
3. Explain that SFS students are obtaining a detailed picture of the vegetation types at the site. They note tree sizes and species diversity and map these characteristics on a topographic chart.
4. Have students work with partners to make a scale drawing of the rainforest strata. Help them decide what scale to use. (Have students compare the dimensions of the tallest tree to those of the paper to get a rough idea of an appropriate scale.) Have them write the scale they use on their drawings.

## Extend the Activity

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Explain that the canopy is home to many of the plants and animals that live in the rainforest. Because the highest branches of the canopy can be more than 100 feet above the ground, scientists find it difficult to conduct research in the canopy. Have students devise safe ways to reach and explore the treetops.