



HARVEST IN THE RAINFOREST ASSEMBLY

Theme: Food, land rights, community, environment.

Country focus: Brazil.

Aim: to celebrate Harvest and reflect on the importance of caring for the natural world.

Materials:

- Brazil nut (in its shell) – check that no-one in school has a nut allergy first
- nutcracker
- assembly slideshow
- classroom activities to support this assembly can be downloaded from christianaid.org.uk/learn

Other resources available:

- *Harvest in the rainforest* assembly slideshow
- *Harvest in the rainforest* classroom activities.

ASSEMBLY PRESENTATION

Show slide 1 and welcome students to the assembly, then show **slide 2** and ask students if they can identify which of these magnificent structures is around 50 metres tall and 1,000 years old.

The answer is the tree on the bottom right of the slide. The other structures are:

- the statue of Christ The Redeemer, which is only 30 metres tall and less than 100 years old (built in 1931)
- the Gherkin skyscraper, which is 180 metres tall but less than 10 years old (built in 2004)
- the Great Pyramid at Giza, which is much taller at 138 metres and much, much older (built 4,500 years ago in around 2550 BC).

Can students identify which of these structures is from Brazil? The answer is both the statue of Christ the Redeemer, which stands on a mountain high above the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro, and the tree, which is a Brazil nut tree that is found in the Amazon rainforest.

Show slide 3

The Amazon rainforest is vast, covering nearly two thirds of Brazil, and it is an extremely important environment, home to a huge range of diverse wildlife and plants. Deep in the rainforest, those plants and animals exist in a delicate balance, and nowhere is this better demonstrated than in the case of the Brazil nut tree.

If you are able to get hold of a Brazil nut in its shell, then ask a student to come up to the front and challenge them to crack the nut (without hurting themselves!). They won't be able to do it, so you could provide a nutcracker to help them.

If you think Brazil nuts are hard to open, you might be surprised to learn that they actually grow in a pod that is even harder to crack.

Show slide 4 and see if students can correctly identify which photo shows a Brazil nut pod. The answer is bottom right. The others are peanuts (top right) and cashew nuts (left).

Show slide 5

In order for new Brazil trees to grow, the seed pods must be cracked open and the nuts planted in the ground. Can anyone guess how this happens, deep in the Amazon rainforest?

Show slide 6

The answer lies with a little animal called an agouti. The agouti has very sharp teeth and is one of the only animals – apart from humans – who is able to crack the hard shell to get at the delicious Brazil nut inside.

Show slide 7

Agoutis love Brazil nuts! They love them so much that they like to store some away in the soil for eating later. But, being rather forgetful, they sometimes forget where they've buried these nuts, and those forgotten nuts can grow into Brazil nut trees.

Show slide 8

Without agoutis to plant their seeds, Brazil nut trees cannot produce more trees in the wild. And Brazil nut trees can only grow in the wild – they cannot be farmed – because in order to produce the seed pods in the first place, they depend on pollination by a special bee called an orchid bee. Orchid bees are only found where a special flower called an orchid grows, and orchids grow best in the rainforest. So the trees need the bees, which need the orchids, which in turn need the rainforest environment to thrive.

Show slide 9

The special relationship between these four quite different living things – the tree, the agouti, the orchid and the orchid bee – is an amazing example of the circle of life, and an important reminder of the delicate balance of nature.

Show slide 10

It is important to remember that we all exist in this delicate balance, even if our own lives seem quite far from the natural world at times. The Amazon rainforest is an important habitat, not just for the

ASSEMBLY PRESENTATION

trees that grow and the animals that live there, but for the entire world. Sometimes described as 'the lungs of the planet', the rainforest is home to many billions of trees, which absorb carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and produce oxygen, thus helping to slow down the rate of climate change.

Show slide 11

This important environment is under threat from big companies who are eager to make money from the precious resources that exist in the forest by harvesting valuable wood from the trees, minerals from the ground and fish from the rivers. Cutting down the forest has a devastating impact on the species that grow there, many of which can only exist in the rainforest, but it also has a serious environmental impact on a global level. The worldwide destruction of forests is responsible for up to a fifth of the world's greenhouse gas emissions – that's more than every plane, car, truck, ship and train on the planet combined.

Show slide 12

Fortunately, some rainforest inhabitants are fighting back to protect this precious environment. The quilombola people have lived in the rainforest for hundreds of years. Their ancestors were slaves who escaped and fled to the rainforest to hide, where they were shown the ways of the forest by the indigenous people already living there. Like other rainforest inhabitants, quilombolas have learnt to live in harmony with the forest: using it as their home and their source of food, whilst protecting it.

Show slide 13

Dielem Viana Printes is eight years old and she has lived in the forest all her life. Because she is a long way from any shops, Dielem and the rest of her quilombola community harvest nearly all their food from the forest. Agoutis are not the only ones who like Brazil nuts: Dielem loves them too! They are a really important part of her diet, as they are rich in essential fat and protein. Dielem is proud that, like an agouti, she can crack the hard shell with her teeth!

Show slide 14

In many ways, Dielem is much like any of you. She spends most days at school and when she gets home she can't wait to change out of her uniform so that she can go and play with her brothers. She loves

swimming and drawing, and her favourite colours are red and pink.

Show slide 15

But there are a few differences between her life and yours. The bus that Dielem uses to get to school is a boat bus, which carries her by river through the rainforest to the local school.

Show slide 16

When she goes swimming with her brothers after school, she has to keep an eye out for crocodiles in the river. And once a year, she and the rest of her village head deep into the rainforest to harvest precious Brazil nuts.

Show slide 17

Dielem and her community understand and respect the delicate balance of the forest. The Brazil nut trees hold such an important place in quilombola culture that many of the trees have names, just like people. Dielem's father, Domingos, says: 'The land holds great significance for us... we call the land "mother". We have an old song and the music says: "the land is our mother and we have to take care of her".'

Show slide 18

Dielem and her community are doing a very important job. By living in the forest and caring for it, they are helping to protect this amazing environment from big companies who would like to cut down the trees to use the wood and dig up the ground to collect valuable minerals. These rainforest communities are being supported by Christian Aid's partner CPI: an organisation that helps them stand up for their collective ownership rights to their forest lands and stand up to the big companies.

CPI is also helping them find funding to make a small community factory, where they will be able to use machines to crack open the hard shells of the Brazil nuts. This means that they will be able to sell more nuts and make more money from their harvest, so they can afford to buy essential items like medicines, clothes and the types of foods they can't grow or gather in the forest.

Hold up the Brazil nut and show **slide 19**. It's amazing to think that this very nut grew in the rainforest: that the tree where this nut grew was probably planted by an agouti and pollinated by an orchid bee; that people like Dielem and her family might have walked deep into the forest to collect this nut.

REFLECTION

Holding this Brazil nut in my hand reminds me of the delicate balance of nature that we all hold in our hands. The quilombolas are an inspiration. Let's remember their saying: 'The land is our mother' and let's all try to make sure that we try to respect our environment as much as they do.

FURTHER ACTION

- You can download the *Harvest in the rainforest* secondary classroom activities from christianaid.org.uk/learn
- Your school can help raise funds to support the work of Christian Aid's partners: for more details see christianaid.org.uk/harvest