

NUTS ABOUT NATURE ASSEMBLY PRESENTATION



Theme: food, Brazil nuts, land rights, community, environment.

Country focus: Brazil.

Aim: to celebrate Harvest.

Materials:

- optional – eggs, milk, flour, Brazil nuts (check that no-one in school has a nut allergy first)
- teaching materials to support this assembly can be downloaded from christianaid.org.uk/learn

Other resources available:

- *Nuts about nature* assembly slideshow
- *Nuts about nature* classroom activities.

ASSEMBLY PRESENTATION

Show slide 1

At Harvest, we like to take some time to think about our food and where it comes from.

Hold up the eggs, milk and flour or show photos of these items (**slides 2-4**). Ask pupils: *can you tell me where these foods come from?*

Hold up a Brazil nut or show a photo (**slide 5**). *Does anyone know what this is and where it comes from?*

It doesn't look like much, does it? But this nut has an amazing story. It is called a Brazil nut and – you guessed it – it comes from a country called Brazil in South America.

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A large part of Brazil is covered by the beautiful Amazon rainforest. Brazil nut trees only grow wild in the rainforest: they cannot be farmed. That's because the trees depend on some very special rainforest friends.

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In order to produce seeds, the trees need to attract a special kind of bee, called the orchid bee, which buzzes from tree to tree and pollinates (fertilises) the tree so that it will produce seeds (these are the Brazil nuts).

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But for those nuts to grow into new trees, they need to be planted, and for this job the Brazil nut tree relies on a cheeky little animal called an agouti. The agouti has very sharp teeth and is one of the only animals – apart from humans – that is able to crack the hard shell to get at the delicious Brazil nut inside.

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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, sometimes they can't remember where they've buried these nuts, and those forgotten nuts can grow into Brazil

nut trees. And wow, how they grow! Brazil nut trees can grow up to 50 metres tall and they can live for up to 1,000 years.

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The story of the Brazil nut tree is a very good example of the circle of life. Without orchid bees and agoutis, Brazil nut trees cannot grow. And without the varied plant life of the rainforest, the bees and agoutis cannot survive. So life in the Amazon rainforest exists in a delicate balance, with each of its many thousands of inhabitants adapted to live side by side.

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Among the many inhabitants of the rainforest – which include toucans, monkeys, jaguars and millions of different insects – are some very special humans: the quilombolas. Like their rainforest neighbours, the quilombolas have learnt to live in harmony with the forest, using it as their home and their source of food, while also protecting it.

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Dielem Viana Printes is eight years old and she has lived in the forest all her life. Because they are 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 fats and proteins. Dielem is proud that, like an agouti, she can crack the hard shell with her teeth!

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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.

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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.

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When Dielem 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.

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Bebé Albenize, a grown-up who lives near Dielem, describes this important time:

'To get to the best area [for the harvest], we paddle for three-and-a-half hours in small boats, then walk for another day into the forest, and there we make houses from wood and palm leaves... The children love living out in the forest so much: even the smallest ones help collect the nuts.'

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Dielem and her community understand and respect 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".'

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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 is helping them to understand their rights, stand up to the big companies and work together to prevent the precious forest from being cut down.

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Protecting the forest is important for all of us, as the Amazon rainforest is an important environment for the whole planet; not only does it contain many different types of rare animals and trees, but those trees help to produce oxygen that we all need to breathe, and they also soak up polluting gases. So, just like the agouti, the bee and the Brazil nut tree, we also rely on the rainforest.

As the quilombolas understand so well, the rainforest deserves respect and protection.

One of the leaders of Dielem's village explains: 'We are not greedy, we only cultivate a small patch to meet our needs. We understand the forest.' In areas where quilombolas live, much less of the forest is cut down by big companies than in areas where they don't live, as they are there to protect it.

As well as helping the community to stand up to the big companies, Christian Aid's partner CPI is also helping them to 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.

[Hold up the Brazil nut.] 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.

Holding this 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 make sure that we try to respect our environment as much as they do.

PRAYER

Dear God.

We listen with wonder to the amazing story of the Amazon rainforest. We give thanks for the wonderful diversity of life on this Earth. We pray that the quilombolas will be able to stay on their land and continue to protect and care for the forest. And, this Harvest time, we promise to do what we can to care for our planet.

Amen.

FURTHER ACTION

- You can download the *Nuts about nature* primary classroom activities from christianaid.org.uk/learn
- Your school can help to raise funds to support the work of Christian Aid's partners. For more details, see christianaid.org.uk/harvest



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