

Layers of the Rain Forest

Did you know that rain forests are home to over half of the world's plants and animals?

The trees of the tropical rain forest provide shelter for many animals, such as birds, monkeys, cats, butterflies, insects, snakes, and frogs. Because most trees in the rain forest are very tall, they are equipped to hold many different animals. Some animals live at the bottom of the trees, where it is dark and damp. Others live towards the top of the trees where it is light.

Picture a tree in the rain forest and divide it into four layers: the bottom layer is the **forest floor**; the second layer is the **understory**; the third layer is the **canopy**; and the fourth is called the **emergent layer**.

The **emergent layer** is where the treetops join together to form the roof of the forest. This is where trees soak up the most sun. The harpy eagle lives and hunts here. Other animals, such as the toucan, sloth, macaw, and parrot can be found here as well.

The **canopy** is a bright and colorful place, full of animals and plants. That's right, there are plants that grow on trees! These plants are called **epiphytes**. Epiphytes grow along the branches of a tree. They dangle their roots and collect moisture from the damp air; they also get nutrients from decayed leaves, algae, and moss.

The canopy is also home to many wonderful creatures such as howler monkeys, spider monkeys, orangutans, sloths, and fruit bats. These animals love to eat the sweet fruit that grows in the canopy. Other animals that live in the canopy are tree frogs, parrots, hummingbirds, butterflies, toucans, and bees.

The **understory** is darker than the canopy as it is farther away from the sun. Boa constrictors, emerald tree snakes, anole lizards and monkeys cling to **lianas**. Lianas (thick, woody vines) grow up trees and act as ladders for animals to climb up from the forest floor to the understory. Many cats, such as the jaguar, leopard and ocelot, hide in the branches of the understory waiting to pounce on their prey below.

The **forest floor** is the darkest and dampest part of the forest. Not much sunlight penetrates through here, so little plant life grows. The soil is covered by **leaf litter** (decayed leaves), which provides nutrients for tree roots. Leaf cutter ants, spiders, termites, mice, anteaters, jaguars, leopards, panthers, and gorillas live here.

Now we know how just one tree in the rain forest can provide many different habitats for various animals and plants to live.

Name _____

Date _____

Layers of the Rain Forest Vocabulary

Draw a line from the definition that best describes the word to the right.

Woody vines that grow up a tree and act as ladders for some animals to climb.

CANOPY

This is the bottom and darkest layer of the rain forest, home to insects and fungi, rotting leaves, tree trunks, and roots.

LEAF LITTER

Underneath these decaying leaves is thin soil with few nutrients. Tree roots grow shallow to the ground so that they can suck the nutrients from this top layer of the forest floor.

FOREST FLOOR

Plants that grow along branches of a tree and let their roots dangle in the air. These plants get nutrients from moss, algae, and decayed leaves.

EPIPHYTES

The particular environment in which a plant or animal usually lives.

EMERGENT LAYER

This is the top layer, or "roof," of the rain forest. It is home to the harpy eagle.

HABITAT

This is the second highest layer of the rain forest, home to monkeys, sloths, birds, butterflies, insects, and lizards.

UNDERSTORY

This is the layer beneath the canopy and above the forest floor. It is shaded from the sun by the leaves above. Snakes, monkeys, and cats can be found here.

LIANAS

Name _____

Date _____

Layers of the Rain Forest Venn Diagram

Draw three circles that intersect at the center. Label one **Forest Floor**, the second **Understory**, and the third **Canopy**. Write in the animals where they belong on the Venn diagram. Remember, some animals live in more than one layer of the rain forest.

boa constrictor

parrot

leaf cutter ants

lianas

fungi

orangutan

anteater

passion flower butterfly

leaf litter

fruit bat

toucan

leopard

emerald tree snake

anole lizard

epiphytes

tree frog

sloth

spider monkey

jaguar

ocelot