

The Rainforest

Learning Objective:

To explore why the rainforest is under threat and the measures taken to protect it.



More than half the world's plant and animal species live in rainforests but rainforests are under threat. Around 14% of the Earth's surface were covered in rainforest, but now that figure is more like 6%. Over half the world's rainforests have been lost.

Can you think of any reasons why this has happened?



Think, pair, share your ideas.

The trees of the rainforest are being cut down for a number of reasons. This is called **DEFORESTATION**. Huge areas of rainforest have been cut down for timber which is then sold around the world. This wood is used for many things, such as building work or making furniture.



Lots of the trees in the rainforest are also used to make paper. The wood is turned into pulp which then makes paper, card and cardboard.



This photo shows a large pile of sawdust waiting to be turned into pulp at a paper factory.

Farmers in the rainforest use a technique called 'slash and burn' to clear areas of forest for farmland. This involves chopping down trees and burning what is left so that the soil can be used to grow crops.

The trouble with this is that the soil in rainforests is very poor. This means that the soil will only be able to grow crops for a few years before the farmer will have to move on and clear a new patch of land.





This is the same as clearing areas of forest for cattle grazing. After a few years, the soil becomes too poor to be useful and the farmers have to move the cattle on to new areas.

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Another reason for deforestation is mining. Mining companies clear areas of land in rainforests in order to dig precious metals like gold or silver from the ground.

This also means that they have to clear areas to make roads to get machinery to the right places.





All these, and many other factors, are contributing to the deforestation of the rainforests.

What effects do you think this is having on the world?

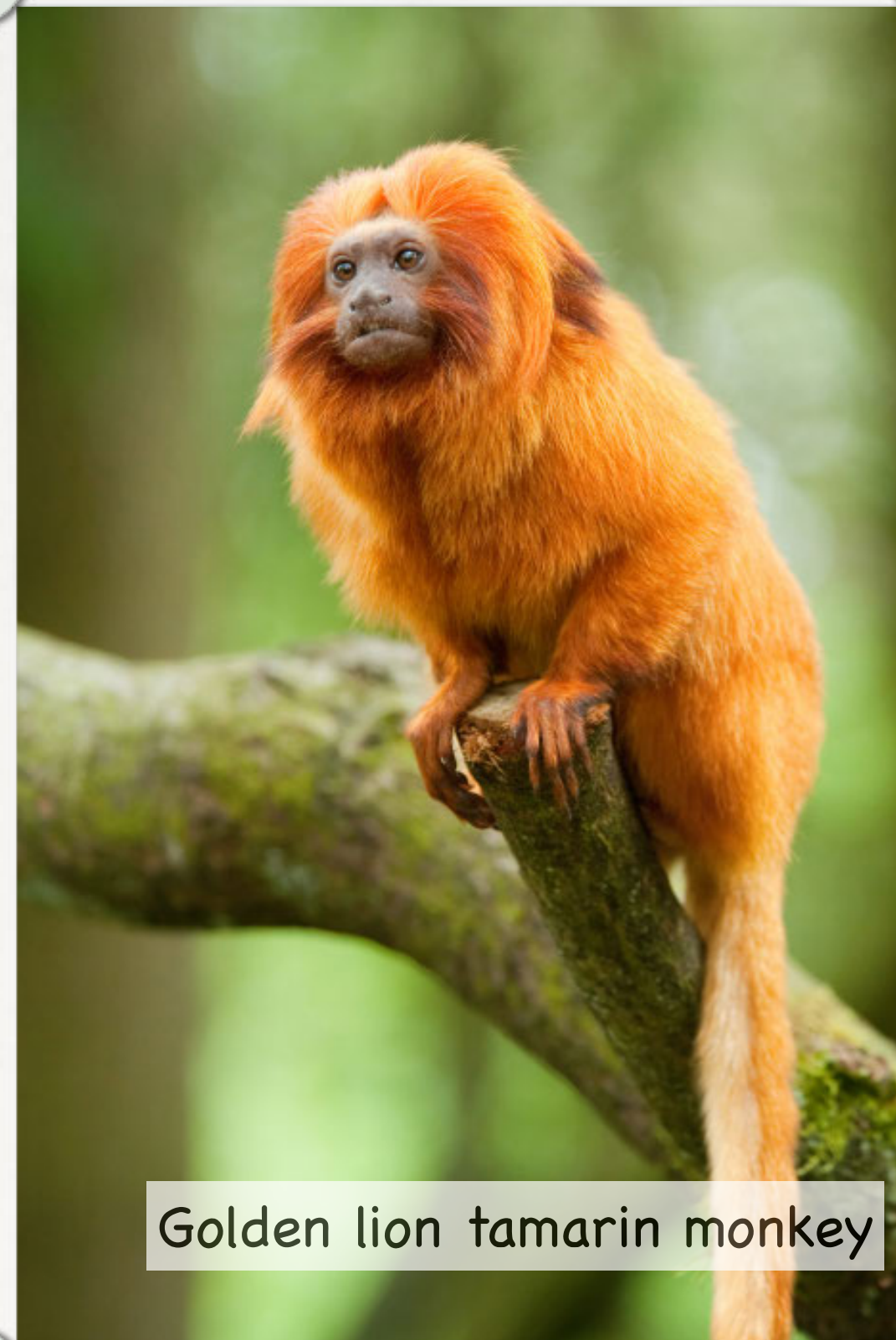
Think, pair, share your ideas.



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Many animals and plant species have become endangered due to the loss of their rainforest habitats. When large areas of trees are cut down, animals are made homeless. This in turn has an effect on plant life too.



Golden lion tamarin monkey

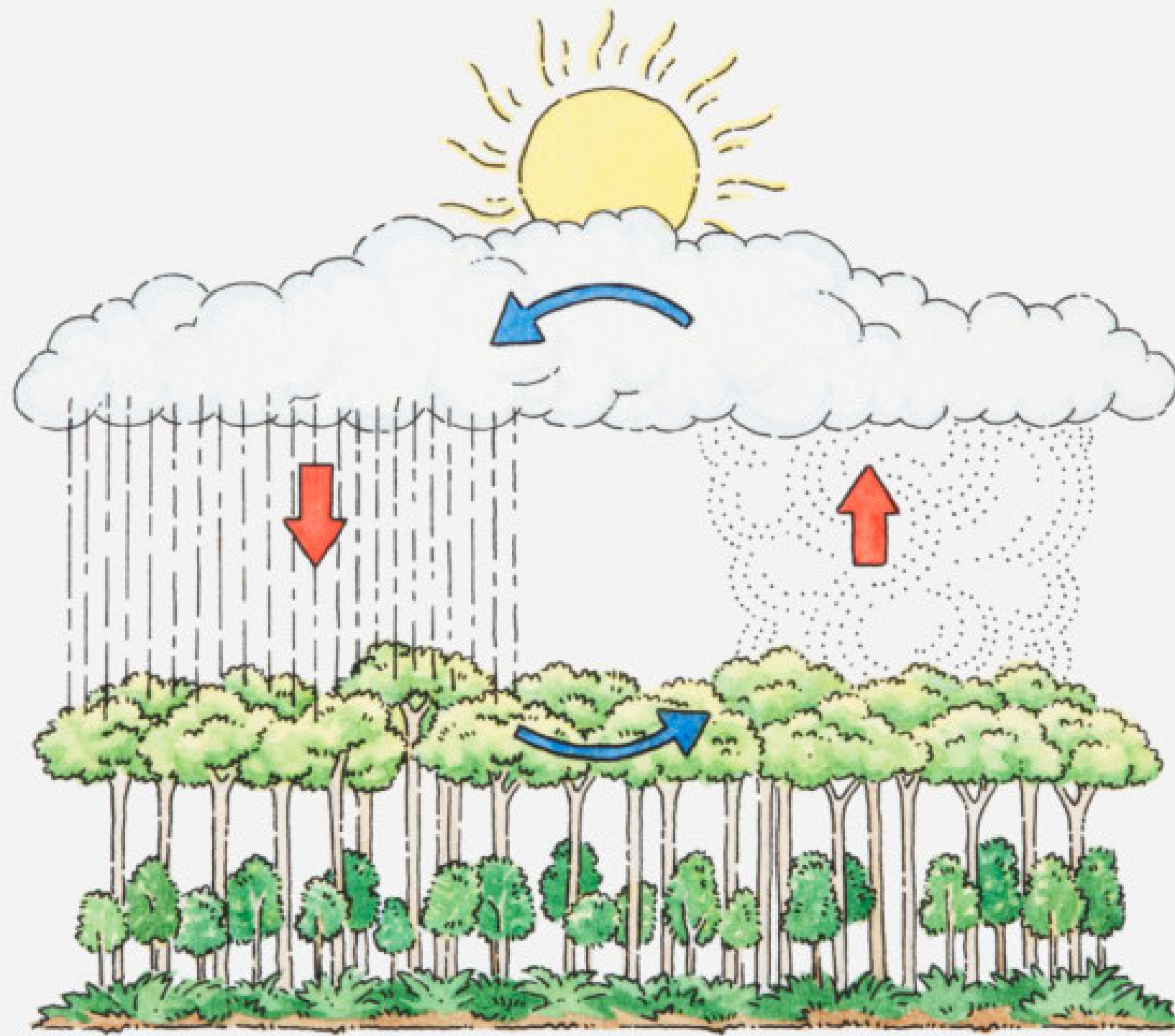
The golden lion tamarin monkey and harpy eagle are just two out of thousands of species that are endangered due to rainforest deforestation.



Harpy eagle

Photograph taken by Dirk van der Made

Deforestation also has a major impact on the environment, especially the water and carbon cycles. The rainforest helps to keep rain levels high due to the unique part it plays in the water cycle. If the rainforests disappear, less rain will fall which will then make soil and air temperatures rise.



The tops of the trees in the rainforest canopy are uneven which creates turbulence. This increases the amount of water that evaporates from rain that has already fallen which produces more clouds that give off rain. Without the trees causing turbulence, less rain will fall.

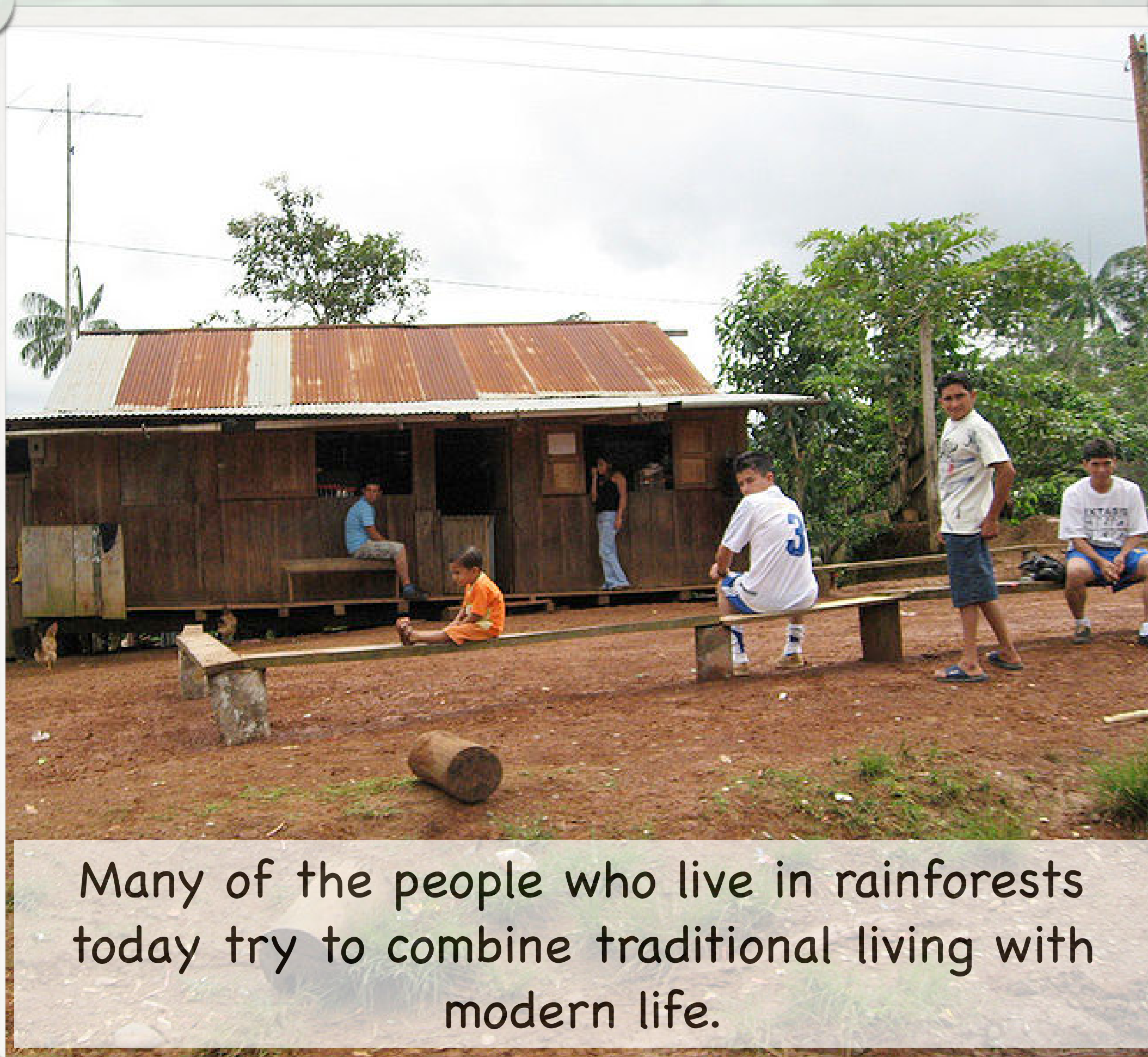
The trees in the rainforest are also very important for the carbon cycle. Plants absorb a gas called carbon dioxide (CO_2). Carbon dioxide emissions are produced by cars, trucks, planes and many other things. If all the trees in the rainforest are cut down, carbon dioxide levels would rise, making the earth and air around it hotter.

This means ice at the North and South poles will melt and low-lying lands will flood. The rise in temperature and melting icebergs affect the whole planet.



Melting icebergs in the North Pole

The loss of rainforests also has a huge impact on the native tribes who live in them. These people have lived in harmony with the rainforest for thousands of years.



Many of the people who live in rainforests today try to combine traditional living with modern life.

However, the changes that have happened in the rainforest over the last 50 years are threatening their way of life. They have less land to live on and fewer animals to hunt for food. They also have to deal with the invasion of a modern world that endangers their traditional lifestyles.

We have found out that it is very important to protect the rainforest but how do you think we can do this?



Think, pair, share your ideas.

Despite the dangers that threaten the rainforest, lots of action is being taken to protect them. For example, today furniture is often made from softwood trees, like pine, as these trees grow more quickly. Hardwood trees, like mahogany, take a long time to grow so are not as sustainable.



New trees are often planted when older trees are cut down for timber. These are trees that will grow quickly.

Some areas of rainforest are now protected by law and have been made into National Parks. This means that all the plants, animals and people who live in them are safe from harm.



There are lots of organisations who campaign to make people more aware of the dangers of destroying the rainforests too. These groups teach people about how they can help from wherever they are.



Lots of countries with rainforests now encourage their farmers to gather the crops that grow naturally in the rainforest instead of clearing the land for farming.



Cocoa pods growing naturally

We can help by making sure we don't waste the resources that we have. This includes recycling various materials, such as paper and plastic, as well as lowering carbon emissions by walking more and using transport less, and not wasting electricity.