

Cortés in the rainforest



Comprehension

Cortés in the rainforest

In 1525, Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés and his men were making their way through the rainforests of Central America in search of new rich empires, and gold to claim for their king.

Cortés' men raised their machetes and chopped off any branches that were in their way. The going was tough. The air was hot and sticky, and there was no clear path through the rainforest. Cortés' men had to find one for themselves and their leader.

It was such an effort that they stopped often to catch their breath. They wiped sweat from their brows, though it would appear again within seconds. All around them, insects hummed and whined.

Cortés was troubled. He was expecting to see large open spaces. Surely the people he wanted to conquer must have cleared the rainforest for farming and building, he thought. But so far, he hadn't found anything.

Late in the afternoon, one of Cortés' men chopped downwards with his machete, and hit something solid. He pulled aside the branches and revealed a stone that looked perfect for resting on. He cleared it so that Cortés could sit down. What Cortés didn't realise was that he was sitting on part of an abandoned Maya city, Tik'al, that had been swallowed up by the rainforest after many years.

Understanding words

Before we can understand a story we have to know what all of the words mean. Let's try one...

a Write the sentence in which you found the word 'machete'.

b From that sentence, suggest what 'machete' means.

c Write a new sentence using the word 'machete'.

d Use a dictionary to find words with a similar meaning (synonyms) to 'machete'.

e Draw a small picture showing what you think 'machete' means.

Sequencing

Sequencing means getting the events in the right order. Write these sentences in the correct order, so they make sense.

Cortés was troubled because he had not found the open spaces he was expecting.

Hernán Cortés and his men were making their way through the rainforests of Central America in search of new rich empires.

Later on, one of Cortés' men found a stone for Cortés to rest on.

They stopped often to catch their breath and wipe the sweat from their brows.

Little did Cortés know, the stone had been part of a Maya city, Tik'al. It had been abandoned and swallowed up by the rainforest.

The going was tough, because the air was hot and sticky, and there was no clear path.

Get to the facts

1 In which year was Cortés searching for empires in the rainforest?

2 What did Cortés and his men often stop to do?

3 What hummed and whined all around them?

4 What looked perfect for resting on?

5 Which city had been abandoned?

Make a story...

When you read a description it often gives you ideas about how the event might be described differently.

Eyes in the forest

Imagine you are Cortés going through the rainforest. At one point you see some dark eyes peering through the branches at your side. You jump, and when you look again, they are gone... (now complete the story)

Below is a plain text version for printing:

Understanding words:

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- b From that sentence, suggest what 'machete' means.
- c Write a new sentence using the word 'machete'.
- d Use a dictionary to find words with a similar meaning (synonyms) to 'machete'.
- e Draw a small picture showing what you think 'machete' means.

Finding key words:

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym).

For example:

Key word – conquer Synonym – defeat

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