

Amazon

The first explorers

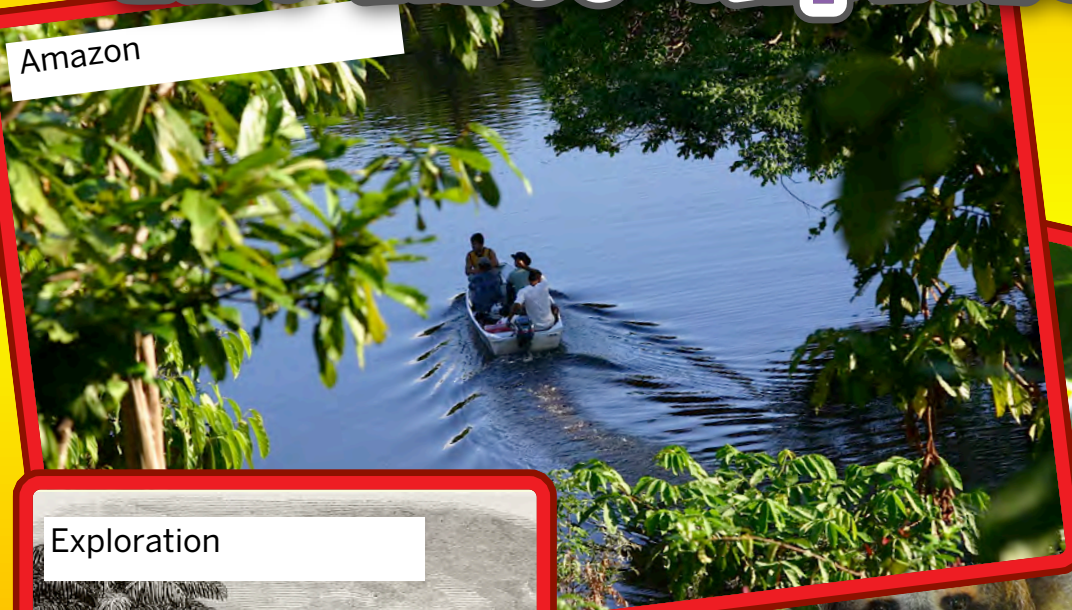


Find out about the meaning of stories and articles

Amazon

The first explorers

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Exploration



Wildlife



Find out about the meaning of stories and articles

River

Matches the requirements of the Literacy Strategy and designed to integrate with the study of river. (This material is independent of any specific text book and can be used alongside any publisher's books including our River Book.)

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The Amazons

This is a story of the first 16th century (Tudor Age) Spanish explorers of the Amazon. Their search was for gold!



The date is 1541. The place: unknown to the travellers, but somewhere along a river that appears to have no beginning and no end. No Europeans have been this way before. Yet the natives keep talking of a place that is made of pure gold. So Francisco de Orellana pushes on, as greedy as his men to make a fortune. They see no one. But they are not alone. They sense it.

Francisco thinks back to when they first heard of El Dorado, the Spanish for "the golden one". It's a story of a tribal king who used to cover himself with gold dust and then dive into a mountain lake. There has been talk of this king and of his city which is entirely built of gold. It is rumoured to be deep in the rainforest. Now the Spanish governor is keen to find it, so he has collected 340 soldiers and about 4000 native people to make an expedition. Francisco is the nephew of the governor, so he is brought along.

But preparations were rushed. There was not enough food and the forest seemed to have nothing for them to eat. They could hear animals, but could not see them to shoot them. Hunger sets in, and with it disease.

Many of the natives and some of the soldiers fall ill and die. It is getting to be impossible. Finally, as the natives flee, the governor decides that his main party should wait until food can be brought to them. So he orders Francisco to press on with a small band of 49 men, see what he can find and then return.

Francisco's band of men push on, then put in to the river bank to find food. They know it is going to be dangerous, for they have been attacked many times before. They begin to move cautiously inland through the thick tangle of trees that line the river. Inside the forest it is easier going. They relax a little. But then an arrow shoots past them and embeds itself in a tree. The arrow has tiny flint blades in its tip.

They are under attack again. They begin to retreat and catch sight of the attacking warriors. They are women, fighters fiercer than any men they have ever encountered. They seem to have no fear. Why do they not understand bullets, when all they have are arrows? Why do they not turn back?

Instead it is the Spaniards who turn and rush back to their boats, rowing quickly away from the bank and out of reach of these fearsome women. And still Francisco has no gold...

Many months later Francisco tells this amazing story to his king. It reminds King Charles of the old Greek mythical warriors called the Amazons. The river had no name before, but he will give it one now – the river of ferocious women fighters – the Amazon.



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 '**cautiously**'.

b From that sentence, suggest what '**cautiously**' means.

c Write a new sentence using the word '**cautiously**'.

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

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



Finding key words

Next, we need to find the key words that tell us what the story is about...

Read the story and underline the key words. Write the most important of these key words in a list like the one below. Write next to it a word that means a similar thing (a synonym). You don't have to use all the spaces, but you should not use more.

Key word	Synonym (similar word)
Example: mutiny	rebel

3

Summarising

(the gist of the story)

To summarise means to rewrite the story in a shorter version using as many of our key words from Task 2 as needed.

1 Write a heading for your summary.

2 Now write the main idea in one sentence.
e.g. "This story tells us..."

3 Now add some detail to the main idea by writing more sentences after it.

**Finally,
can you rewrite your
summary to make it better?**

1. Look out for errors such as using the same word too often – use alternatives.
2. Make sure you have summarised the author's purpose in your OWN words.
3. Make sure your summary is in a logical order.
4. Is your summary informative AND interesting to others?

**There is
nothing wrong
with rewriting; even
the best authors
rewrite their
work.**

123
4

Sequencing

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



They wondered if they would ever find the gold – or the end of the river.

They were attacked by a band of ferocious women warriors – the Amazons.

They put in to the river bank to find food.

They started out ill-prepared.

They retreated to the boats and pushed off to get out of reach of the arrows.

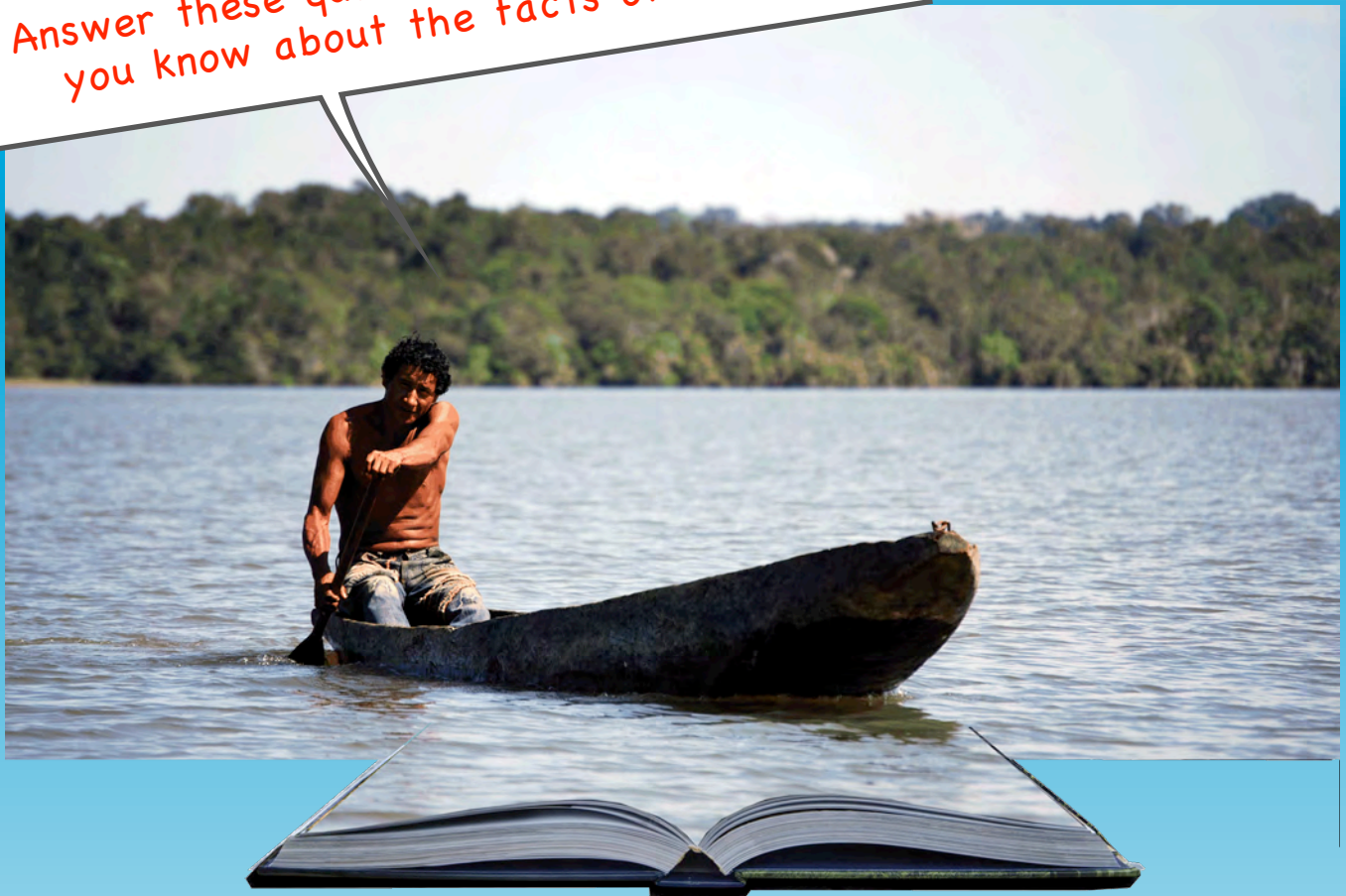
They moved cautiously through the trees.

The Spaniards had been told a story about a city of gold.



Get to the facts

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the facts of the story.



1 When did the Spaniards set off?

2 What was the city called that they had been told of?

3 Who were the fierce women warriors?

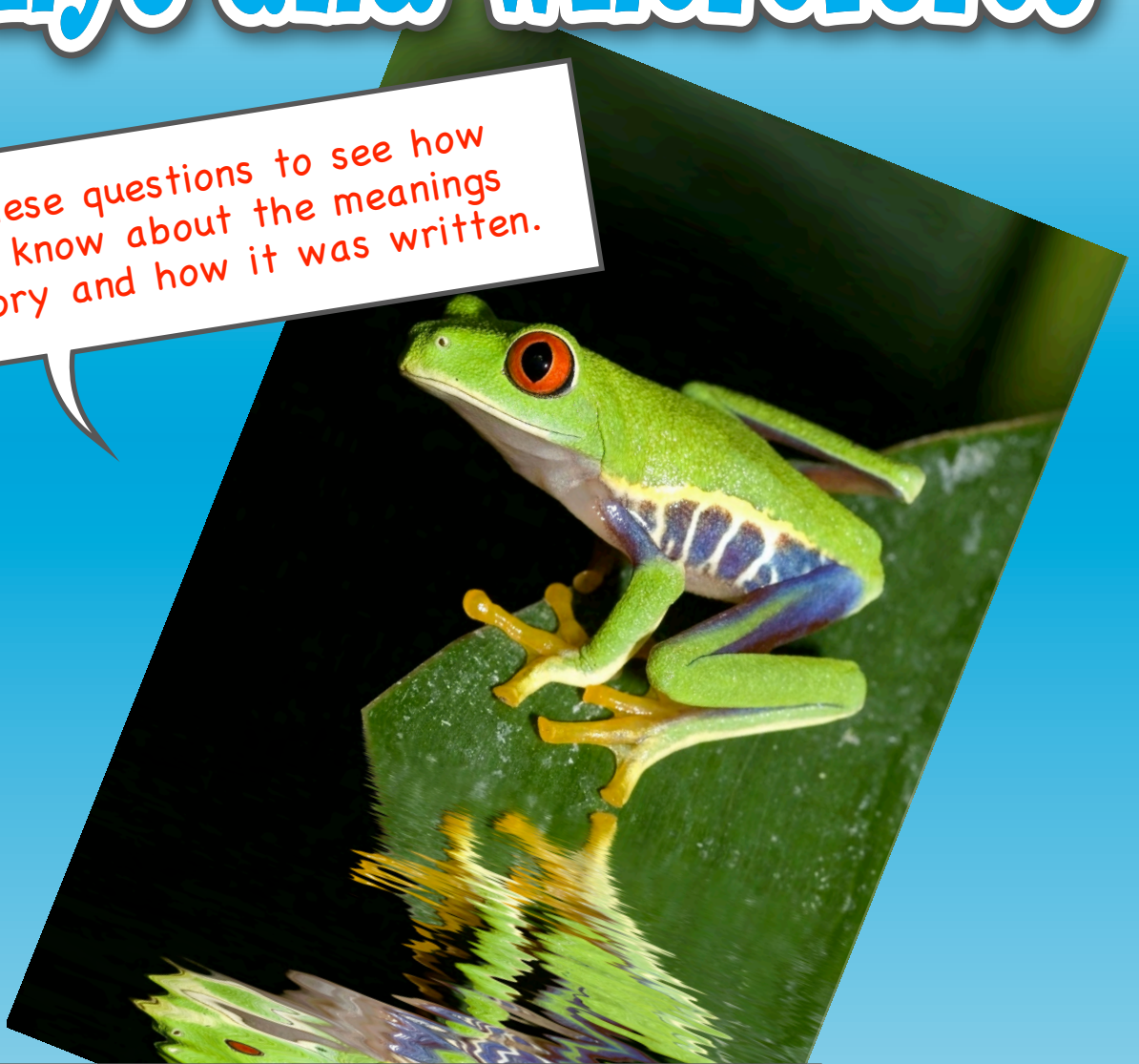
4 How many men did Francisco take with him?

5 What did the king name the river?



Whys and wherefores

Answer these questions to see how much you know about the meanings in the story and how it was written.



1 Why were they keen to make the journey?

2 Why do you think they were afraid of going?

3 What made the governor decide to split the party up?

4 What was so surprising to 16th century explorers about the attack by the Amazons?



Opinions matter

Answer these questions to give your views and to develop the story.

- 1 Do you think the tribe of Amazons should have left the fighting to the women?
- 2 What is the underlying view of the author when he ends his sentence "...these fearsome women"?
- 3 Do you think the naming of the River Amazon was appropriate?
- 4 If they could have gone back to the beginning, knowing what was ahead, do you think they would have made the trip? Explain your reasons
- 5 Put yourself in the role of Francisco. He has reached the mouth of the Amazon and is writing to the king. What do you think he would say?





Talking it through

It often helps if a group of people get together and discuss a problem.



Discussion topic: How could you survive?

Discuss what you would need for a modern exploration of the Amazon. Each make a list (clothes, food, water, water-purifying tablets, mosquito netting and so on). Then compare lists and justify anything you have on your list that others don't have on theirs. Could you survive like this native man?



Make a story...

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



My Amazon encounter

You are paddling your canoe along the upper part of the Amazon and you suddenly come across native children playing. They have never seen outsiders before. Suddenly one of them looks round...

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