

Overviews of Critical Challenges

1 **Becoming a reporter** (3 sessions)

This two-part critical challenge introduces students to the importance of the Brazilian rain forest and the issues surrounding its continued existence and development. In anticipation of an end-of-unit project to prepare a live “visual essay” or a video documentary, students assume the role of investigative reporters. In this introductory challenge, they learn about the rainforest and learn to recognize significant facts and formulate issue-based questions. The lesson begins with a questionnaire to gauge students’ attitudes and knowledge of the Brazilian rain forest. Students work through a press-briefing package, containing background information about the region and details of the documentary assignment. After highlighting interesting facts about Brazil, students examine comparative fact sheets to determine five significant similarities and differences between our country and Brazil. In preparation for the second critical challenge, students develop criteria for questions that raise debatable or contested matters. Students then develop five issue-based questions to guide their investigation of Brazil and the rain forest.

2 **Getting into the picture** (2 sessions)

In this critical challenge, students learn to describe and offer thoughtful reflections about an event. They do this in the context of a reporter’s log, recording observations and insights about photographs of the Amazon River. Students use the 5W questions (who, what, where, when, why) to guide their observations of the photographs. After developing a sample log, students generate criteria for an effective reporter’s log. Students work in small groups to describe and reflect upon three pictures. Finally, students reflect on the usefulness of a reporter’s log in understanding the Amazon region and the people who live there.

3 **Uncovering the issues** (5 sessions)

In this two-part challenge, students learn to analyze a situation by looking to uncover the relevant stakeholders, implied interests and underlying issues. First, they analyze a familiar scenario, one involving a pair of friends who hope to convince their parents to let them go to a movie. Students then research one of three topics on the Brazilian rainforest—economy, environment, people—and look to identify the stakeholders, interests and significant issues at the heart of their assigned topic. In addition, students assemble visual images for use in creating a poster in the second critical challenge and for possible inclusion in the documentary later in the unit. After developing criteria for an effective poster and learning about various visual techniques, students work to create their informative posters. As a final activity, students complete a reporter’s log on what they have learned from the posters.

4 **Representing the stakeholders** (6 sessions)

In this two-part challenge, students explore in greater depth the positions of key stakeholder groups in the Brazilian rain forest. Students participate in a symposium where they hear one of five guest speakers present different stakeholders’ perspectives on the rain forest. In the first critical challenge, students prepare a press release representing what they heard from their symposium guest about that stakeholder group’s perspective. Students hold a press conference to share the press releases of their stakeholder groups. In the second critical challenge, students prepare probing questions to ask of other students about their stakeholder group. As an optional activity, students file a reporter’s log on one of the press conferences.

5 **Negotiating a solution** (4 sessions)

In this two-part critical challenge, students negotiate a plan for developing a region of the Brazilian rain forest. Students begin by graphically representing the impact of various actions on the interests of the five stakeholder groups introduced in the previous critical challenge. They also learn to recognize solutions that are based on a “win-win” philosophy. In the first challenge, as representatives of an assigned stakeholder group students develop draft proposals for developing the rain forest area. Then, anticipating the responses of other stakeholder groups, students plan how they might accommodate these concerns. In the second critical challenge, students meet with representatives of other stakeholder groups to reach consensus on a win-win solution. When all plans have been shared, students assess the impact of each proposal on various stakeholder groups. Finally, students write a position paragraph identifying and justifying their chosen development plan. In the debriefing, students consider the effectiveness of a win-win approach and whether solutions can be found to the problems facing the Brazilian rain forest.

Overviews of Critical Challenges

6

Documenting the challenges (8 sessions)

In this culminating critical challenge, students plan and produce a video documentary or visual essay on one of the challenges facing the Brazilian rain forest. Students learn about the pre-production, production and post-production stages in developing a documentary. Students analyze the story structure, story-telling devices and the visual and sound techniques used in documentaries. Next, students develop criteria for an engaging documentary. In teams, students work through the production stages to produce their video or visual essay. After presenting at a “screening event,” students debrief the experience. Finally, students compare how their attitudes on the rain forest have changed from their initial assessment in the first critical challenge.
