

Helen Cowcher

FAQ's about the book RAINFOREST

How did RAINFOREST come about?

As Henry Thoreau wrote: *"What is the use of a house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on"*.

When I started work on RAINFOREST in 1986 house prices got far greater attention in the media than the destruction of tropical forests. I chose not to do a straightforward information book but instead I created a dramatic story about the creatures of the rainforest losing their homes. It is a story based on reality. All of us can easily identify with losing one's home, and with the dramatic use of color and imagery I hope to reach out to hearts as well as minds!

I tell the story from the animals and birds point of view, to emphasise what we are losing when the forest is destroyed, not just trees, but also the 50% of all the world's living creatures that live in the tropical forests.

Why do you like using unusual words?

The story in RAINFOREST is simply told, but some of the words are unusual. This is because I like to use specific words that have a powerful sound which have an effect even when you might not know the meaning. For example 'deep foreboding' is what toucan feels.

How did you choose the characters to go in the book?

Each animal or bird is in the story for a special reason. Toucans, I chose because I love bright colours. Also I needed to include birds so that they could fly over the treetops and we could feel that we were with them and also look down upon the forest canopy. The canopy is like a huge green umbrella shaped of leaves and branches that shelters everything in the forest below. When the canopy is disturbed in my story, macaws and butterflies suddenly fly out from it. They show us some of the beauty within the forest, most of it hidden from view.

Jaguar is in the story because jaguars, as big cats, are very important animals. They are known as "kings of the jungle". If they can survive in the tropical forest it means that lots of other creatures will be living there too.

Howler monkey is another important creature. I needed an animal that has a strong voice, I made the monkey's mouth HUGE so that you could almost hear the sound coming out at you, when you look at the picture.

The most powerful character in the book is 'man & machine', which represents an ignorant force damaging the forest without any thought for long term consequences.

How do you paint the jungle pictures ?

As an artist I like to give my pictures a lot of atmosphere. So when I painted RAINFOREST I imagined that I was in a very hot damp forest , in my London studio, so that the backgrounds to the pictures have a very wet look. The first pages of the book are soaked in greens and full of drips and blobs. These can be 'happy accidents' and interesting texture to look at! If you look at the end papers to ANTARCTICA you can see that I love this technique. There 'white blobs & drips on blue' seem to be very icy.

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