Chembakolli: Forest

In these lessons, learners explore physical and human features of the forest. Activities look at the relationship that Adivasi people in Chembakolli have with the forest and how they use it, as well as conflicting uses of it.

Activity 1: Human/physical features of the area

Aims: Identify human and physical features of the landscape around Chembakolli.

Resources: Chembakolli: Landscape PowerPoint. 'South India Model' activity sheet. Google Earth.

Instructions:

- Using Google earth and the PowerPoint, list the physical and human features you come across on the whiteboard
- Use the 'South India model' activity sheet to highlight the features you have listed
- Shade shapes A and B with these colours: Kerala coast (green), Nilgiri Hills (purple), Eastern plains (yellow), Arabian sea and Bay of Bengal (blue)
- Using the PowerPoint to draw symbols for the physical and human features you see in the landscape
- Use scissors to cut out A, B and C
- Fold along the dotted lines on each shape
- Glue the tabs on A and B to shape C
- Make a chart to compare physical and human features in your local area to those in and around Chembakolli

Activity 2: Use of the forest

Aims: Identify and discuss direct and indirect human use of forests. Learn about some of the ways in which Adivasi people depend on the forests of the Nilgiris.

Resources: Chembakolli: Landscape PowerPoint. 'Forest web' activity sheet.

Instructions:

- Individually or in a small group use the 'Forest web' activity sheet to record ideas about ways in which people use the forest. Try to think of both direct and indirect uses.
- Look at the images and notes in the 'Landscape: forest' PowerPoint and/or Chembakolli slideshows to find out about the different ways in which the Adivasi people depend on the forests of the Nilgiris.
- Using a different colour, add any more uses that you have learnt about to your forest web. Compare your ideas with a partner or in a group.

Activity 3: The forest ecosystem

Aims: Recognise that the forest ecosystem is interconnected.
Learn about ways in which the forest is used by Adivasi people living in Chembakolli.

Resources: Chembakolli: Honey PowerPoint. 'Indian gooseberry' resource sheet.

Instructions:

- Come together as a class to create an interactive forest web.
- Stand in a circle. One person needs to volunteer to be a tree and should hold a ball of wool or string. Another person needs to say something in the forest which depends on a tree, e.g. bee hives. Keeping hold of the end of the wool loosely the ball should then be passed to this person. Someone else then says something that depends on bees. The second person should keep a loose hold of a bit of wool and pass on the ball to the next person and so on. Try to keep going as long as possible until everyone in the circle is holding onto the wool.
- Imagine that the tree has been cut down. The first person needs to **gently** tug on the wool. When the next person feels the tug then need to **gently** tug their string and so on. If you do this correctly, everyone in the web should eventually feel a tug.
- In the same way that everyone is now connected by wool, so all species in an ecosystem are connected. If one member of the fragile forest ecosystem is removed then all other species will be affected in some way. The Adivasi people are part of this forest ecosystem.

Activity 4: Conflicts in the forest

Aims: Explore how different uses of the forest can cause conflict. Have a debate about honey collection, one of the Adivasi uses of the forest.

Resources: Chembakolli: Landscape PowerPoint. Chembakolli: Honey PowerPoint. 'Conflicts in the forest' resource sheet.

Instructions:

- Human uses of the forest can cause conflict.
- Read the 'Conflicts in the forest' resource sheet. Discuss how some of the different uses might cause conflict.
- Have a debate about whether or not the people of Chembakolli should be allowed to freely collect honey from the forest. Divide the class into two groups.
- One group should take on the role of the AMS (Adivasi Munnetra Sangam). You want to protect the traditional rights of the Adivasi people to freely live and move in the forest. This should include collecting honey.
- The other group should take on the role of the Forest Department. You respect the traditional rights of the Adivasi people to the forest but think that there should be restrictions to control honey collection. You want to preserve the forest, with its unique ecosystem, for future generations.
- At the end of the debate, come out of role and vote for whether or not you agree with the motion.

South India model

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Forest web

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Think of as many human uses of the forest as possible. Record your ideas on the forest web below. Remember to consider both direct and indirect uses. Look at the Forest PowerPoint to find out about some ways in which the Adivasi people depend on the forests of the Nilgiris. Using a different colour, add any more uses that you have learnt about to your forest web. Compare your ideas with a partner or in a small group.

The Indian gooseberry

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Latin name: Phyllanthus emblica
Sanskrit name: Amalaki
Local names (Tamil): Nellikai

Where it is found

It is found in India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and South China. It is grows in the forests in tropical and subtropical parts of India, such as The Western Ghats. It is also widely grown for its fruit.

What it is like

This tree grows up to 15m tall. Its leaves grow on branchlets. They are small, thin and green with sharp, red or green tips. Its bark is smooth and a green-grey colour. The flowers are small, greenish-yellow and grow in clusters on the branchlets. The fruit are fleshy and round (up to 5cm diameter) when young. After time the flesh of the fruit dries up and breaks into 6 pieces.

The tree

The leaves

The flowers

The fruits

Uses

The fruits have many uses including: to treat fever, diabetes, vomiting, loss of appetite, worms, anaemia, jaundice, cough, fainting, heart disease, thirst, bleeding gums, digestive disorders problems, earache, eye disease and dysentery. The fruits are used for making pickles, murabba (a sweet), candy, juice and coconut chutney.

Please note that this information is provided for general interest only. It is not intended as guidance for medicinal use.

Photographs: ACCORD/AMS/ACTIONAID

Conflicts in the forest

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The forests in the Nilgiris are used by people in many ways. Read what the people below have to say about some of these uses. Discuss how some of these uses might cause conflict.

Chembakolli honey collector

My family have collected honey sustainably from the forest for many generations. We are always careful to only take what we need from the forest and to leave enough for these products to be replaced naturally. Now things are changing. We are no longer allowed to go into many areas of the forest. We have to fill in forms at the forest department and wait for permission. We are afraid of getting caught by the forest officials so we try to collect the honey as quickly as possible. Sometimes we don't have time to perform our pujas (religious ceremonies) and rituals properly.

Hotel owner

I own a hotel on the edge of Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary. Tourists visit the reserve from all over India and overseas. Tourism is very important for jobs and the local economy. Visitors like to go on safaris to see all the wild animals in the forest like elephants and tigers. Elephant rides are also very popular. People claim that waste and pollution is becoming a major issue because of the increasing numbers of tourists. We agree that the forest needs to be protected but many people's livelihoods depend on tourism.

Just Change worker

The Adivasi people have lived in the forests for hundreds of years. The traditional rights of Adivasis are protected under the Forest Rights Act but these are being ignored by some Forest Department officials. We have set up a processing and marketing unit for the honey collected from the forest. Spare honey that isn't required by the honey harvesters for personal consumption is collected and brought to Gudalur. The honey is bottled and labelled and sold. We have created direct links between the producers and consumers of honey so that consumers pay a fair price for the honey they buy and the honey collectors receive a fair price for the honey they collect.

Tea plantation owner

I own a tea estate in the Nilgiri Hills near the town of Gudalur. I help to create jobs in the area by employing local people as tea pickers. Some of the tea pickers are Adivasi and live in villages in the forest like Chembakolli. The tea leaves are sometimes eaten by pests and diseases so we have to use chemical pesticides. We also need to use fertilisers to help keep the soil rich. Some people are saying that these chemicals are affecting the numbers of bees and pollination but what can we do? If we stopped using them then how would we compete in the market with other tea plantations? The more profits we make, the more jobs we can create to help the local community.

Forest department official

I work for the Government Forest Department in Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary. The forests here are very beautiful with diverse plant and animal life. Some species here aren't found anywhere else in India or the world! The forests here contain many different animals, including elephants, sambar and barking deer, bison, panthers, tigers, sloth bears, pythons and a variety of birds and reptiles. We want to protect the forest and preserve it for future generations. To do this we need to control who goes into the forest. The forest is closed to all traffic at night time. We respect the forest rights of the Adivasi people but if they want to collect honey they still need to ask permission.