

Brazil

A Reading A-Z Level X Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,437

LEVELED BOOK • X

Brazil

Discussion Questions

Analyze:

How has the growing population of Brazil caused problems for the people and the environment?

Evaluate:

In what ways is the Pantanal wetlands important to people and the environment?

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Front cover, back cover: The unique and beautiful city of Rio de Janeiro sits on the southeastern coast of Brazil, facing the Atlantic Ocean.

Title page: The tiger-striped leaf frog is one of many different types of frogs that live in the Amazon rainforest in Brazil.

Page 3: During Carnival in Brazil, many people play music and dance as part of large samba schools.

Brazil
Countries Around the World
Level X Leveled Book
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Correlation

LEVEL X

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Where Is It?

Brazil is a country in the eastern part of the continent of South America. It occupies nearly half of the continent and is almost as large as the entire United States.

The eastern half of Brazil extends into the Atlantic Ocean. Because Brazil is such a large country, the Atlantic coastline is more than 7,400 kilometers (4,600 mi.) long. That's almost twice as long as the distance across the entire United States.

The western half of Brazil shares a border with many smaller countries, including Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Paraguay, Argentina, and Uruguay. In fact, Brazil shares a border with every other South American country except Ecuador and Chile.

For many years, the city of Rio de Janeiro (REE-oh DAY zhuh-NAIR-oh), located on the eastern coast, was the capital of Brazil. In the 1950s, Brazilians decided to build a new capital city, Brasília (bruh-ZIL-yuh), near the middle of the country. Construction of the city was a giant undertaking. A huge, wild area had to be cleared, and a network of highways connecting the city with the rest of the country had to be built. A large artificial lake was part of the city plan, and it also had to be dug. Brasília became the official capital of Brazil in 1960.

The city was planned to have a population of only a few hundred thousand people. However, by the early twenty-first century, a population of more than two million lived there. This increase in population created some unanticipated problems. The artificial lake became polluted, so a water treatment plant had to be created. In addition, the highway network has begun to threaten natural areas, including the Amazon rainforest.

People

Like so many countries, Brazil is a melting pot of different ethnic groups. About half of the Brazilian people are of European descent, mainly Portuguese (POR-chuh-geez) but also Spanish, Italian, German, and Polish. In fact, Brazil was a colony of Portugal for three hundred years, and the main language of the country is Portuguese. Other people are descended from slaves brought to the country from Africa to work on **plantations** and in mines. Still other people are descended from the groups of American Indians who first lived in South America. A large segment of Brazil's population—about four out of every ten Brazilians—is of mixed ancestry.



São Paulo is a large industrial center.

Of the more than 200 million people living in Brazil, eight out of ten live in cities, including São Paulo (SOW POW-low), the largest city in South America. Brazil's cities have grown rapidly over the past sixty years, and with this rapid growth have come problems. Many of the poor have been forced to move onto vacant land at the edge of cities and use whatever materials they can find to build homes.

Some people in Brazil work in banking, construction, education, health care, and other service industries. Along the coast, others may work in the large hotels and restaurants found there.

Away from cities, some people work in the mining and oil industries. In addition, farmers grow **sugarcane** and much of the world's coffee. This plays an important role in Brazil's agriculture industry. The agriculture industry also produces oranges and soybeans as well as pork, cattle, chicken, and lumber.

Ranching in the southernmost region has a long history. Beginning as early as the 1500s, cowboys called **gauchos** (GOW-chohz) ran ranches and cared for cattle, sheep, and horses. Over the centuries, gauchos developed their own traditions in clothing, songs, and dances.



Modern gauchos still work on ranches in southern Brazil.



Land

Brazil is famous for the Amazon River and Amazon rainforest, both of which lie in the Amazon **basin**. The Amazon rainforest, the world's largest tropical rainforest, is known as the "lungs of the planet" because its plants produce about 20 percent of the oxygen for the entire world.

Highlands are found in two regions of the country. The highlands of the far north contain mountain ranges, steep cliffs, waterfalls, and deep valleys. The larger highlands in southeast Brazil contain both hills and low mountains.



Native to the Pantanal, the capybara is the world's largest rodent.

One of the world's largest freshwater **ecosystems**, the Pantanal, is located in central Brazil. It extends for as much as 210,000 square kilometers (81,000 sq. mi.). Waters rise several meters when the rivers flood the land during the wet season (October through March) and then recede.

In addition to supporting an amazing variety of life, the Pantanal protects areas downstream from flooding during the wet season. During the dry season, it continuously releases water downstream. The Pantanal also acts as a giant water treatment plant by removing pollutants. In addition, its waterways provide transportation, and the region as a whole plays an important role in Earth's **water cycle**.

Brazil's coastal lowlands in the east include beautiful sandy beaches, which are some of the main attractions for tourists visiting the country.

History

The earliest known people who lived in Brazil were American Indians, groups of which still live in the jungles and along the banks of the Amazon River. In the early sixteenth century, Portugal claimed the area. At first, the Portuguese used the land to collect a type of wood called *pau brasil* (POW brah-SEEL), or brazilwood, which produced a red dye. This unique type of wood is how the colony got its name. The Portuguese forced many of the American Indians to work on huge sugarcane plantations. Later, millions of slaves were brought from Africa to work on coffee plantations and in diamond and gold mines. In fact, more African slaves were transported to Brazil than to the Caribbean and North America combined.

In 1822, Brazil broke away from Portugal to become an independent country ruled by Emperor Pedro I. In 1888, slavery in Brazil ended, and in 1889, Pedro II was forced by the military to step down. For the next hundred years, **dictators** led the country, causing much turmoil and uprisings. In 1985, the government became a democracy.

Today, Brazil faces serious challenges. Poverty and unemployment challenge its people while **deforestation** threatens the natural environment.



In a building called the *Sambadrome* in Rio, performers sing and dance the samba on elaborate floats during Carnival.

Celebrations

Many holidays in Brazil are religious in nature. Most Brazilians belong to the **Catholic** religion, which was brought to Brazil by the Portuguese.

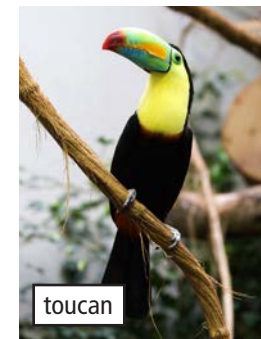
Carnaval, a four-day celebration leading up to Lent, is the largest and most popular holiday in Brazil. During Carnival, people crowd into Brazil's streets for parades and dancing. Many people wear elaborate costumes with masks and headdresses.

As part of year-long preparations for Carnival, some Brazilians dance the **samba** in the samba schools of Rio de Janeiro. The samba was brought to Brazil by African slaves many years ago.

Animals

Brazil is home to the widest variety of life on Earth. The Amazon rainforest alone includes thousands of different types of insects, fish, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and mammals—from the beautiful to the dangerous.

The toucan (TOO-kan) is easy to recognize from its brightly colored bill, which is almost as long as its body. Its plumage includes feathers of black, white, green, yellow, and red. Although toucans are heard all the time, they are rarely seen because they mostly stay high up in the trees.



toucan

Brightly colored frogs of the Amazon rainforest are lovely to look at, but they are among the most poisonous creatures on Earth. The poison of some species is so deadly that just touching them can kill. The poison in the skin of many of these frogs comes from **toxic** foods that they eat.

In the Amazon River, red-bellied piranhas (pi-RAH-nuhz) hunt in groups of one hundred or more. These meat-eating fish have very sharp teeth and strong jaws. Although they eat animal flesh, they rarely attack humans. Instead, they usually eat dead animals.



giant anteater



hyacinth macaws

The river is also home to a “shocking” snakelike fish called the electric eel. The electric eel can grow to be almost 2 meters (6 ft.) long and weigh as much as almost 22 kilograms (48 lbs.). They deliver a strong electric shock to stun prey and enemies.

Other parts of Brazil, such as the Pantanal, also include fascinating animals. Storks and herons build nests in its swamps. Colorful parrots fly overhead. Giant anteaters, jaguars, and deer roam the land.

Some animals in the Amazon Rainforest and the Pantanal could disappear from Earth forever because of habitat loss. As a result of deforestation, more than one fifth of the Amazon Rainforest has been destroyed and is gone forever. Many organizations are working together with the Brazilian government to save these areas.



Pelé

Futebol

Many Brazilians enjoy watching and playing futebol (FOOT-bohl), also known as soccer. Brazil has won the World Cup, the world’s largest soccer tournament, more than any other country. Pelé is the country’s most famous soccer player; he is known around the world. Pelé led the Brazilian team to victory in the World Cup three times—in 1958, 1962, and 1970.

Conclusion

Brazil is a colorful mix of different kinds of land, animals, and people. The Amazon River, the Amazon rainforest, and the Pantanal are all famous for hosting a variety of life.

The diverse people, vibrant culture, and amazing celebrations make it a fascinating place unlike any other.



Population: 202,656,788

Land: 8,458,417 sq km (3,265,813 sq. mi.)

Capital City: Brasília

Primary Language: Portuguese

Primary Religion: Catholic

Currency: Real (ray-AHL)



Source: Central Intelligence Agency (July 2014), World Bank

Glossary

basin (<i>n.</i>)	a depression, or low area, in the surface of the earth (p. 8)
Catholic (<i>adj.</i>)	of or having to do with the Roman Catholic Church, a branch of Christianity (p. 11)
deforestation (<i>n.</i>)	the clearing away of trees and other vegetation in an area (p. 10)
dictators (<i>n.</i>)	leaders who rule with total power, usually by force (p. 10)
ecosystems (<i>n.</i>)	communities of living things together with their habitats (p. 9)
gauchos (<i>n.</i>)	cowboys of the South American grassy plains (p. 7)
highlands (<i>n.</i>)	areas with many mountains; land that is high above sea level (p. 8)
plantations (<i>n.</i>)	large farms with many workers (p. 6)
samba (<i>n.</i>)	a rhythmic, Brazilian dance of African origin; the music for such a dance (p. 11)
sugarcane (<i>n.</i>)	a tropical grass that sugar comes from (p. 7)
toxic (<i>adj.</i>)	poisonous; dangerous to life (p. 12)
water cycle (<i>n.</i>)	the path water takes, and the changes it goes through, as it cycles through the environment (p. 9)