Big Gift to the Earth 2015
Student & Teacher Guide
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Part I:  
Big Gift to the Earth History
Earth’s Birthday Project: 25 Years of Student Learning and Conservation

This year, Earth’s Birthday Project celebrates its 25th year of inspiring wonder, learning and care for our Earth.

It all started with a birthday party. In 1989, Earth’s Birthday Project helped organize the first birthday party for our Earth. It took place on Earth Day in New York City. That day, thousands of 4 and 5 year old Head Start students gathered in Central Park to share a giant birthday cake and say “Happy Birthday!” to our planet. They also raised and released thousands of butterflies as a birthday gift. Since then, the Earth’s Birthday Project has continued to help children celebrate and learn to care for our Earth.

What have we been doing since that first birthday party for the Earth? Every year since then, thousands of students, teachers and parents have participated in our conservation fundraiser, Big Gift to the Earth. By collecting coins, sending in their donations and learning about stewardship work around the world, students learn that even small, individual efforts combine with those of others to collectively produce a big impact! In its very first year, Big Gift to the Earth purchased 8,571 acres in the Sierra de las Minas Cloud Forest Reserve in Guatemala. The land purchase established the new reserve’s boundaries and interrupted deforestation operations in Guatemala’s rainforest. Since then, student donations have been responsible for protecting nearly 700,000 acres of critically endangered habitats in nine countries on four continents. Now that’s an awesome birthday gift for the Earth! We can see that young people in the United States are becoming informed, responsible and engaged citizens of our planet. It makes us want to celebrate!

During the same 25 year period, Earth’s Birthday Project has provided millions of children with hands-on learning experiences through our live-insect and conservation education activities. Growing sunflowers from seeds, observing caterpillars as they transform into butterflies and watching earthworms recycle food scraps to make new soil are all ways that children discover and delight in natural processes. Every engaged child, every awe-inspiring caterpillar, every tiny seed observed, every penny collected... each is an individual element that, taken together, create a culture of stewardship for our Earth.
Our Conservation Partners

Earth’s Birthday Project has joined with many conservation partners to protect endangered species and habitats in critical locations across the globe. Since 1990, we’ve worked with the World Wildlife Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, World Land Trust-US, The Leatherback Foundation and The African Wildlife Foundation. We partner with these organizations because each of us has a specialty. At Earth’s Birthday Project, we can mobilize students, teachers and families across the United States to raise funds for conservation work with our Big Gift to the Earth. Then our partner organizations get that money directly to the people and places where help is most needed.

In 2011, Earth’s Birthday Project began working with a wonderful conservation organization focused on protecting South American resources: Nature and Culture International.

Why do we trust Nature & Culture International (NCI) with our donated funds?

First, we fully support their mission to preserve biologically diverse ecosystems in concert with local peoples all across Latin America. Next, we appreciate the process by which they perform their conservation work. NCI staff conducts on-site scientific research to document ecosystems and the details of why they are in danger. They make sure that lots of people, all over the world, learn about the endangered area that has been documented. NCI collaborates with governments from the local to national level to create legal protection for the identified endangered ecosystems. They also work closely with the local population to make sure they are educated, enthusiastic participants in the conservation programs that will protect the environment all around them. NCI’s work in Latin America has proven to us that they really are saving the rainforest.

Read about NCI’s conservation work and see lots of amazing pictures at NatureandCulture.org.

Learn how NCI establishes protected areas in the rainforest, by visiting EarthsBirthday.org/gifts.

To get connected with what’s happening in and around the NCI rainforest preserves, tune in for our Big Gift 2015 LIVE WEBCASTS. We’re bringing the plants, animals and people of Amazonas, Peru directly to your classroom! See what your coins are protecting. Meet folks who live right in the rainforest. Find out what animals are flourishing because of YOUR conservation efforts. Find the schedule of webcasts at EarthsBirthday.org/gifts.
Did you know that a single penny can purchase and protect a square yard of endangered rainforest? It doesn’t seem like collecting and donating a penny could have much of an impact, does it? Try this: picture thousands of students, all across the country, collecting pennies to donate. Now picture all those pennies, from all those students, and transform each one into a square yard of rainforest. That’s actually a LOT of rainforest being saved every year! When everyone contributes just a little bit, altogether our Big Gift to the Earth donations makes a BIG difference for the planet. Here’s a list of how much endangered land we’ve protected so far:

- **2013** Maranon Preserve, Peru – 100,000 acres
- **2012** Balsas Regional Conservation Area, Peru – 100,000 acres
- **2011** Molino Pampa Community Reserve, Peru – 18,750 acres
- **2010** El Pangan Rainforest, Columbia – 1,775 acres
- **2009** Podocarpus-El Condor Biosphere Reserve, Ecuador; El Paujil Nature Reserve, Colombia – 2,228 acres
- **2008** Big Gift African Elephants, Kenya and Tanzania – 9,555 acres
- **2007** Leatherback Nesting Beach, Playa Grande, Costa Rica – 3,394 acres equivalent
- **2006** Orangutan Habitat, East Kalimantan, Borneo – 5,045 acres
- **2005** Brazilian Amazon Rainforest – 173,607 acres
- **2004** San Rafael Conservation Area, Paraguay – 6,260 acres
- **2003** Brazilian Cerrado – 6,250 acres
- **2002** Mata Atlantica, Brazil – 7,691 acres
- **2001** Madre de los Aguas, Dominican Republic – 45,000 acres
- **2000** Maya Mountain Marine Corridor, Belize – 13,650 acres
- **1999** Sierra de Lacandon National Park, Guatemala – 9,614 acres
- **1998** New River Land, Belize – 12,171 acres
- **1997** Brazilian Pantanal – 12,743 acres
- **1996** Mbaracayu Forest Reserve, Paraguay – 37,000 acres
- **1995** Talamanca Caribbean Biological Corridor, Costa Rica – 30,000 acres
- **1994** Punta Patino Reserve, Panama – 30,000 acres
- **1993** Guaraquecaba Environmental Protection Area, Brazil – 6,857 acres
- **1992** Rio Bravo Conservation Area, Belize – 9,857 acres
- **1991** Sierra de las Minas Cloud Forest Reserve, Guatemala – 8,571 acres

The conservation efforts of teachers, families and students, just like you, have safeguarded these precious places forever. Let’s protect more rainforest in 2015!
Part II:
Rainforest, the lungs of our Earth!
Why are rainforests so important?

Rainforests are important to life everywhere on our Earth. While they cover only 6 percent of the planet’s surface, rainforests are home to more than half the Earth’s plant and animal species. Rainforests provide us with many valuable medicinal plants and with food and renewable products from rivers, mountains, trees and grasses. The rainforest is also home to a large number of indigenous communities. There are many plants, animals and people that could not survive anywhere else.

But perhaps the most important reason we care so much about the planet’s rainforests is that they are like a giant set of lungs, cleaning and replenishing the air for all of us. The rainforests’ dense vegetation takes in vast amounts of carbon dioxide, which can contribute to global warming. The rainforests’ vegetation uses the carbon dioxide and produces fresh, clean oxygen. Who needs oxygen to breathe? We do! All animals and people need oxygen to live. That means we need vast areas of rainforest to work as our planet’s lungs, cleaning and renewing our air every day.

But the rainforests are in danger. In many places across the world, people have cut down and even burnt the rainforest in order to use the land for other purposes like agriculture and mining. We now know that removing the rainforest is dangerous for our Earth. When we destroy rainforests, we destroy our planet’s ability to breathe and clean our atmosphere. We also destroy the homes of the wonderful plants, animals and indigenous communities that survive and thrive there.

Luckily, there are people and organizations working hard to protect rainforests all over the world. How can we help?

• First, we can learn about the rainforests. What do they look like? Who lives in them? Where are rainforests located? The more we learn about rainforests, the more we’ll understand how truly special they are and how important they are for life on our Earth.

• Next, we can raise funds to help support rainforest protection. Every donation helps preserve critical habitat for endangered animals, offsets carbon pollution and makes sure that acres and acres of vegetation won’t be cleared or even worse, burnt.

• Most importantly, we can share our knowledge. Spread the word that rainforests are important and that they are needed by every living thing on our Earth.
The dynamic variety of species in the rainforests is called **biodiversity**. Fossils show that rainforests have been around for 70 million years. Rainforest species survive by adapting in unique ways to their special habitats and to each other. Each species of plant and animal in the forest is connected to every other species in a complex **web of life**. This community of animals and plants is called an **ecosystem**.

Tropical rainforests circle the world near the Earth’s **equator**, where sunlight and rainfall concentrate. Rainforests grow on four continents: South America, Africa, Asia and Australia. More than half the world’s rainforest are located in three countries on three continents: Brazil in South America, Democratic Republic of Congo in Africa, and Indonesia in Asia. South America has the largest area of rainforest in the world.

Rainforests are alive with plants, insects, birds, and other animals from the tops of the trees to the moist soil surrounding the roots. Like tall buildings, rainforests have something different happening on every floor.

**Rainforest Vocabulary**

The highest tree tops are the **EMERGENT** layer. They tower over the rainforest and can reach more than 150 feet. That’s as tall as a 15-story building! Insects, birds, orchids, and many other living things inhabit this dry, windy world above the forest.

Most of the rainforest activity takes place in the **CANOPY**. Tree tops here are about 80 feet tall. Their leaves grow so thickly that they form an unbroken sea of green. The canopy absorbs most of the sunshine that falls on the forest. Vines climb into the canopy reaching for light. Orchids and bromeliads perch on strong branches. Monkeys, sloths, and other canopy animals spend most of their time in the treetops.

Below the canopy is the **UNDERSTORY**. Only about 2 percent of the sunlight shining on the forest reaches the small trees and bushes that grow here. The air is humid and cool. Leaves are big and glossy to absorb the dim light. Bright flowers hang from stems, and fruits like cocoa, bananas and coffee grow in the deep shade.

The forest **FLOOR** receives almost no sunlight. Ferns, fungi, and mosses grow among the litter of dead leaves. Buttress roots fan out from the trunks of tall trees. Jaguars, peccaries, and other large animals roam here. Ant trails criss-cross the litter. Insects, worms, and other decomposers break down dead plants and animals, and return their nutrients to the soil.

Rivers, streams, swamps, and marshes create the rainforest’s **AQUATIC** layer. Rushing down a mountain, rippling in a pond, or quietly pooling in a marsh, water is important rainforest habitat. Fish, snails, and shellfish abound. Storks, crocodiles and otters live in water and on shore.

We help to protect the **green, oxygen-rich** rainforests because we understand they are the lungs, or the “breathing capacity” of the planet, and therefore critical to the survival of the **web of life** that supports all inhabitants of planet Earth.

Year after year, new species of plants and animals are discovered in rainforests. **Indigenous** cultures that have lived harmoniously within the confines of the rainforest for thousands of years - some of whom have never been contacted by civilization - continue to be discovered as well. As we work together to expand the areas where it is illegal for the large-scale harvesting of lumber and mining of minerals to take place, we help protect these plants, animals and people.
In 2015, funds from Big Gift to the Earth will again be directed to help protect Amazonian rainforest on the continent of South America. Our students’ coin collections fund 40% of the work being done in Peru by Nature and Culture International. THOSE ARE YOUR PENNIES AT WORK!

NCI is currently purchasing land, working with surrounding communities and strengthening legislation at these three sites:

- Maranon River Watershed, Cajamarca side
- Chinchipe River Regional Protected Area
- Cajamarca-Condor Tepuis Regional Protected Area

### What is a watershed?

The word *watershed* is used to describe all the areas of land that drain to a river. Every drop of rain and every melting snowflake, once they are affected by gravity and move downhill, will eventually end up in the river. To help you understand the idea, picture your kitchen sink. If you pour a glass of water down the sides of the sink or even just empty it into the middle, the liquid will go to the bottom of the sink and then gather in the drain. That’s because the drain is the lowest point in the sink. And because of gravity, water always wants to go to the lowest place. A *watershed* is an area of land that is like the sides and bottom of your kitchen sink. No matter where it rains or snows on that area of land, the water will eventually go to the lowest place available – usually a river. To make sure the river stays clean and healthy, we need to be sure that the *watershed* (all the land that drains to the river) stays clean and healthy, too!

### What are tepuis?

*Tepuis* are flat-topped mountains that tower over the surrounding rainforest. Because they are so tall and the sides are so steep, plants and animals that live on tepuis have lived in isolation for a long time. Many are endemic species and can only thrive on these tall mountains. *Tepuis* are sometimes called “islands in the sky”. Why do you think they are called by that name?
What is an endemic species?
A species is a type of plant or animal. **Endemic** means that it only lives in one specific location on our planet. There are many endemic species found in the rainforest. They have adapted to survive there and nowhere else. When the rainforest is damaged or destroyed, what happens to the **endemic species** that live there? They cannot just move to a new place. What can we do to help them?

What are some of the endemic species we are helping to protect in the Peruvian rainforest?

**Podocarpus Tree:**
The Podocarpus is one of the very few Latin American conifers (like a pine, spruce or Douglas fir tree). This beautiful tree is now endangered in Peru and Ecuador due to the high quality of its wood and the shrinking areas of undamaged rainforest in which it can live.

**Bromeliads:**
These plants have tiny, bright flowers with stiff leaves that can grow on the ground, on other plants, on rocks and even in trees. They can absorb food and water from the air around them, so are sometimes called "air plants". They provide a home for tiny worms, snails, insects and frogs.

**Sundews:**
Sundews are carnivorous plants that thrive in the rainforest. They have a sticky, moist surface and tentacles that help them attract and then digest insects!

**Spider Monkey:**
These adorable creatures are long-limbed, long-tailed monkeys that live in the Amazonian rainforest. They live in large groups and find their food in the treetops. Spider Monkeys are endangered due to hunting and a shrinking habitat.

Lots and lots of **beautiful birds**, including the Golden-plumed Parakeet, Spot-winged Parrotlet, White-chested Swift, Coppery-chested Jacamar (shown at left) and Orange-throated Tanager.
Part III:
Get involved with
Big Gift to the Earth 2015
What’s an Earthologist?

An Earthologist is an individual who studies about and cares for the Earth. You can become one at any age. Earthologists understand that all forms of life are interconnected. They also know that the planet on which we live is precious. Earthologists learn about and try to save important endangered animals, plants and places. They also like to do earth-friendly acts, which we call Acts of Care, such as recycling, picking up litter, and conserving water and electricity at school and at home. We need LOTS of Earthologists in order to insure that our planet will remain a healthy home for all living things!

How can I become an Earthologist?

First, ask yourself these questions:

- Do you get excited to see a caterpillar change into a butterfly?
- Are you astonished to think about how a tiny seed can grow into a tall tree or brilliant sunflower?
- Do you sometimes think about the plants and animals that live on this Earth with us?
- Do you wonder about places you’ve never been and wonder what they might be like?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you are just the right sort of person to become an Earthologist. You can become one by taking the Earthologist’s Pledge. Then, try to learn about and care for the Earth whenever you have the opportunity. Perform Acts of Care often. Help remind your family and friends to take care of the Earth as well. That’s all you need to do. It’s easy!

The Earthologist’s Pledge

My name is ____________ and I am an Earthologist.

No job is too big, no action too small,
for the care of the Earth is the task of us all!

Performing Acts of Care

Every small thing we do to help the Earth is what we call an Act of Care. Each one combines with all the others to make a big difference for the health of our planet. An Earthologist knows that every single seed planted, every drop of water conserved, every tree hugged, every child learning, every breath of air that is clean instead of polluted, every square yard of rainforest preserved, in fact every type of Act of Care really COUNTS. We will create a culture of care for our Earth by taking these actions in our own communities, as well as on behalf of the planet. All Earthologists are encouraged to participate in our annual conservation fundraiser, Big Gift to the Earth. By collecting coins and donating them to help protect rainforests, you'll be performing an Act of Care at home and at school that effects the whole world.
Ready to take part in our conservation fundraiser, **Big Gift to the Earth**?

Join Earthologists from across the country as they collect spare change and bring it in to their classrooms and clubs. Then, send the money to us at Earth’s Birthday Project. We put all the donations into one BIG check and send it to our partners, Nature and Culture International (NCI). NCI puts that money to work by purchasing and protecting rainforest, working to strengthen conservation laws and helping local communities develop sustainable, rainforest-friendly businesses.

**Coin Collecting**

Every penny collected by students becomes a square yard of protected rainforest. Can you imagine how much rainforest is protected each year when students from all across the country send in their donations? Each donation may seem small, but together, they add up to a **BIG GIFT**!

Where can you find coins?

- *on the ground* (People drop change all the time!)
- *in the pockets of family and friends* (Tell them what you’re doing and ask if they’d like to donate.)
- *in places where such things gather* (Look around. Search in hidden places like under the couch and on the floor of your family’s car.)

Once you start collecting coins, you’re going to need a place to keep them until you can turn everything in at your classroom or club meetings. In the past, Earth’s Birthday Project has created and offered paper Earth Banks for coin collecting. We’ve discontinued this practice** as a means to encourage Earthologists to find new, more sustainable ways to collect and contribute loose change. After all, why use paper and ink to make a tiny box that will just get thrown in the trash in a few weeks? That’s not caring for the Earth! Read the next section, called **The Happy Sock**. It explains how each Earthologist can give a useless, single sock a new job as a coin collector. That’s putting "reduce, reuse, recycle" into practice!

Where should you bring your coin collections?

Every group of Earthologists should keep one big jar or box to collect everyone’s coins. Decorate it with stickers, drawings, paint, glitter or any other fun things. You can also use the **Big Gift collection bank label** we’ve included in this booklet. When everyone has brought in their coin collections, get ready to donate all that change to the **Big Gift to the Earth**!

**We do still have a stock of Earth Banks in the office. If you would like to help us finish these off, please contact us by phone or email and let us know how many you need. Available while supplies last.
Donations can be sent to us in three ways:

1. **COINSTAR** Drop your collection of coins in the nearest COINSTAR kiosk. Select “Donate to Charity Button”. Find Earth’s Birthday Project on the list and select it. Be sure to take your printed receipt. Later, you’ll attach that Coinstar receipt to the donation form below and mail in to us.

*Here’s some great news for Earthologists: Earth’s Birthday Project is now listed on COINSTAR kiosks in ALL 50 STATES! It’s easier than ever to contribute loose change to protect rainforests. Locate the nearest Coinstar kiosk online at Coinstar.com.*

2. **Mail** Fill out the donation form at the bottom of this page. Send it, along with a check, to **Earth’s Birthday Project**
   
   PO Box 1536
   
   Santa Fe, NM 87504.

3. **Webstore** Make your donation online by going to EarthsBirthday.org and selecting “Shopping” on the left side of your screen. Go to the Big Gift to the Earth section of the store, then choose the item **Big Gift to the Earth Donation**. Note the amount you wish to donate and pay with a credit card.

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**Yes!** We are excited to help protect and preserve our Earth’s important rainforests. These funds for **Big Gift to the Earth** were collected by

**Group, Classroom, Club or School:**

Contact Name:

Phone and/or Email:

Mailing Address:

We’ve chosen to make our donation by:

- **Check.** Please find an enclosed check for the amount of $_______.

- **Charge Card.** Please charge our credit card for the amount of $_______.

  *Name on Card:*
  
  *Card #:*
  
  *Expiration Date:*

- **Coinstar.** We’ve taken our coins to the nearest Coinstar kiosk and are attaching the receipt to this form. We made a total donation of $_______.
What is the saddest thing in the world? It is a single sock. Imaginge how it feels. It has lost its very best friend, its sole mate.

And if that weren’t bad enough, now it has no purpose and no job. It has nothing to do.

The Happy Sock

You can turn a sad sock into a happy sock... by making it your COIN COLLECTOR.

Let your sock know it’s got a NEW JOB! Fill it with pennies, nickels, dimes and quarters.

When your sock is full, bring it into your classroom or meeting place.

All the other students will bring in their happy socks too.

Then get ready to send in your donation. See if you can find ANOTHER job for your single sock.

Just PICTURE all the sock banks across the country being filled right now. When every donated penny protects a square yard of rainforest, we’re definitely giving a Big Gift to the Earth!
SAVE THE RAINFORESTS

1 sq yd = 1 sq yd

BIG GIFT BANK
No job is too big, no action too small, for the care of the Earth is the task of us all!

Questions? Concerns?
We’re happy to help! Contact us at 800.698.4438 or info@earthsbirthday.org!

For informational updates, further resources and the 2015 schedule of webcasts, visit EarthsBirthday.org regularly.

WE LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU! Send in photos, essays, fundraising ideas and anything else you’d like to share. We’ll post them to our website and Facebook page. Mail to Earth’s Birthday Project, PO Box 1536, Santa Fe, NM 87504 or email to our National Program Director, Alia Munn at Alia@earthsbirthday.org.