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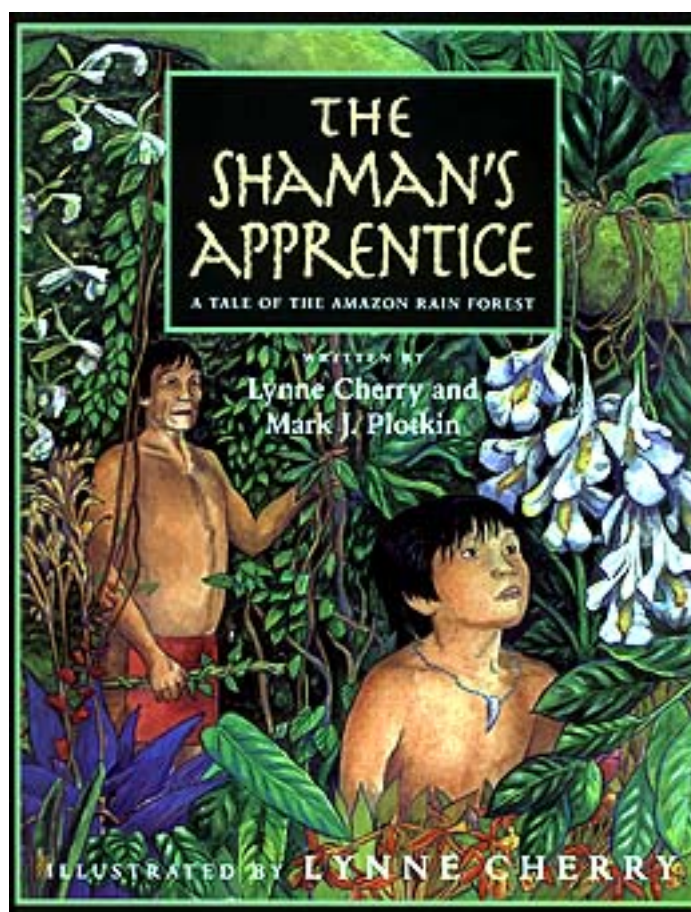
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## Book Reviews

Associate Editor Aristotel Pappelis



Lynne Cherry and Mark J. Plotkin, 1998. *The Shaman's Apprentice: A Tale of the Amazon Rain Forest*. Illustrated by Lynne Cherry, and published by Harcourt Brace & Company (A Gulliver Green Book), 15 East 26th Street, New York, NY 10010, ISBN 0-15-201281-8. \$16.00.

This is a book for children, their parents and grandparents (their story-readers), their teachers, and for students interested in ethnobiology. Some readers may be interested in the artwork, text, and accompanying information on the title pages. Some may be more interested in the portrayed medicinal

plants. Others may wish information about the rain forests and the native Americans living in them. This book has something for all of us and more. There are questions that the book brings to our minds: some probably planted there at the desire of the authors; some planted there by our teachers; and, some embedded there by our continued self-studies beyond the academics. Let's explore the book, its involvement in the education of us all, and see the beauty that most of us must obtain by the creative efforts of artists and story tellers turned authors.

"Wow! What a beautiful book." The title seems to be a bill-board along a rain forest path. Look at the unusual flowers (at first glance you should see four or five kinds). The man is carrying a stick with a vine growing around it. Is it special? Is he special? He seems to be ready to gather a few leaves or show them to the boy. The boy seems more interested in the rain forest beyond. At first it appears that it is the flowers he's studying. Did the artist do that for us to notice and question? What is the chain around his neck? What is it made from? Will the authors tell us about these observations we have made? Since this is a story about a shaman and his apprentice in the Amazon rain forest, is it possible that the authors want us to make the inference that these are the main characters in the book? (We have made observations, inferences, used numbers, measured qualitatively, and classified items in the illustration in some crude way: human and plant; young and old; student and teacher; stem, leaf, and flower). By looking on the back cover we infer that this is one illustration showing us more species of plants. Can you find orchids? Common house plants we grow? Legumes?

We are not going to put this book down. We leaf through it and decide to buy it. It's going to be a collectors book.

Let's look inside. Wow again! Thirty-seven flowering plants and two kinds of fungi on the inside cover pages-- front and back. There are some names that we know and some phonetic spellings to help us say the name of these as the people of the rain forest say them. "Many Amazonian plants do not have English names." And, the authors continue, these are plants of the "Surinam rain forest." Do we know where that is? The authors left this up to the reader to do. (So, let's look up the location on a map. First, we get our map book and look up Suriname in the index. There it is. It's in South America, about latitude 5 degrees above the equator and longitude 55 degrees west of Greenwich.) It's a country with a coastline on the Atlantic Ocean. (The skill of communicating using maps, numbers, words, etc. is extended by the map makers who predict that we can read maps they make or someone we know can. There are instructions in the map book, too. This requires some skill of understanding time and space. I think the globe makers had such skills and expected us to develop them, too.)

According to Mark, my grandson, "Books like this should be part of our science classes. Its more interesting than other things we are asked to read. And besides, its based upon a true story." He went to say that he noticed that each plant and fungal species illustrated had a medicinal use listed and asked about how these were discovered.

Ugent described trial and error methods that could have been used, with the errors not being too good for the person trying the method (eating; drinking water extracts or soups; applying juices from them to the

skin or applying them in compacts, etc. as in ethnobiology books). Mark commented that some primates seem to know what to eat for their ills (a PBS program for children). Well, that put him in the game.

The title page seems to be set into the art: one page showing the rain forest through a window and the other page showing the book title as a framed hanging. What the wall was made of remained unknown but we inferred that it was branches from palm trees. What the vine was that was used to tie the "fronds" together wasn't discussed. A boy and two adults (the boy's parents?) could be seen walking towards the window. Mark had to say it. "They probably were "fronds" of the rain forest. Ha,ha." (Well, it is a book for children.)

The copyright, etc. page shows the village on the river bank (aerial view) with round and oblong huts. (Which hut has a cone-shaped roof? Here we are teaching time/base relationships.) Palm trees are in the illustration. Children and adults are in the village and in canoes. Can you see someone in a hammock? Can you see someone tending a pot over the fire? Can you guess what will happen to the fish being carried towards the pot?

A portion of the proceeds from the sale of this book is dedicated to the protection, preservation, and restoration of native forests. The people of the village Kwamala are thanked for their part in the story and illustrations. Other people are thanked and the book is dedicated to the memory of Al Gentry and Ted Parker. We are ready to turn the page and begin the book. Each time that we turn a page (15 times), we will see a double-paged illustration with a small information box set into the left page (one to three paragraphs of text). The illustrations are eye-catching and present great numbers of opportunities to ask open-ended questions that draw out the ideas of the authors in the text and illustration that goes beyond the text.

Kaymanya (the boy with the chain and shell --or seed) is in the hammock. His mother, not pictured, is fanning her feverish son. She tells his father (not pictured) to take Kaymanya to the shaman.

The next illustration shows the shaman ( Yes, we guessed correctly. He was in the cover illustration.) sorting through plants and we must infer that he is making a boiling extract in the black pot on the fire. (Can you name the green animal in the illustration?) The shaman is chanting as he selects leaves, roots and bark for the pot. The cooled liquid will be poured into the boy's mouth (amount not specified). The chanting ends. The fever ends by morning and the boy will recall this night over the following years.

More village activities are in the next illustration. The village is on the banks of the Sipaliwini River. What kind of activities shown in the illustration can you infer are going on? The villagers grow cotton (which is spun and made into cloth). They grind achiote berries. (Why? Check the insides of the book covers. No. It isn't there.. But U-shuh is there --lipstick tree fruit--and its use is listed as cloth dye. Probably the color will be as shown; red.) The mother and daughter have harvested cassava roots. Cassava bread is being made. (Can you find it? Look on the roof. What's it doing up there?) The father is hunting for tapir. Some boys are fishing. Others are swimming.

Next pages. We were correct about the book cover. Lessons are going on. On the next pages we see healing rituals and village life. Is that a chicken? Are they native animals? Are those white geese? Are the feathers we see from those birds? The hut can now be seen from the inside. Is it palm fronds and posts? We see a dog. What is the other mammal that looks like a dog? Why do we know it is a mammal? What is the hammock made of? There's that black pot steaming away on the burning wood. What does the shaman have in his hands? Is that a throwing stick and spear in the onlookers hands or a bow and arrow? Do you see a basket made from some kind of plant material? The man in the hammock was from up-river and is sick with a disease brought to them by gold miners (strangers to their village). Could you write a hypothesis statement that we could use to help the shaman find out if the sick man was correct? The shaman was unable to heal the sick man. He "passed on to the spirit world." Others became ill. The shaman could not heal them.

The next illustration shows the village receiving information that "tall, white skin" people with hair of straw color and bodies covered with cloths (missionaries) gave white pills to the sick and made them well. The "quinine" controlled the "malaria." The new cloths (next page), reading and writing lessons, and study of the Bible (translated into Tiro) prepared the people for trading (metal pots and pans, rice, and plastic bottle in exchange for emerald tree boas, scarlet macaws, and poison frogs). And who knows what else is being taught. Can you find these in the illustration? Is that a man with a bow and arrow? What is in the cage? Can you find the monkey? Butterfly? What else? How long will they last in the forest under these conditions? Can you suggest a way to protect the wildlife from too much harvesting?

In the next illustration, we see a beautiful night scene. People around the fire. The natives now follow the new religion because the new medicine had greater power than their natural ways. The apprentice is trying to make the shaman feel better. (Look. Another necklace with a seed or shell.)

Four years pass. The missionaries leave. The next illustration shows the river and the village. A stranger (Gabriela) is coming in a canoe with a guide. Gabriela explains that she is an ethnobotanist seeking to learn the healing magic using the forest plants. She was asked to explain why she wanted to learn the ways of the shaman when the ways she knew to control malaria were so much better. Gabriela, being an honest botanist, explained that the quinine came from a Peruvian shaman! The source? The bark of the cinchona tree. The old shaman, dignity restored (next page) shows Gabriela what he knows. (Describe what you think is going on.) Now, Gabriella returns for a few months each year (summer session research project?) and has learned about the hundreds of plants used in the shaman's repertoire. Learning. Learning. Learning. (Next page.)

Gabriella sees the village from a plane. Five years have passed. Does the village look like it has changed? Her plane lands. She is given a joyous greeting. She speaks in the language of the village--telling that she has a special gift for them. It's a book. (Next page.) Wow. This is a beautiful illustration of the inside of a hut. Is the person in the hammock making cotton thread for weaving? Look at the variety of baskets. That must be cassava being prepared as a bread. Why the long spears? Are those special feathers? What did they use to dye the cloth blue? Green? Violet? The book on medicinal plants and the Bible; what else do the villages need? The whole world is now able to use the shaman's wisdom. (Next page.)

The shaman now will finish the training of the apprentice. Gabriela will return year after year. (Next page.) The shaman has passed on to the spirit world. The apprentice is now the shaman. He still wears his necklace with the shell or seed hanging down to his sternum. People have always used medicinal plants and fungi for healing their ills. The oral traditions still exist but are being lost. Are we relying too much on synthetic medicines?

This is based on a true story first told in the book *Tales of the Shaman's Apprentice* (Penguin,1994). The author of that highly acclaimed book was Dr. Mark J. Plotkin. Ms. Lynne Cherry is well known for her award-winning tales for children. Her book, *The Great Kapok Tree*, is highly recommended --an NSTA-CBC Outstanding Science Trade Book for Children. Together these environmentalists have enabled us to play-out a moving story with a compelling message to our children and grandchildren. We have had an opportunity to use the science process skills learned in elementary school and applied them to a new situation (transference). The message about the importance of plants to humans goes beyond that of the medicinal plants in the story. Look at the illustrations. Without plants and the collective knowledge maintained and added to over the great number of generations within tribal settings, around troubled ailments and the hungry of all ages, the partly clothed and the poorly sheltered, the collectors of fruit and berries, the fish in a basket or strung on a stripped branch, and the hunters--with wooded spears, arrows, bows, and poles for returning meat to the village, where would the Gabrielas of the world go to help the next generation survive? Don't ask whether someone should be a lawyer and business agent for the villager when reading this book. For that, read the 1998 newsletters from the Society for Economic Botany.

This illustrated review was prepared by Aristotel Pappelis (Professor, Department of Plant Biology, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois 62901), Mark Franklin (Student, Fifth Grade, Ball-Chatham Elementary School District, Chatham, Illinois 62629), and Donald Ugent (Professor, Department of Plant Biology, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois 62901).

A.J.P.

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