

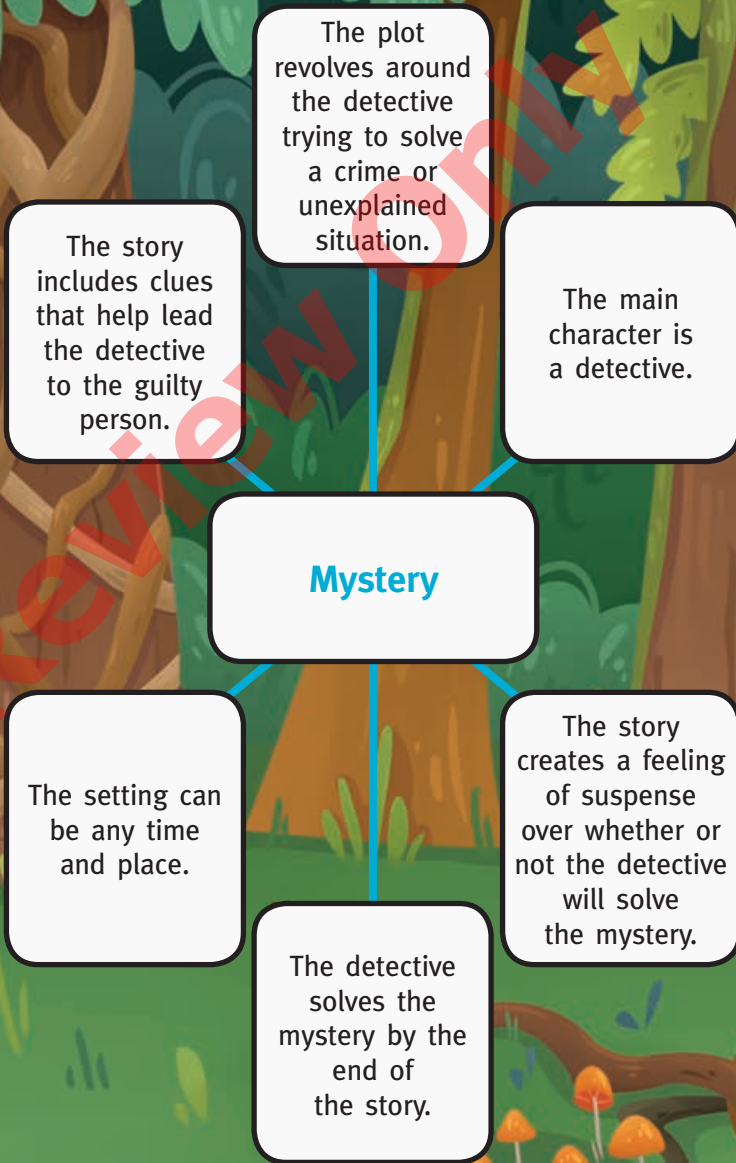
Rain Forest Mystery

by Cynthia Clampitt
illustrated by Yoss Sánchez



Mystery

Look for the genre features noted below as you read this book. Use the features to help you understand the text.



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The Investigation Begins

When Abby arrived at work on Tuesday, she could tell that something important was on her boss's mind. Miss Rose was pacing back and forth in her office at the Flora Detective Agency. When Miss Rose heard Abby enter, her eyes lit up.

"Abby! I've got a mystery for you to solve," Miss Rose said quickly. "Trees are dying in the **rain forest**, and we need to figure out why. Are you willing to take this case?"

"I don't know much about the rain forest," Abby responded. "But I'm always eager to solve a mystery."





“Good,” Miss Rose said. “Now we know that all living things die. It’s part of the life cycle. But it seems **suspicious** that trees clustered in one area have all died recently at the very same time.”

Miss Rose walked over to her desk, opened a large map of South America, and spread it out in front of them. Then she pointed to a spot on the map. “It’s happening here, in Brazil,” she said. “In the northeast region of the forest. Not too far from where the forest meets the Atlantic Ocean.”

Then Miss Rose pulled a plane ticket out of a drawer. “I have you on a flight that leaves tomorrow. So pack your bags.”

“On it, Miss Rose,” Abby said confidently.

The flight was long. The boat trip was longer. After two days of travel, Abby found herself at the edge of the rain forest. She began making her way through the dense **foliage**, pushing leafy branches and thick vines out of the way with every step forward. Suddenly, she heard a chorus of voices. “Hey, watch where you’re walking!”

Abby looked all around, but she saw no one.

“And you call yourself a detective!” the voices rose up, with annoyance.

Abby slowly looked down. She saw that she had stepped on the edge of a thick bed of moss. “I’m sorry,” Abby said. “I’m here to question you, not hurt you.”

“We’re not interested in your questions!” the voices replied.

“Trees are dying, and I need to find out why,” Abby said. She crouched down to get closer to the thousands of little plants that made up the bed of moss. “Do you know why they are dying?”

“We stay close to the ground,” the moss said. “We don’t pay attention to what other plants are doing. Leave us alone.”

“I think you know something,” Abby said, “You cover tree roots. Maybe that hurts the trees.”

“No!” the moss replied. “Like other plants, we help the forest. We hold in water and **nutrients** in the soil, helping the plants and trees around us. We also help stop soil from washing away and slow **erosion**. You’ve got the wrong plants.”



“So you don’t know anything?” Abby said.

“Do you think we can see anything from down here?” most of the voices asked.

But one voice squeaked out, “Maybe the fan palms over there have seen something.”

Abby turned around and saw a group of fan palms. They looked like trees but were a different kind of plant. “I’ll see if they know anything,” she wondered aloud.

As Abby neared the fan palms, she said, “I’m investigating the dying trees, and I am suspicious of all of you. What do you know about how the trees are dying? Are you responsible?”

“We have never hurt a tree. We are too busy surviving,” one fan palm said.

“What do you do to survive?” Abby asked.

“Our broad leaves catch sunlight. They catch rain, too, but our leaves are **segmented**. So the rain drains through—this helps us survive.”



“How does it help you?” Abby asked.

“In the rain forest, plants grow wherever there is water. The trees’ leaves catch water. So things grow on the trees. But we’re not as strong as trees, so we don’t want things growing on us.”

As Abby turned to leave, one fan palm leaned over and whispered, “Talk to the mangroves. They might know something.”



Mangrove Hunt

Abby didn't know what mangroves looked like. But she always followed up on a tip when trying to solve a mystery. So she opened her laptop and did a quick search on the Internet. *Ah! They are near the ocean—and they are very strange looking,* Abby thought.

At the ocean's edge, Abby saw a clump of mangroves. "Trees are dying, and I'm here to find out who—or what—is causing it," she said loudly.

A mangrove shook its branches. "I don't think we will be able to offer much assistance."

"Why not?" Abby asked.



“Consider how far we are from the other trees,” the mangrove responded.

“Yes, being by the ocean is strange,” Abby said. “Most plants hate saltwater, but you don’t.”

“We can **tolerate** some salt,” the mangrove replied. “That is what makes us so important. We learned to survive here, and we protect the coast. We catch soil that might wash out to sea. Instead, the soil builds up around our roots as new land.”

“You look like you are on stilts,” Abby said.

“They call our roots stilt roots,” the mangrove replied. “They keep us above the waves. They also create a place for fish to live. Are we done yet?”

