

Lost & Found

By Charles Piddock

A vanished culture is unearthed in the Amazon rain forest.

A real-life Indiana Jones. That's how people remember British explorer Percy Harrison Fawcett (1867–1925). Like Indy, Fawcett plunged deep into tropical forests where he battled hungry predators and dodged poisoned arrows shot by angry natives. Like Indy, too, Fawcett sought to turn the world of science on its head with an amazing discovery from a lost world.

In 1925, already famous, Fawcett set out into the vast and largely unexplored Amazon rain forest. Accompanying him were his 21-year-old son, Jack, and Jack's best friend, Raleigh Rimell. Fawcett's goal was to find what most scientists at the time said did not exist: the half-buried ruins of a once-mighty ancient city. Since 1542, when European explorers first entered the Amazon region of South America, stories had emerged of a rich city ruled by a king called El Dorado (the gold-covered one) somewhere in the forest. For centuries, dozens of explorers searched for the city, but no trace was ever found.

No trace, that is, until Fawcett's expedition. He sent messages home that he had found evidence of a city that once existed in the forest along the Xingu River. The Xingu is one of the Amazon River's many *tributaries* (streams and rivers that flow into a larger body of water). Fawcett called the lost city the City of Z for reasons known to him alone. His search for the city is documented in the best-selling book *The Lost City of Z* by David Grann.

Thin Soil

Scientists back home believed that the British explorer was simply chasing after a myth. In 1925, the societies in the Amazon were small and isolated, eking out a primitive existence in tough conditions. *Anthropologists* (scientists who study the development of human cultures) saw the local people as a perfect example of *environmental determinism*. Environmental determinism is the belief that physical environment determines culture. Complex societies capable of building cities and supporting a large population, the theory goes, need certain environmental conditions to develop. They need good soil to produce crops; protection from predators and disease-carrying insects; and leisure time to develop writing and other

hallmarks of civilization. The Amazon rain forest provides none of those things. Despite the forest's thick vegetation, the soil is poor in the nutrients that crops need. Clouds of disease-carrying insects make living there an ordeal, and large predators lurk in the forest's darkness.

Fawcett's quest was widely publicized in newspapers and magazines. Readers eagerly followed his progress. Then, suddenly, Fawcett stopped sending messages. All contact with his expedition was lost.

Weeks turned into months and months into years. Expedition after expedition went into the rain forest to locate Fawcett—without success. Fawcett's vanished expedition has been called the greatest exploration mystery of the 20th century.

Buried Settlement

Until now, historians believed that Fawcett lost his life pursuing a myth. But new evidence shows that the ill-fated explorer may have been onto something after all.

A team of scientists led by University of Florida *archaeologist* Michael Heckenberger has been studying a region of the upper Xingu River for 13 years. An archaeologist studies ancient cultures by examining their material remains. Recently, the team revealed that it had made a big discovery—what Heckenberger believes may be the lost City of Z. Using satellite imagery and ground-penetrating radar, as well as information provided by people in the region, Heckenberger has found the remains of roads, bridges, and *plazas* (public open spaces) that had been used between A.D. 800 and 1600.

"The roads were as wide and straight as modern four-lane highways," Heckenberger told *Current Science*. "And they seemed to connect settlements that once covered an area of 150 to 200 square miles. The settlements, which I would call garden cities, were set in clusters, or groups of cities, each surrounded by a wall and a deep ditch. The ditches were up to 15 feet deep and more than 30 feet wide. The entire area was carefully engineered and managed. It is clear that these people liked to have beautiful roads and plazas and bridges."

Heckenberger says specialized farming and hunting allowed the people who built the towns and villages to support a population probably 10 times larger than what exists in the region today. His team has found 19 such settlements, at least four of which were major residential centers.

A Vanished People

What happened to the people who built the garden cities? They were probably wiped out by the infectious diseases unintentionally brought to the region when the Europeans arrived, says Heckenberger.

Heckenberger says he thinks continued research will bring even more startling discoveries about the Amazon's early civilizations. "There are many remarkable discoveries yet waiting in the Amazon," he told *Current Science*. "We can expect to find things that are uniquely Amazonian. And some of these are bound to be more complex and advanced than expected."

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Along which tributary of the Amazon was the lost City of Z located?
 - A the Z River
 - B the Xingu River
 - C El Dorado Stream
 - D the Little Amazon
2. The author describes a theory known as “environmental determinism”. Which of the following *best* describes this theory?
 - A Ancient civilizations believed that the environment was determined by the Gods.
 - B The impact of humans on the environment can determine the climate.
 - C The environment determines the type of housing structures people must create to protect themselves from natural elements.
 - D The success of a civilization depends on specific environmental features such as quality soil and the ability to produce enough food.
3. What is the best explanation for Fawcett’s sudden disappearance?
 - A He was abducted by people that lived in the rain forest, and went on to live with them for the remainder of his life.
 - B He decided to join the people of the lost City of Z who had moved underground to continue building their civilization without the threat of predators and scientists.
 - C He died from the harsh natural elements of the Amazon rain forest, such as vicious predators or disease-ridden insects.
 - D He found King El Dorado’s hidden gold, changed his identity, and moved to another country to live in wealth and seclusion.
4. Read the following sentence: “Expedition after expedition went into the rain forest to locate Fawcett—without success.”

In this sentence the word **expedition** means

- A a vacation trip to a far away land
 - B a journey around the world
 - C efficient promptness or speed
 - D an organized journey for a specific purpose
5. The primary purpose of this passage is to
- A help people plan a vacation trip to the Amazon
 - B describe an exciting archeological discovery
 - C warn people of the life-threatening elements of the Amazon rain forest
 - D promote the film, *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*

6. According to the author, what most likely caused the extinction of the people of the Lost City of Z?

7. How would the author likely describe Fawcett? Use evidence from the text to support your response.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

_____ the Amazon was full of dangerous predators and insects Fawcett boldly set off to explore the region.

- A Although
- B Because
- C Before
- D After

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

For centuries, explorers searched for the lost city of Z hoping to discover the city's riches.

Who? explorers

What? _____

How long? _____

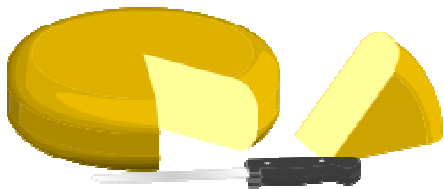
10. Read the vocabulary word and definition below and complete questions 10a, 10b, and 11.

Vocabulary Word: plunge (plunge): to dive in energetically; thrust something forcefully into another object.

10a. Read the sentences below and underline the word **plunge**.

1. It seemed that Johnny hadn't eaten for days as he plunged his spoon into the soup bowl.
2. There is nothing better than to plunge into the water off of the diving board on a hot summer's day!
3. My dad plunged his knife into the turkey at Thanksgiving dinner
4. The brave girl on the cliff plunged into the clear blue water 40 feet below.
5. Susie tripped, spilled her tray of food, and plunged headfirst into her mashed potatoes.

10b. Which picture best demonstrates the word plunge?



11. Would it be a good idea to plunge off a 40-foot waterfall into a giant river rapid?

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 1040

Featured Text Structure: Descriptive- the writer explains, defines, or illustrates a concept or topic.

Passage Summary: *Lost and Found* describes an early 20th century British explorer's mysterious discovery of a vanished culture in the Amazon rain forest. University of Florida archaeologist, Michael Heckenberg, now leads a team of scientists in uncovering the remains of what may have been the same civilization.

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3. What is the best explanation for Fawcett's sudden disappearance?

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- C He died from the harsh natural elements of the Amazon rain forest, such as vicious predators or disease-ridden insects.**
- D He found King El Dorado's hidden gold, changed his identity, and moved to another country to live in wealth and seclusion.

4. Read the following sentence: "Expedition after expedition went into the rain forest to locate Fawcett—without success."

In this sentence the word **expedition** means

- A a vacation trip to a far away land
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5. The primary purpose of this passage is to

- A help people plan a vacation trip to the Amazon
- B describe an exciting archeological discovery**
- C warn people of the life-threatening elements of the Amazon rain forest
- D promote the film, *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*

6. According to the author, what most likely caused the extinction of the people of the Lost City of Z?

Suggested answer: The people were most likely killed off by infectious diseases brought by European colonists. [paragraph #12]

7. How would the author likely describe Fawcett? Use evidence from the text to support your response.

Suggested answer: The author would describe Fawcett as a determined individual who did not let the status quo opinion influence his choices and attitudes. He would describe him as a daring explorer because he set off into dangerous tropical forest with hostile predators and natives. [paragraphs #1 & #2]

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

_____ the Amazon was full of dangerous predators and insects Fawcett boldly set off to explore the region.

- A Although
- B Because
- C Before
- D After

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

For centuries, explorers searched for the lost city of Z hoping to discover the city's riches.

Who? explorers

What? **searched for the lost city of Z**

When? For centuries

Why? hoping to discover the city's riches

10. ReadWorks recommends that you teach this vocabulary word to the whole class out loud using the four steps listed below.

Vocabulary Word: plunged

Step 1: Introduce the word

- a. Teacher writes the word on the board and divides it into syllables: (plunged)
- b. Teacher says: "This word is plunged. What is the word?" [All students reply together out loud: "plunged."]

Step 2: Provide a child-friendly definition

- a. Teacher says: "Plunged means to dive in energetically or thrust something forcefully into another object."
- b. Teacher says: "You could say you plunged into the swimming pool to escape the heat or that you plunged the knife into the watermelon. In the text, Fawcett plunged deep into tropical forests where he battled hungry predators and dodged poisoned arrows shot by angry natives."
- c. Teacher says: "What is the word?" [All students reply together out loud: "plunged."]

Step 3: Practice the word

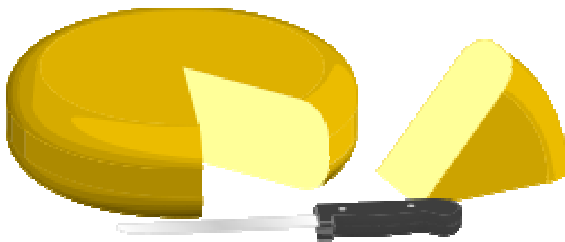
Teacher provides examples and additional opportunities to repeat the word. Read the 1st sentence out loud to your students. Begin reading it again and when you come to the vocabulary word prompt students to say the vocabulary word out loud. Then, finish reading the sentence out loud to our students.

- 10a.**
1. It seemed that Johnny hadn't eaten for days as he plunged his spoon into the soup bowl.
 2. There is nothing better than to plunge into the water off of the diving board on a hot summer's day!
 3. My dad plunged his knife into the turkey at Thanksgiving dinner.
 4. The brave girl on the cliff plunged into the clear blue water 40 feet below.
 5. Susie tripped, spilled her tray of food, and plunged headfirst into her mashed potatoes.

Step 4: Check for student understanding

This step can be completed as a whole class activity or as an independent practice.

- 10b.** Which picture best demonstrates the word plunge?



- 11.** Would it be a good idea to plunge off a 40-foot waterfall into a giant river rapid?

Suggested answer: It would not be a good idea to plunge off a 40-foot waterfall into a giant river rapid because the current of the river could cause you to drown.

Suggested Additional Vocabulary: predators, natives, trace, civilization, quest, pursuing, ill-fated