

LEVELED READER • V

Adventure on the Amazon River

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Chapter 1: Hammock Life

“Cammy, just try to say it once: ‘Obrigada’. It means ‘Thank you’.”

“Dad, I already told you! I don’t speak Portuguese, and I don’t want to learn.”

Cammy’s mum rolled her eyes. Most of the trip had been like this. For some reason, Cammy was not enjoying the adventure. Most twelve year olds would think a boat ride up the Amazon River was pretty interesting.

Cammy poked at her food. “This is the third lunch in a row they’ve served this same fish. I’m getting tired of it.”

"It's a good thing we brought our own food," said her dad.

"Yeah, but too bad there are ants in our food," continued Cammy. "They climbed right up the poles and into our stuff. How did they get on the boat anyway?"

"They must have paid money like the rest of us," responded her mum with a smile.

Cammy laughed. "And did the mosquitoes pay, too? Because I've got a few bites here on my arm. See?" Cammy held out her tan and bumpy arm. "If I get **malaria**, I'm holding you two responsible. This trip was your idea."

"Is there anything that you *do* like about this trip?" her dad asked.

"Let's see . . . that there are only three days left until Manaus? Come on, Dad, you know I like watching the sunsets. And yesterday Mum and I saw one of those interesting pink dolphins. There! That was pretty positive, eh? Obrigada."

"Well, Ms. Smarty Pants," her mum began, "tomorrow we're going to arrive at a town called Santarém. That will be something new to look at."

"Do we get to get off?" Cammy asked.



"No, but you'll get to see an Amazon town up close. And some new people will get on."

"What if I did get off? And slipped into the jungle and never came back?"

"Then we'd just have to live without you, my dear," said her mum with a smile.

After finishing lunch in the cafeteria, Cammy and her parents walked back to their covered sleeping area. They each climbed into their own hammock.

For three days now they had travelled up river on this big boat. Every once in a while they passed little wooden houses on the bank of the river, but mostly it was just one thick, green jungle. Cammy reached for her travel **journal** to reread her first three entries.

March 24, 2002

Today we left Canada and landed in a city called Belem. My parents and I are going to travel up the Amazon River in a big three-storey boat that carries mostly local Brazilians. Mum and Dad did it about 20 years ago. (I think they're trying to relive the olden days.) We're going to sleep in big hammocks for six nights!

March 25, 2002

Today was our first day on the boat. My parents are talking to people in Portuguese, and I can't understand anything. I couldn't sleep very well in my hammock. Mum says I'm getting cranky already. But nobody here is my age! I wish I was back in Vancouver with my friends. Brian is having a party on Friday, and our soccer team has a tournament over the weekend.

March 26, 2002

Today was better. A Brazilian man had a soccer ball, so we played on the top deck. It was fun until somebody kicked the ball overboard! Then we sat up top and watched the sun set. It's interesting here because you can see forever. And the air here is kind of sweet. Dad says to breathe it in deep now, because it's the best air in the world.



Chapter 2: The Canoe People

On the following day the boat stopped in Santarém, a medium-size town on the bank of the river. A Brazilian family boarded and hung their hammocks in the sleeping area. There was a girl about Cammy's age. She had curly black hair and a big smile on her face.

"Hello, do you speak English?" the girl asked Cammy with a foreign accent.

"Yes," answered Cammy. "And you are Brazilian? How did you learn English?"

"My family live for one year in Toronto, Canada. So I go to school with Canadian children and learn English. My name is Gabriela."

"Excellent. My name is Cammy. It's nice to meet you. Hey, do you want to check out the boat?"

Gabriela smiled. "Yes, sure," she said. "Let's go see."

The two new friends explored the boat from front to back. When they finally reached the top deck, Santarém was already out of sight. As they gazed out over the wide river, Cammy spotted two little canoes paddling toward the boat. A man was in one canoe and two young boys were in the other. Their skin was dark brown. When they reached the side of the boat, they slapped their paddles hard against the water.

"What are they doing?" Cammy asked.

"They are asking for things, like food," Gabriela answered. "It is kind of like a tradition. Those people are very poor. So the people on these big boats help them out."

Just then somebody from the lower deck threw a white plastic bag into the water. It landed near the two boys. They paddled over to the bag and picked it up before it sank.

Cammy rested her elbow on the railing and stared out at the canoe family. "I wonder what their lives are like," she said. "Do you think we could make a bag to throw to them?"

"Do you want to?" asked Gabriela.

"Yeah, let's go."

The two girls raced back to Cammy's hammock. Cammy emptied two plastic grocery bags and shook out the ants. They quickly filled each bag with fruit, crackers, and a can of soda. Cammy also put in a bracelet that she had made. Then they ran to the lower deck.

"Hey, look," pointed Gabriela, "there's another canoe coming."

A young boy and an older girl paddled hard to reach the big boat. Then they slapped their paddles against the water and stared up at the two girls.

Cammy and Gabriela threw their bags in close **proximity** to the canoe. The older girl paddled while the young boy scooped them up. He handed the bags back to the older girl. Cammy could see her pull out the bracelet. She held it in her palm and carefully examined it. Cammy squinted to see her face, but the canoe had already drifted too far away.



Chapter 3: While the Boat Slept

The following day was one that Cammy would never forget. The swaying of the hammock somehow woke her up early. She rolled over to see what time it was. The sky was almost totally black, but she could tell that it was dawn. There was a hint of **fuchsia** in the black and a faint streak of orange below.

Everyone else was still asleep, rocking quietly back and forth. Cammy's tan feet slipped into her sandals, and she walked up to the top deck.

The air still smelled like fresh rain. Cammy took a slow, deep breath, inhaling through her nose. Everything was silent except for the chug and hum of the boat's engine.

The sky grew lighter purple, and Cammy could see where the sun was going to rise. As she looked

across the water toward the trees, she spotted a small person paddling a canoe toward the boat.

Cammy ran downstairs and quietly filled up another plastic bag. Then she ran to the lower deck, but the canoe was still not close enough. Then she climbed to the upper deck. Maybe if she threw it hard enough, the canoe person could reach the bag before it sank.

Cammy stood up on the middle rail and pressed her knees into the top rail for support. She cocked her arm back, and then swung it forward with all of her might. The plastic bag flew out into the river. But Cammy's body leaned too far forward, and her knees pivoted over the rail. She fell down, down, down, into the Amazon River.

Cammy's body sank deep underwater. When she finally surfaced, the boat was already fifty metres away. "Heeeeelp!" she screamed at the top of her lungs. "Somebody help me!"

Cammy **frantically** swam in the direction of the boat. But it continued to chug upstream while the current carried her further downstream. Nobody was standing on the decks. Nobody had seen her fall. The sun was not even up yet. The passengers were still asleep in their hammocks.



Chapter 4: The Little River

Cammy felt two hands grab onto her shoulders. Before she knew it, they had pulled her up and into a canoe.

Suddenly she was resting on a huge fish, almost as big as herself. It was cold, slimy, and still breathing. "Ahhhhh!" she screamed, and jumped away from the fish. A little giggle came from the back of the canoe.

Cammy turned around. The canoe's paddler was a little boy no more than eight years old. He had dark brown skin and straight black hair. He wore a red shirt and blue shorts, and his feet were bare. The boy stared at Cammy like she was from another planet. Then he looked at the fish and laughed again. Cammy studied him **distrustfully**.

The little boy paddled the canoe toward the shore. There were no houses in sight, but Cammy did spy a narrow **tributary** winding back through the jungle. The boy expertly steered the canoe into that opening, and soon they were travelling deeper into the rainforest.

Tree branches and leaves formed a thick green canopy overhead. Vines hung down to the water. The little river narrowed. The loudest sound was the light splashing of the boy's paddle in the water. Bird and animal chatter echoed throughout the forest like background music.

After another hour of paddling, they arrived at a small house. It was all made of wood: the roof, the walls, the porch, and the steps leading down to the little river. There was no glass in the windows and no door on the entrance. They were simply open.

When the little boy shouted up to the house, three children appeared in the doorway. They stared at Cammy for a moment and then disappeared back inside. She could hear them whispering and giggling. Finally, a boy in cut-off shorts ran down the stairs and tied up their canoe. He touched Cammy's blond hair and stared at her as if she were an alien. Then the two brothers picked up the big fish and quickly ran into the house.



Cammy suddenly felt very afraid. Besides the house, she could not see any other signs of human existence. And the jungle was so thick that she could hardly see the sky. A big mosquito landed on her arm and started sucking her blood. She slapped at it frantically. "Ahhhh!" Another one landed on her neck. "Malaria!" she screamed, as her hands spun like an out-of-control windmill, slapping her body up and down.

Giggles came from the direction of the house. Four curious faces peaked out of the window. But when Cammy looked up, they ducked down. Their giggles turned into loud laughter.

That's when Cammy started to cry. She lay down on the ground in a ball and sobbed until her whole body trembled. Everything was different here, her parents were far away, and these weird children didn't even speak her language. She was lost in the middle of the Amazon rainforest! Cammy closed her eyes and everything went blank.



Chapter 5: The First Night

When Cammy felt a hand on her forehead, the sky was almost completely dark. Rain had started to fall. She could hear it dripping through the trees. Cammy's tears had dried, and she was starting to feel cold and wet.

The hand she felt was that of the oldest girl, maybe two years younger than Cammy. Her face was soft and round, with kind eyes that looked like those of an older woman. "Ixtola," she said to Cammy. She put her hand on her chest and repeated, "Ixtola."

Cammy looked up at her and smiled. "Cammy," she said. "I'm Cammy."

Ixtola helped Cammy to her feet and up the wooden steps. On the porch stood a short man with his arms crossed. His eyes studied Cammy distrustfully as she ducked under the doorway.

Inside it was dark except for a fire in the middle of the room. Shadows danced on the wooden walls. The two boys sat on the floor near the fire. The littlest girl helped a woman peel vegetables over a table. That woman had black hair with grey streaks in it. Her eyes were a deep, dark coffee colour. She smiled at Cammy and motioned for her to sit. Cammy sat on the floor next to her friend, the paddler.

Ixtola's mother handed them bowls containing something white that looked like soup. It had vegetables, leaves, fish, and other stuff in it. There were no spoons. Cammy closed her eyes and took a small sip. "Mmmm," she sighed, opening her eyes. The entire family laughed. They were relieved that she liked the food.

After dinner Cammy sipped her tea and watched everyone's shadows dance on the walls. She also watched the smoke blow out of the window and into the Amazon sky. "Wow," Cammy



thought to herself, "last night I fell asleep next to my parents on the boat. Tonight I'm in the middle of the Amazon, getting fed by natives."

Then Cammy slowly looked around the room. The family was softly talking and had stopped staring at her. She took the opportunity to study their faces, dirty fingernails, and bare feet. These were the kind of **exotic** people that she had only seen on television. But tonight they did not seem very exotic. This was just a family talking after dinner. Each person had a name, just like in Cammy's family.

Chapter 6: A World Away

March 30

This was my first full day here. My brain hurts from trying to communicate with them. I feel really tired. Last night my body was really itchy. I think there are fleas in my bed. And I kept thinking about my parents.

March 31

This morning Ixtola and I went to the garden and pulled up manioc roots. In the afternoon we saw a group of little monkeys up close! And then we found some bananas just growing on trees! Ixtola cut them down with her machete.

April 1

Today they gave me canoe lessons. Ixtola's dad said to give me one of their canoes to go to Santarém. From there I can get back on a big boat. We can't really talk to each other, but we use our hands until we understand. Ixtola's little brothers taught me how to count to ten.

From her favourite tree, Cammy stared down the little river. Tomorrow she would get in the canoe and paddle downstream. She folded up the piece of paper that Ixtola had given her and looked back at the wooden house. This place didn't seem so strange anymore. Cammy would miss Ixtola's family, but she promised to return. Maybe she would show the rainforest to her own children someday.



Chapter 7: Looking Up

The big boat had reached Manaus, picked up new passengers, and turned around to chug back downstream. Johnnie and Jared were two of its new passengers. Their parents had brought them all the way from Australia to see the Amazon rainforest. They had already slept in hammocks for three nights. The big boat was getting close to Santarém.

"What do you suppose their life is like?" Johnnie asked his older brother.

"I don't know," Jared answered, "but they do get to canoe all day. Look, they just grabbed the bag of cookies you threw down!"

Johnnie and Jared watched from the top deck as a little boy with brown skin opened up the plastic bag. "I wonder what kind of house they live in," Johnnie wondered out loud.

"It's probably like that small wooden one," said a man who was leaning on the rail.

Johnnie looked over at him and nodded. Next to the man was a woman. She clutched a plastic bag in her right hand. "Excuse me, but are you going to throw that too?" Johnnie asked.

The woman looked at him and tried to smile. "Yes, but I'm just waiting for the right moment."

"What's inside?" he asked.

"A wish," she said.

"Hey look, there comes another canoe person now!" Jared exclaimed.

From the upper deck they could see a person paddling hard toward the big boat. It looked like a small girl. She slapped her paddle into the water and waved her arms.

The woman stood on the middle rail and threw the bag as hard as she could.

The girl paddled to the bag and put it in the canoe. She opened it up and peered inside.

Jared looked through his binoculars. "That's strange," he said. "It looks like she has blond hair."

The man excitedly tapped Jared on the shoulder. "Excuse me," he asked, "but can I look through those for a second?"

Jared handed him the binoculars. The man looked through them and started laughing out loud.

"Is it her? Is it her?" the woman asked.

The man laughed again. "It's Cammy alright!" he exclaimed. "You threw that bag down to your very own daughter!"

Something splashed so hard next to Cammy that it almost tipped her over. She regained the canoe's balance and looked down into the river.

A man's face slowly emerged from the water. "Can you give me a lift, young lady?" he said.

"Dad! What are you doing here?"

"That's what I wanted to ask you," he said, out of breath. "But first help me into the canoe." Cammy pulled her dad up into the canoe and gave him a big, wet hug.

"I fell off the boat. I didn't jump," she wanted to make clear. "But I learned a lot of things."

"Well, I jumped," her dad said. "And I hope it was worth it."

Cammy looked up at the big boat as it chugged farther away. She could see her mum waving from the top deck. Cammy waved and blew kisses until she couldn't see her mum anymore.

Then she turned to her dad and said, "It's only about ten hours to Santarém, you know."

"What do you have in the basket?" her dad asked. "Enough food for the both of us?"

"Let's see . . . I've got bananas, manioc bread, and lots of mangoes. There are um, dois, três, quatro, cinco, seis, sete, nove and dez."

Cammy's dad smiled. "So you could learn a **foreign** language from natives, but not from your own father, eh?"

"No, Dad. Now I want to learn from you too. Could you teach me to count up to twenty in Portuguese?"

"That depends on how well you canoe, my dear," Cammy's dad said as relaxed his hands behind his head. "This trip was your idea."

Glossary

distrustfully in a suspicious way; without trust (p. 13)

exotic something out of the ordinary, usually from a faraway place (p. 18)

foreign from a different country or language (p. 23)

fuchsia a very bright pink colour tinged with purple (p. 11)

frantically wildly; worriedly (p. 12)

journal a diary, or blank book, in which a person writes news, thoughts, or feelings (p. 6)

machete a wide and heavy knife that is used for many purposes (p. 19)

malaria a dangerous tropical fever that is spread by mosquitoes (p. 5)

manioc the starchy root of a tropical tree that is used for food (p. 19)

proximity closeness in space; nearby (p. 10)

tributary a river or stream that flows into a larger river (p. 14)