

Humanities

GREEN

Miracle! Four children found alive after surviving plane crash and 40 days lost in the Amazon jungle

Skills learned playing a ‘survival game’ have helped four children survive a plane crash and being lost in the jungle for six weeks

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Four children have been found alive after surviving a plane crash and being lost in thick jungle for 40 days.

The siblings* survived by using hair ribbons for shelter and skills they learned playing a “survival game”.

Eldest sister Lesly, 13, took care of younger brothers Soleiny, 9, Tien Noriel, 4, and one-year-old Cristin after they became stranded* deep in the Amazon jungle in Colombia in South America.

Their mother Magdalena Mucutui Valencia, the pilot and an indigenous* leader lost their lives in the accident on May 1 after the engine failed.

The Colombian military found the crashed plane more than five weeks ago, but the children from the Huitoto indigenous community were missing, starting a huge search by 150 soldiers, 200 volunteers and 10 dogs.

They found items including a child’s drink bottle, scissors, a makeshift* shelter, half-eaten fruit and a hair tie, which gave searchers hope the children may still be alive.

It’s believed a sniffer dog led a group of soldiers to the children after following muddy footprints.

Searchers shouted “Miracle, miracle, miracle, miracle!” into the radio. It is army code for a child found alive. Repeated four times, it meant all four had survived.

The siblings, who had rags wrapped around their feet, were well apart from being dehydrated*, suffering from extreme hunger and being covered in insect bites.

Their aunt Damarys Mucutui believes a “survival game” the two oldest children played prepared them for the jungle filled with poisonous plants and predatory* animals including jaguars and snakes.

“When we played, we set up little camps,” she said on TV.

“(Lesly) knew (there were) fruits she can’t eat because there are many poisonous fruits in the forest. And she knew how to take care of a baby.”

To help the children, boxes of food and bottles of water were dropped to the jungle floor along with 10,000 pamphlets* with instructions in Spanish and the children’s indigenous language, informing them to stay still and tips on how to survive. Speakers from a helicopter blasted a recorded message from the children’s grandmother Fatima Valencia telling them to stop moving.

Ms Valencia told BBC TV that Lesly knew how to look after her brothers because she was responsible for them when her mother would go to work.

“She gave them flour and cassava bread (from the plane), any fruit in the bush, they know what they must consume*,” she said. “I never lost hope.”

Colombian president Gustavo Petro called the rescue a joy for the whole country and said: “They’ve given us an example of total survival that will go down in history.”

The siblings are now receiving medical treatment at a military hospital in Colombia’s capital city Bogota.

** Additional reporting AP and Reuters.*

GLOSSARY

- **siblings:** brothers and sisters from one family
- **stranded:** lost and alone
- **indigenous:** native to a country

- **makeshift:** temporary
- **dehydrated:** when the body loses too much fluid or water to work properly
- **predatory:** animals that hunt and kill for food
- **pamphlets:** small books with information or instructions but no cover
- **consume:** eat

9.

10.

Time: allow 20 minutes to complete this activity

Curriculum Links: English; Personal and Social; Critical and Creative Thinking

2. Extension

Apart from their physical health that will need looking after being lost in the jungle for 40 days, how do you think these children will need help dealing with the emotional trauma of what they've been through and losing their mum?

Write them a card to support them in what will be a difficult time for them.

Time: allow 20 minutes to complete this activity

Curriculum Links: English; Personal and Social; Critical and Creative Thinking

VCOP ACTIVITY

1. What would you say?

Imagine you were one of the searchers who first found the children. Create a conversation between yourself and the oldest child Lesly. What would you say and what information would you wish to learn?

Don't forget to try to use facts and details from the article to help make your dialogue as realistic as possible.

Go through your writing and highlight any punctuation you have used in green. Make sure you carefully check the punctuation used for the dialogue and ensure you have opened and closed the speech in the correct places.