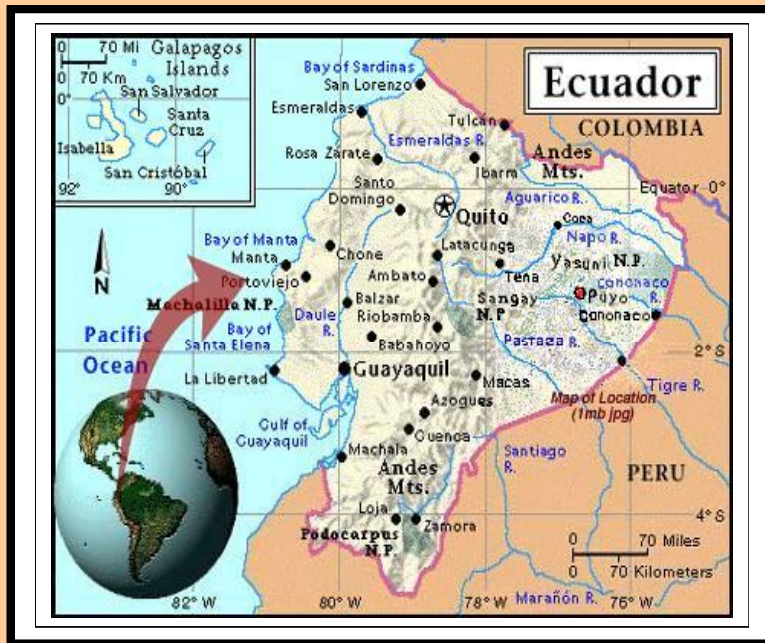


ECUADOR

WOW!



Written By: Susan Husiak

Teacher, Whitehall District Schools, Whitehall, Michigan 40461
Teacher Consultant, Michigan Geographic Alliance
Fulbright-Hays Participant to Ecuador - 2005

Christopher Jeffrey, better known as C.J., was so excited because today he was leaving for a wonderful, yet scary adventure. He was going to Ecuador, a country in South America. His mother had told him that he would be going to all four of the geographic regions in Ecuador; the Galapagos Islands, the Costa (along the Pacific Coast), the Sierra (Andes Mountains), and the Oriente (Amazon Rainforest).

C.J. had seen a National Geographic special on the Rain Forest and he knew that there were many scary animals in the Amazon, even big snakes. C.J.'s mother had told him not to worry he would be safe, because they would have a guide.

Ecuador

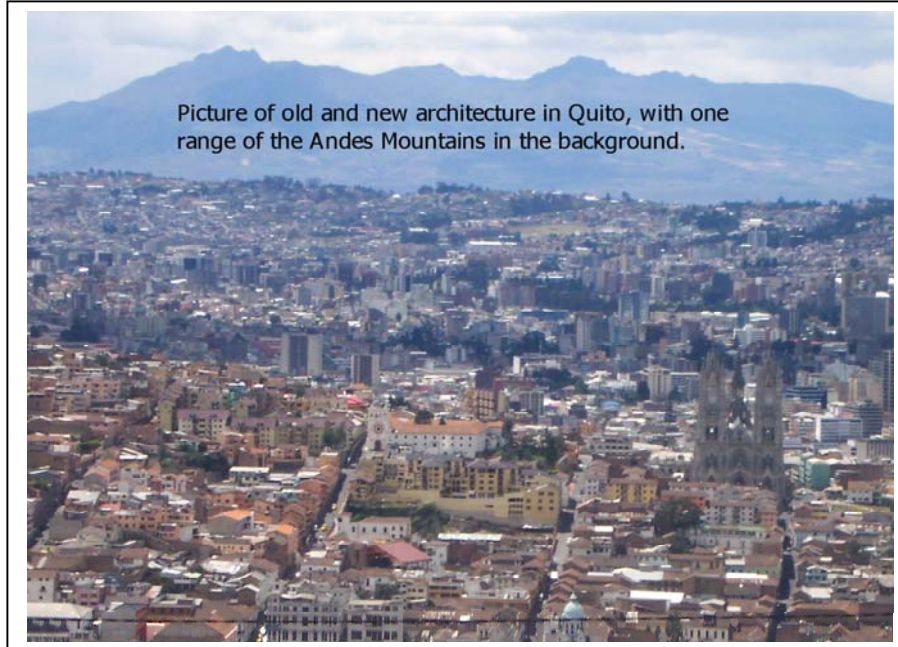


He knew that they would be flying out of Muskegon, Michigan, because that was the closest airport to Whitehall, the town in western Michigan where C.J. lives. He and his family would have to fly to Detroit, change planes, then fly to Houston and change planes again, and finally fly to Quito, Ecuador.



C.J.'s mother had told him that the elevation in Quito was 9,200 feet and that he may feel a little ill due to altitude sickness. Also, that he had to make sure to wear sun screen because Ecuador was on the Equator at zero degrees latitude. C.J. was anxious to get started!

C.J. and his family arrived at the airport at 5:00 A.M. to begin their trip. All three of the plane flights turned out to be great. One of the stewardesses even gave C.J. a small pair of wings, like the pilots wear. When the plane was landing in Quito (Ecuador's capital), C.J. was looking out the window and he was surprised to see that Quito was located between two mountain ranges.



The tour agency's guide, Juan, met C.J. and his family at the airport and drove them to their hotel. As they drove through the city Juan explained that Quito was a mix of old and new buildings. The old city had a lot of Spanish influence in its architecture. Quito has grown a lot and today the population is 1,399,378 people.

As they drove through the old city C.J. saw a peaceful demonstration in front of the President's official residence. A group of indigenous people, from the coastal area, was demonstrating for potable water in their area.



C. J. saw armed guards, with automatic weapons, around the building. This surprised him. He had never seen that in Michigan.

There were also guards in old-style uniforms standing on the balcony in front of the President's house. They were in the middle of the "Changing of the Guards" ceremony. He was so excited to see this. However, he wondered how these guards protected the president when their only weapon was a sword.



The next day the guide took C.J. and his family to a street market in Otavalo. This market was supposed to be one of the largest in the area. They left very early because it was a long bus ride north on the Pan-American Highway to get to the market. On the way they stopped at an Equator line marker where Juan balanced an egg on its end.

Juan explained that he could do this because they were at the zero degree latitude line, which was the same distance from both poles. This meant that the magnetic pull was the same from the North Pole and the South Pole, so the egg was not being pulled in any one direction.



At the market C.J. was amazed at how the people were dressed. Juan explained that they were from local indigenous groups, and that they were there to sell their products.



C. J. saw people selling food that was cooked right in front of him. It didn't look like any fast food restaurant or street vendor that he had ever seen.

Some people were selling spices out of bags. He didn't know what they were, however they sure were pretty.



People were selling fruit that had been grown in the coastal region of Ecuador. Also, they were selling vegetable and legumes. There were a lot of them that C.J. did not recognize.



There were even children working in the booths selling clothing and other items. The children were helping their parents.



After they left the market C.J. and his family stopped at a beautiful old hacienda that was now a hotel. Juan ordered *cuy* (pronounced "kwee") for dinner. C.J. was amazed when he saw it. Cuy was guinea pig. C.J. couldn't believe it, and he wanted to cry. His classroom had a guinea pig as a class pet. Juan explained that "cuy" was a special dish eaten in Ecuador. C.J. refused to try it.



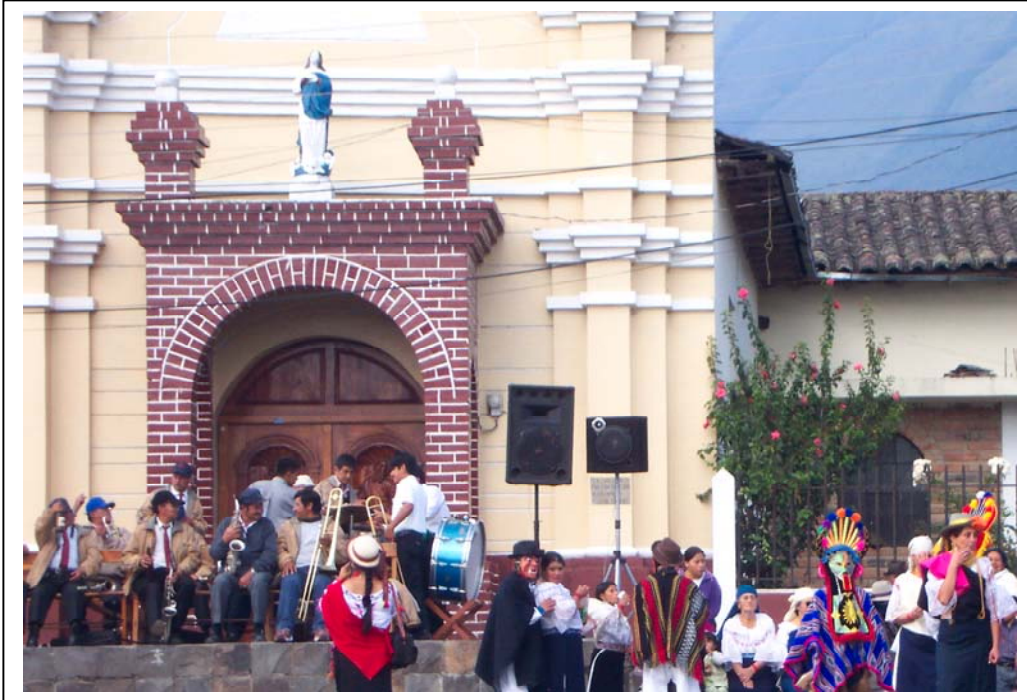
During lunch, C.J. and the other diners were entertained by a local dance group. The dances were traditional "Spanish Folk Dances."



After dinner Juan took C.J. and his family walking in the mountains. There they saw a beautiful waterfall, valleys, and people washing clothes in the rivers. Juan explained that people didn't have running water in their homes like C.J. did back in Michigan. So, the people used the rivers and streams to bathe and to wash their clothes.



In the village of Peguche, C.J. saw a festival at the local church. It was the festival of San Pedro and San Pablo. People were wearing masks, and were colorfully dressed. C.J. enjoyed the festival!



On C.J.'s third day in Ecuador he visited Cotacachi, which is known for its leather goods. He also visited a rose farm. He had never seen so many rose bushes. C.J. learned that the roses grown at this farm were sold in the United States. The rose farm grows roses of many different colors. C.J. even saw beautiful blue roses. He learned that to get the different colors the growers put dye in the water at the roots of the plants. He thought he might try that when he got home.



On Thursday, his fourth day in Ecuador, C.J. and his family boarded an airplane for the Galapagos Islands. After landing at the airport on San Cristobal Island, they were driven through town to the area where they boarded a boat that would take them to four of the seven islands in the Galapagos.

C.J. was amazed by what he saw. He had seen many specials on the Galapagos Islands and they never mentioned that people lived on any of the islands. He thought that only animals lived in the Galapagos.



Juan explained that there were about 30,000 people living on the Galapagos Islands. In 1998 the Ecuadorian government put limits on the number of people living there. The government is worried about the fragile ecosystem on the islands. The government has also limited the number of visitors that can visit the islands each year.



A water taxi waiting for passengers in the harbor at San Cristobal Island in the Galapagos.

The first trip C.J. took was to a beach where he saw many sea lions. He was able to go snorkeling near them. While on the beach he saw several birds that dove straight down into the water to catch fish. C.J. found out that they were blue-footed boobies. He laughed at the bird's name. The next day he saw many blue-footed boobies. Some were flying, some were with their babies, and others were sitting on eggs in their nests.



On that trip C.J. also saw lots of marine iguanas, iguanas that swim. He walked right next to them and they didn't even move. They were not afraid of him. He also saw frigate birds, and hawks. C.J. learned that hawks were at the top of the food chain on the island.



Saturday was a special day for C.J. because he saw many penguins. He was surprised because he thought penguins only lived in Antarctica, where it was cold. He didn't know that there were penguins that could live in warmer weather. Near the penguins he saw pelicans and sally lightfoot crabs. He even saw giant tortoises. In the water near this island he saw a shark. That scared him. His mother reassured him that he was safe.



C.J.'s last day in the Galapagos Islands was spent snorkeling. He saw many different kinds of fish. His mother chose to go on a glass bottom boat to see the fish. She got seasick. After snorkeling C.J. went on shore where he saw many flamingos. Juan told C.J. that flamingos were pink because their diet is mostly shrimp.



On Sunday C.J. and his family flew to Guayaquil where they were going to tour the coastal area. Their first visit was to a mangrove farm. There were armed guards on the boat that took them through the mangrove area. The guards were there to protect C.J. and his family from pirates. Pirates prey on gringos. He thought pirates were only in the movies. However, he felt safer having the guards with them.

After his boat trip, C.J. saw men pulling crabs out of the ground under the trees. The men had to stick their arm into a hole up to their shoulder. Crabs live in holes under the mangrove trees.



In other areas of the mangrove farm the owners had a shrimp farm and a tilapia fish farm. The owners also grew bananas and cacao (cocoa, which is made into chocolate) in another area of the farm. C.J. was thrilled to see these fruits growing on trees. C.J. lives in a fruit growing region of Michigan. However, bananas and cacao won't grow there because it gets too cold.

His guide explained that the bananas are put in plastic bags for protection from bugs and other animals. The cacao fruit (nut) was huge and red. The guide broke open a cacao fruit and let C.J. taste the seeds inside. He was warned not to chew the seeds only suck on them. The inside was white and it didn't taste much like chocolate to him.



In Guayaquil, the largest city and seaport in Ecuador, C.J. and his family stayed at a new hotel in the banking district. C.J. noticed that there were armed guards everywhere. He felt safe there. That evening he had dinner on a ship while it sailed the Guayas River. The next morning while brushing his teeth the water stopped. Juan later explained that in parts of Ecuador they often lose water and power.

The next day C.J. and his family drove north along the Pacific coast through many coastal villages. He noticed that many houses were built out of wood and were on stilts. This was different from other parts of Ecuador where most of the houses were built out of cement. There were also many street vendors selling several different kinds of fruits. He did not recognize many of the fruits.



In the evening C.J. went swimming in the Pacific Ocean. While swimming he noticed that the coastline reminded him a lot of the coastline along Lake Michigan where he swims at home, with its tall hills, sandy beaches and big waves. The biggest difference he found was that the Pacific Ocean is salt water and that Lake Michigan is fresh water.

That night C.J. went to bed early so he could get up early the next day and go whale watching. The next morning C.J. and his family went to Puerto Lopez to catch a boat to go whale watching. On the boat C.J. was so excited when one of the other passengers yelled that there was a whale off the port (left) side. When C.J. looked to where the man was pointing he saw three whales. Two of them looked like they were playing a game with each other. This was so exciting for him.

After the whale watching C.J. and his family toured the town and visited a local market, where they saw meat and chickens hanging in the open air for sale. This was unlike any of the meat markets in the stores near C.J.'s home. He even saw a truck bringing chickens to the market.



After lunch the family toured an Ecuadorian national park. The park guide explained that this was a dry forest and was inhabited by many indigenous families. While walking through the park the guide pointed out a boa constrictor in the trees. C.J. was surprised because he was not scared of the snake. The guide pointed out a sign that hung in the tree. It was in both Spanish and English. The guide explained that this is how the people in the area feel about the land they live on.



C.J. saw two men getting water from the local well. They used a horse to help them carry the water back to their house. This is where the local people get their water.

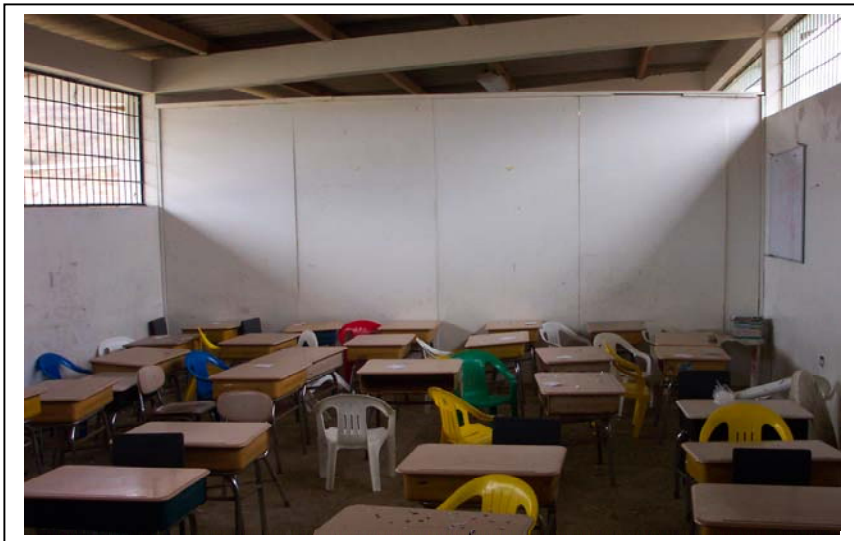


After the tour C.J. and his family drove north to Manta, another seaport city. It was a very long drive and they arrived at their hotel very late. The hotel was located on the Pacific Ocean. In the morning C.J. and his dad went for a walk along the *malecón* (boardwalk) near the hotel. There they bought two figures made out from tagua nuts, an iguana and a toucan. He thought they were so cute! C.J. learned that the tagua nut is a renewable rainforest crop.



C.J. and his family toured several schools in Manta. His mother is a teacher and she had asked the guide to arrange that for them. They visited several public schools in the poorer sections of Manta. C.J.'s mother couldn't believe what she saw. The students didn't have many books and there were very few supplies in the rooms. There were no windows in the classrooms, only openings at the top of the rooms near the ceiling. However, the children seemed to be happy and eager to learn.

Also, there were no televisions or computers in any of the rooms. This made C.J.'s mother appreciate all of the supplies and technology that she had in her classroom.



The next day C.J. and his family flew to Cuenca, a city in the Andes. The streets in Cuenca were very narrow which surprised C.J. He thought they would be wider. He also noticed that the shops were narrow unlike most of the stores near his home in Michigan.

There were a lot of churches in the town. Also, there were a lot indigenous people in Cuenca. C.J. saw some children going to school, and he was surprised to see that they wore uniforms in school.



The next morning C.J. and his family drove to Ingapirca, an Inca ruin. The guide explained that the Incas had only been in Ecuador for about seventy years before the Spanish came. Cuenca had been an Inca capital, and the ancient Inca trail went through Cuenca and Ingapirca up to Quito and down to the Amazon area.



C.J. saw a school group on a field trip. He thought that was so neat. He wished he could go to a place like that on one of his school field trips.



At Ingapirca the guide explained how the Incas constructed their buildings. All of the large stones fit together so well. C.J. even learned that some of the stones used in the buildings had come all the way from Cuzco in Peru. This surprised C.J., because he knew that before the Spanish came the indigenous people did not have horses. So, how did they move the stones? C.J. would have to think hard about that question.



The next day C.J. and his family went to the Parque Nacional Cajas, an Ecuadorian national park. He was hoping to see a condor or a spectacled bear, the only bear that is native to South America. He didn't see either of them. However, he did see lots of beautiful places in the mountains. He was even able to walk up the side of one of the mountains. He was out of breath when he got to the top.



He also saw beautiful plants like Achupaya plant, a favorite food of the spectacled bear. The spectacled bear sits on it and then eats the center of the plant. This was his last trip before he left Cuenca and flew back to Quito.

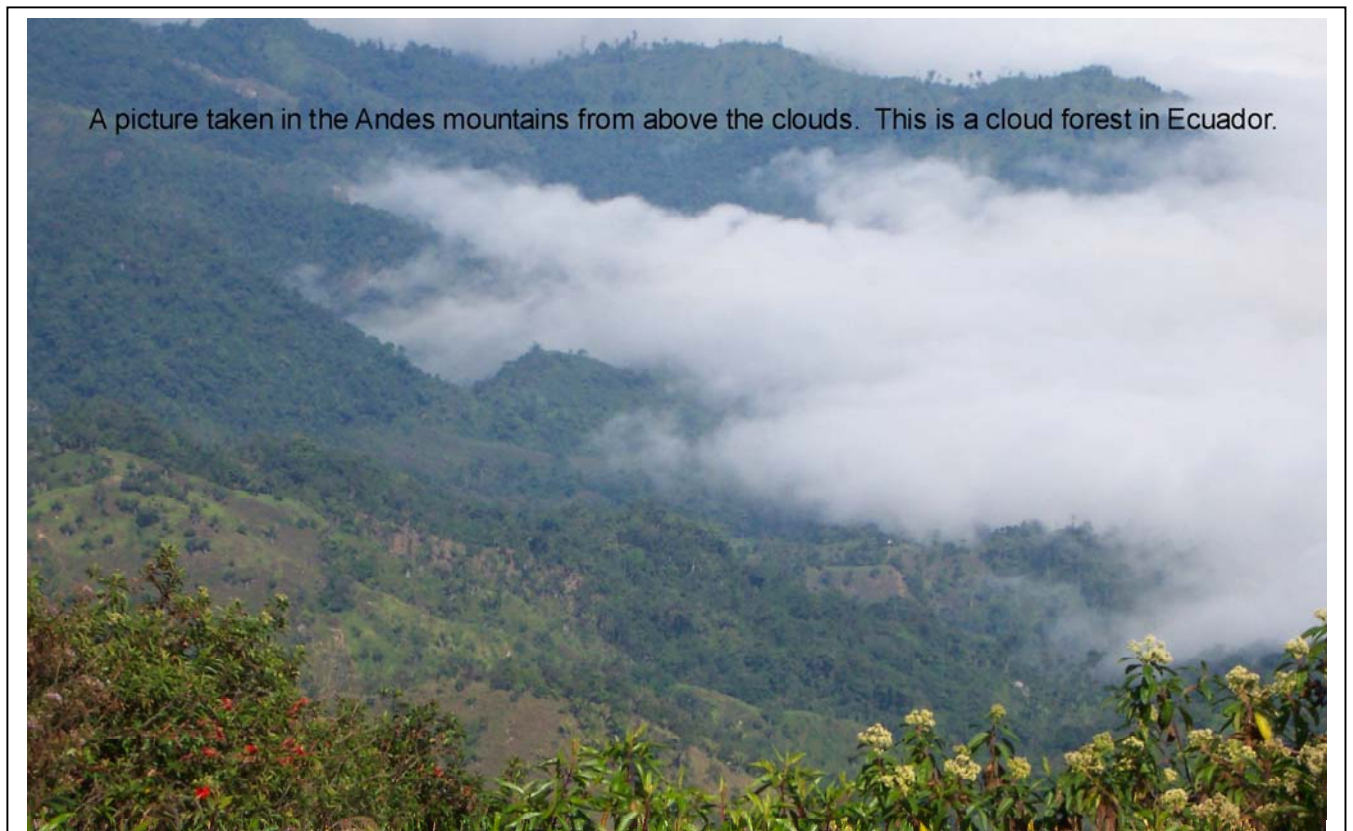


Spectacled Bear

The next morning C.J. and his family flew back to Quito. In Quito they boarded a bus for the Oriente (rainforest). It was raining and they had to drive through the mountains on some very bad roads. C.J. was very scared. When he looked out the window he saw that the road was not paved and parts of it had washed away. In some places there was only one lane, and he saw a lot of signs that said *peligro*, which means "danger".



During their trip they had to drive through a cloud forest. When C.J. looked out the window he could see the clouds below him. He had never heard of a cloud forest before this trip.



Finally they arrived in the upper Amazon, at the Napo River, where they boarded a canoe for the ride to their hotel. On the way to his room C.J. saw a centipede and his dad told him not to touch it. The next morning C.J. was off on his first adventure in the rainforest.



The guide, a Quechua Indian told everyone not to touch anything and to stay right behind him. It was hot, humid, and muddy in the rain forest. C.J. had to wear boots because it was so muddy. The mud made the path slippery and C.J. reached out and grabbed a tree so he wouldn't fall. It was then that he remembered the guide's warning. It was too late—C.J. had a small puncture wound on his hand from a thorn growing on the tree.

The guide cleaned his hand and put the sap from a leaf, called "Dragon's Blood," on his finger to help heal the wound. The translator said that the indigenous people use a lot of the plants that grow in the rainforest as medicines.



C.J. was disappointed because he didn't see any animals. He heard them, but he didn't see them. All of the National Geographic Specials that he had watched showed animals everywhere in the Amazon rainforest.

When the group returned to the hotel, the guide offered to take C.J. and his family to meet a Quechua family. C.J. watched the father demonstrate how to shoot blow darts. C.J.'s mom and dad tried *chicha*, a drink made by the Quechua women. C.J. enjoyed his visit.



A Quechua woman preparing "checha".

C.J. knew he would be leaving the next morning to return to Quito. He wasn't looking forward to the return trip. He was hoping that the roads would be better. They weren't!

After C.J. and his family returned to Quito they went on another tour of the city before they went to the airport to catch their flight home. C.J. saw mothers and children selling goods in the street to passing motorists. He could now recognize which indigenous group they were from by the clothes that they wore.

He was saddened by the fact that young children were on the street working. He wondered why they weren't in school. C.J. learned that there was a law that children had to go to school through eighth grade. However, the law was not enforced, and many children had to work to help support their families. He was sure glad that he didn't have to work.

On the way to the airport C.J. got his last look at Cotopaxi, an active volcano that is near Quito. He and his family were sorry to be leaving Ecuador, their trip had been wonderful and they would always remember it!

C.J. couldn't wait until school started so he could tell all his friends about Ecuador. The only way he could think of to describe his trip was "Ecuador, WOW!"



Vocabulary for story "ECUADOR WOW!"

1. **indigenous** – People having originated in a region or environment.
2. **Oriente** – The rain forest region of Ecuador—also known as the headwaters of the Amazon basin.
3. **costa** – The Pacific Coast region of Ecuador.
4. **sierra** – The mountainous region of Ecuador—the Andes Mountains.
5. **Galapagos** – Islands west of Ecuador in the Pacific Ocean.
6. **vendor** – A person who sells goods.
7. **hacienda** – A large estate especially in a Spanish-speaking country, also known as a plantation.
8. **gringos** – A foreigner in Latin America.
9. **Elevation** – the height above the level of the sea, also known as altitude.
10. **altitude sickness** – The effects (as nosebleed or nausea) of oxygen deficiency in the blood and tissues developed at high altitudes. It can cause dizziness, sleeplessness, and shortness of breath.
11. **region** – a broad geographical area distinguished by similar features.
12. **potable** – drinkable.
13. **Equator** – The imaginary latitude line at zero degrees that divides the Earth into the Northern and Southern hemispheres.
14. **ecosystem** – A system made up of an ecological community of living things interacting with their environment especially under natural conditions.
15. **food chain** – A series of organisms in which each uses the next usually lower member of the series as a food source.
16. **dry forest** – During the rainy season, between January and May, the forest's vegetation turns completely green, while during the rest of the year it appears dry.
17. **cloud forest** – A tropical cloud forest is a specific type of rainforest that occurs at relatively high elevations. Low cloudbanks form over the mountains such that the forest is actually immersed in clouds much of the time. When this happens, the relative humidity is 100%, making cloud forests exceedingly wet places.

CREDITS

Pictures: All of the pictures used in this story were taken by Susan Husiak, except the following:

Cover Map:

From a presentation by S. Sandoval entitled: NEW APPROACH TO THE BOTANY IN ECUADOR THE CONSERVATION OF THE CORDILLERA DEL CONDOR

Muskegon area map:

http://us.i1.yimg.com/us.yimg.com/i/travel/dg/maps/4f/750x750_michigan_m.gif

Cotopaxi view from Quito – From a presentation by S. Ron entitled: ECUADOR PAÍS MEGADIVERSO

Blue Roses:

<http://www.rdrop.com/~paul/detressebleu.jpg>

Spectacled Bear:

<http://animaltrial.com/animals/bearpicturesfolder/spectacledbearpictures/spectacledbearpictures.html>

SITES TO VISIT TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT ECUADOR

Cuy: http://www.ecuadorexplorer.com/html/ecuador_food.html

Rose Exporters: <http://www.cuencanet.com/roses/employees.htm>

Culture and people of Ecuador: <http://www.ecuadorexplorer.com/> and <http://www.globalvolunteers.org/1main/ecuador/ecuadorpeople.htm>

Spectacled Bear:

<http://animaltrial.com/animals/bearpicturesfolder/spectacledbearpictures/spectacledbearpictures.html>

Latin American Network Information Center:

<http://lanic.utexas.edu/>