Tragedy in the Jungle

Directions: Read the story and complete the worksheets.

Within the lush Melghat rainforest in central India lives a colony of magnificent but endangered beasts – 70 Bengal tigers. They are the last of hundreds that roamed the region less than 100 years ago. The Indian government has passed laws to protect the tigers. But there's a big problem: the laws threaten human lives.

The tigers of the Melghat Tiger Reserve share the area with the Korku, a tribe of forest dwellers. To protect the tigers, the government has barred the Korku from using the Melghat. The government wants to move 11 Korku villages out of the reserve. An additional 39 villages,

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which are on the fringes, will be allowed to remain. But villagers may no longer gather firewood or food or graze cattle in the reserve.

For the Korku, the laws are a threat to their very survival. Once nomadic, the Korku were forced to live in settlements in the 19th century when Britain ruled India. They became farmers, but depended on the forest for fruits, nuts, roots, and firewood.

It is a difficult way of life. Since 1993, hundreds of Korku children have died because they did not have enough food. Without the reserves' resources, even more would perish.

"The officials keep talking about saving the tiger. Don't they care about people?" asks Sonaji Dhande, a farmer. "If we leave the forest, our Korku tradition will vanish."

The Korku's plight is reflected across India. At least eight million people live in or around India's 23 tiger reserves. The reserves are home to 3,000 tigers that have managed to survive illegal hunting and the destruction of their habitat. Now, conservation laws are making it hard for humans and tigers to live together.

In January of 1997, the government decided to stop forcing villagers to move out of the reserve. It wants them to move voluntarily. Under the Indian constitution, the government must provide food, shelter, schooling, and medical care for the children of tribal people, a

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promise not always kept.

Conservationists admit they do not know what to do with the villagers. “There is so much hunger outside the reserves. Where do we settle them?” asks P. K. Sen, director of Project Tiger, India’s program to save tigers.

The villagers of the Melghat insist that they are not a threat to the great cats that have been their neighbours for so many years. “We have no quarrel with the tiger,” says Onkar Shikari, an elderly Korku. “We respect one another.”

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Tragedy in the Jungle
Continued

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Directions: Answer the questions.

1. **In what country does the tragedy mentioned take place?**

2. **When did the Indian government decide to stop forcing villagers out?**

3. **Summarise the issue in your own words.**

4. **Illustrate a picture of what a Korku village might look like.**

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5. **What ideas can you add to solutions already mentioned in the article?**

6. **What if the villagers stay in the Reserve? What do you think will happen to the tigers?**

7. **Do you agree with the Indian government? Why or why not?**

8. **Place the following in order of priority: the Indian children, the tigers, the Indian government, the Reserve, the Korku village.**

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The picture below is a fictional illustration of people from the Korku village in India. At one time in the nineteenth century, when Britain ruled India, these people were nomads forced to live in settlements. Use the picture below to answer the questions at the bottom of the page.

1. What are the people doing in the picture?

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2. **What can you learn from this picture about the lifestyle of the Korku villagers?**

3. **Do the Korku people have a primitive lifestyle? Explain your answer.**

4. **Looking at the picture, what would be the danger for tigers living near the village?**

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Document-Based Extension Activities

Work independently or in a small group to complete the following.

1. Based on the picture and the information in the article, do you think the changes to the Korku villagers are necessary to save the tigers? When do you think the protection of animals should surpass the needs of people? When does the protection of wildlife go too far?

2. What criteria could be used to determine when people should step in to save wildlife? What are the pros and cons of intervening on behalf of wildlife – whether plants or animals?

3. What laws have been passed in your area concerning the protection of wildlife? How do these laws compare or contrast with those written by the Indian government?

4. Write an essay expressing your opinion of the Korku villagers and the Bengal tigers.

5. Design a poster that Korku villagers could post to try and save their village.

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6. Write a journal entry as if you were a member of the Korku village. What would it feel like to be forced to leave your home? How would you feel about the tigers?

7. Research the Bengal tiger. Where can these animals be found? What do they eat? What do they need to survive? Why are they threatened? What is their habitat like? Has this type of tiger been bred in captivity? Analyse your findings. What suggestions can you make to the Indian government about what to do with the Bengal tigers that are being threatened?

8. Look back at the article, "Tragedy in the Jungle," and underline examples that you can use to show how the Korku villages need to be taken into consideration. What other options can be considered to allow the Korku villagers and the tigers to share the Reserve?

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