

The Agouti are a Keystone Species in the Amazon

The agouti are shy rodents that live in the Amazon rainforest. They weigh about ten pounds and have very sharp front teeth (incisors) that they use for gnawing on things. They spend their days on the forest floor gnawing on plants, fruits, and seeds.

There is one thing that the agouti does that makes it stand out among other forest rodents. When an agouti chews through a seed pod and releases its seeds, it eats some of them and buries the rest for later. Sometimes the buried seeds grow into new plants and trees. This has earned the agouti the nickname – *seed spreader*. This behavior has also made the agouti an important part of the Amazon rainforest habitat. Their role is so important that scientists call the agouti a **keystone species**. That means that if the agouti disappeared, it would affect the ecosystem in a big way.

There is at least one living thing that would struggle to reproduce without the agouti and that is the mighty Brazil nut tree. The agouti is the only animal that can open the thick seed pods to release the 25 or so nutritious seeds inside. It will bury the seeds it doesn't eat and, when there is enough sunlight and moisture, some of those seeds will grow into new Brazil nut trees.



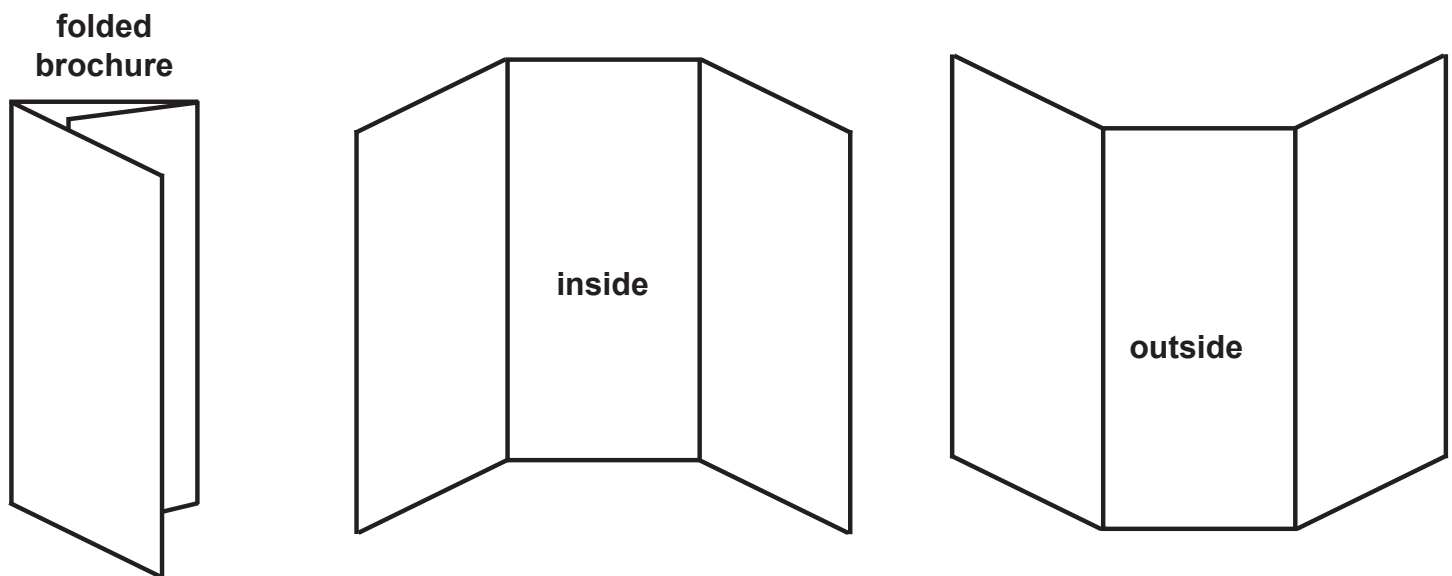
Keystone Species - Descriptive Brochure - Performance Task

Keystone species are organisms that have a major influence on **balancing their ecosystem**. After reading about the keystone species you have chosen, create a descriptive brochure about them. Describe where to find them (range), in which kinds of habitats, what they look like (physical traits) and eat (diet). Include how they affect the other organisms that live near them. Most importantly, include the vital role they play in their ecosystem and if they are endangered. After reading *the Rodent, the Bee, and the Brazil Nut Tree*, choose between the two keystone species from the book – the agouti or the orchid bee.

Brochure Layout

To create your brochure, take a regular sheet of paper and fold it twice to create a 3-panel brochure template. Look closely at the template below so you can see what the folded brochure shape looks like. Here are some tips about how to put your information into your brochure.

- 1) Create a “dummy” brochure first to map out where you want everything to go.
- 2) Arrange your information into sections in an organized way in each panel.
- 3) You can cross panels with pictures and diagrams as needed.
- 4) Make the titles of each section clear and short.
- 5) Each section title text should be bigger than the informational text, so it stands out.
- 6) The biggest title should be on the front panel.
- 7) Include a small picture on the front panel.
- 8) Leave a margin between text and the edge of each panel.



Keystone Species Brochure Diagram - Example

Here is an example layout for making a keystone species brochure (or any performance task brochure). Follow the directions in the “Description Brochure - Performance Task” instructions.

