

# The Girl and the Little Tapir



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Maya loved rainforest mammals more than anything. She read about them, drew them, and wrote notes in her little canvas satchel. Her black hair bounced in two short puffy buns as she ran to the table. Today she would study a new animal. She opened her book and smiled her gap-toothed smile.



The page showed a little tapir, round and sturdy like a large dog. It had a dark brown coat with pale cream spots and stripes fading along its back. Its short flexible snout wiggled in the picture. Maya traced its small rounded ears with one finger. Her tiny green leaf-shaped birthmark on her wrist seemed to glow with excitement.



Maya read that tapirs live in the rainforest, near rivers and thick green trees. They need water to drink and leaves to eat. They need shady places to hide and rest. “A healthy forest gives them everything,” she whispered. She pulled on her red sneakers and yellow leaf-print t-shirt. Today, she would build a model of their home.



Maya cleared the big table and set out her supplies. She used blue-green paper for a river and brown clay for tall trees. She added soft moss for the forest floor. “Every animal needs a home,” she said. She drew a smiling face in the river’s currents and gave it soft foamy edges like hair. The river seemed to welcome her.



Next, Maya shaped the trees. She gave them thick trunks with kind bark faces and wide green canopies. Bright leaf eyes peeked from the branches. She hung tiny vines and paper orchids from their arms. "We give food and shelter," the trees seemed to say. Maya patted their mossy beards and added tiny fruit.



Maya placed the little tapir in the model. It stood by the river, its cream spots and stripes fading along its back. Its short flexible snout sniffed the water. "Hello, little tapir," Maya said. "This is your home." She added small animal figures: a monkey, a toucan, a frog, and a butterfly. They all gathered near the river.



The river in the model sparkled with blue-green water. Maya made a friendly face from the currents, with sparkling light-blue eyes. She floated garlands of leaves and small flowers on the surface. "Water for everyone," the river seemed to sing. The tapir dipped its snout and drank. The monkey swung from a tree branch and chattered happily.



Maya looked at her model and thought about the real rainforest. The trees gave fruit and leaves for food. Their branches offered safe places to sleep. The river gave fresh water to drink and cool mud to roll in. "A healthy forest supports many species," she said. She wrote that sentence in her nature notes with a little star.



But Maya noticed something missing. The animals needed more space to hide and play. She added more trees with wide canopies and hanging vines. She made the river wider and added soft banks. “Now there is room for everyone,” she said. The little tapir trotted happily between the trees and the water.



Maya added a family of frogs near the riverbank. She placed a sleepy sloth in a tree fork. A bright parrot perched on a branch. Each animal found food, water, and shelter in the model. "The forest is like a big, busy home," Maya said. Her round cheeks glowed with pride. She moved the tapir gently to the river's edge.



Then Maya saw a problem. The paper river began to droop, and one tree leaned sideways. “Oh no!” she gasped. She did not want the tapir’s home to fall apart. She thought about how real forests stay strong. The trees hold the soil, and the river flows gently. Maya fetched tape and gentle hands. She fixed the riverbank and propped the tree upright.



As she worked, Maya remembered that every part helps the others. The trees need water from the river. The river needs tree roots to keep its banks strong. The animals need both. “We all share one big, healthy home,” she said. She added a tiny sign made of a leaf that read “Healthy Forest.” The tapir seemed to nod its gentle head.



Maya stepped back and looked at her model. The river smiled with its foamy edges. The trees opened their branches like welcoming arms. The little tapir stood among the animals, safe and happy. “You need the rainforest to stay green and strong,” Maya told the tapir. “And the rainforest needs us to care for it.”



Maya called her family to see the model. "This is a tropical river habitat," she said. "The river gives water. The trees give food and shelter. All the animals live together." Her family clapped. Her little brother pointed at the tapir. "It's smiling!" he said. Maya laughed. The model showed how one healthy forest supports many species.



That night, Maya drew a picture of the little tapir in her notebook. She wrote: "A healthy forest gives food, water, and shelter to many species. The little tapir needs the rainforest to stay green and strong." She drew the river with a smile and the trees with kind faces. She felt warm and happy inside.



Maya placed her model on a shelf where she could see it every day. The girl, the tapir, and all the animals shared one big, healthy home. She knew that even small hands could help big forests. “One day I’ll visit a real rainforest,” she whispered. And the little tapir in her model seemed to wink, ready for the next adventure.