

# 1. THE SONORAN DESERT

Study the geographic location of the Sonoran Desert and characteristics of desert environments, plants, and animals.

## ARIZONA SCIENCE STANDARDS

SC03-S4C3-01&04,  
SC04-S6C3-01&02

## OBJECTIVES

Students should:

- locate the Sonoran Desert within political and geographic boundaries.
- describe what happens to the little rain that falls on the desert.
- explain why plants and animals can live in the desert.

## MATERIALS

- green and blue markers, crayons, or colored pencils for each student
- a copy of *Student Handouts - The Sonoran Desert* and *Sonoran Desert Region Map* for each student

## VOCABULARY

**Adaptation**  
**Evaporate**  
**Habitat**  
**Nocturnal**

## GETTING READY

Prepare the materials as listed in the left margin of this page.

## DOING THE ACTIVITY

### SETTING THE STAGE

- 1) Have students read *The Sonoran Desert*. Discuss the information with students and introduce new terms.
- 2) Review the water cycle.

### MAP ACTIVITY

Pass out *The Sonoran Desert Region Map* and markers. Give students a few minutes to review the map. Have students do the following as you ask the related questions:

- a) Trace the outline of the Sonoran Desert with their finger. Shade the Sonoran Desert in light green. In which countries is it found? (Mexico and United States)
- b) List the states in both Mexico and the United States in which the Sonoran Desert is found. (Sonora, Baja California, Baja California Sur, California, Arizona)
- c) Locate Tucson. Is it within the boundaries of the Sonoran Desert? (yes)
- d) Locate Nogales. Is it within the Sonoran Desert? (No)
- e) Color the Gulf of California and Pacific Ocean in blue. Point out that much of the Sonoran Desert is along the coast.
- f) Locate the 6 labeled rivers (*ríos* in Spanish). Trace these in blue. Tell students that the areas along these rivers are called riparian corridors. Many animals from the desert visit these areas, but some of the plants

and animals in the riparian corridors have different adaptations than those found away from water.

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- 1) Have students pretend they are in the desert as a storm approaches, drenches the area with rain, and eventually disappears. Ask them to write a story describing their experience. Some things you might want them to consider include how they would feel; what they would do; what animals may be doing; the changes in the temperature, sunlight, and moisture; water flow; and sounds.
- 2) Provide students with more detailed maps so they can better understand the diversity within this region. Have them add more details to their maps, such as mountain ranges, additional waterways, historic tribal territory, current Indian reservations, and National Parks.



## The Sonoran Desert

### What Is A Desert?

Deserts are dry places. Most get less than 10 inches of rain each year. The hot desert sun and dry winds quickly **evaporate** most moisture.

Desert rains often come in big bursts during the summer monsoon. Flooding is common and rainwater quickly flows off the land into washes. From washes, much of the water runs off or evaporates, and some of it sinks into the sand.

### How Can Plants and Animals Live Here?

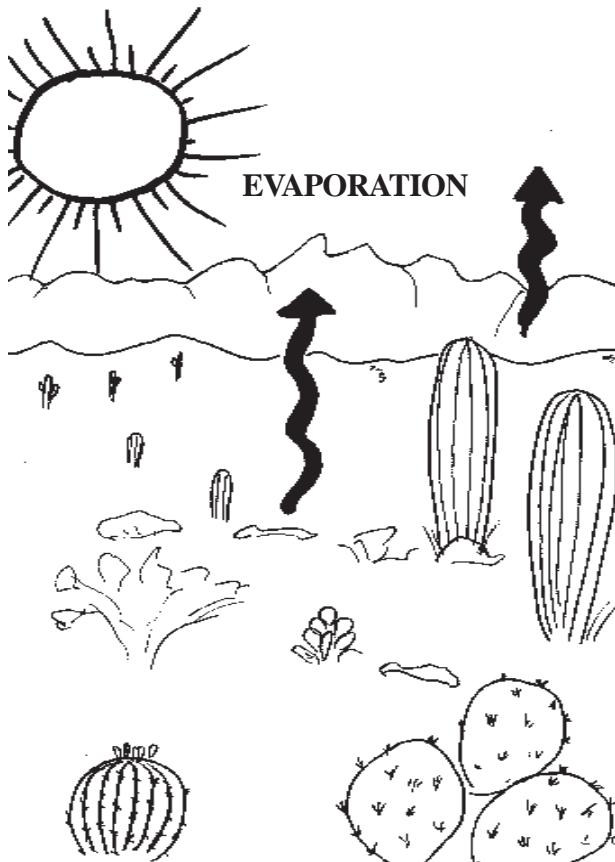
The desert is the **habitat** of many different plants and animals. They are **adapted** to live in this environment. They are very good at surviving on little water. An **adaptation** is a feature of a plant or animal that allows it to survive. For example,

many desert animals are **nocturnal**. They spend the hot, dry days keeping cool in underground burrows and don't come out to find food until the sun has set. This is a behavioral adaptation that helps them stay cool and conserve water. Some animals, such as the kangaroo rat, do not need to drink water. They get most of the water they need from their food. Many desert plants are covered with a thick, waxy "skin" to help keep water inside. These are other examples of adaptations.

Can you think of other ways desert plants and animals are adapted to life in the desert?

### The Sonoran Desert

The Sonoran Desert is a special place. It has more plants and animals than most other deserts in the world! Study the map of the Sonoran Desert given to you by your teacher.



## The Sonoran Desert Region

