



Theme: Animals (Grades K-2)

Pre-Visit Activity #1 Animal Sort

Overview:

In this activity students will learn about the characteristics of desert animals.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to sort desert animals (pictures) into one of four categories: mammals, reptiles, birds and insects.
- Students will know the characteristics of these four groups.

Materials:

- Pictures of desert animals

Activity Part A:

Have the students work in small groups to sort the desert animal cards into four piles according to the animal group they fit into. Examples of the cards would be:

Birds: Roadrunner Gambel's Quail	Insects: Thistledown Velvet Ant Honeypot Ant
Reptiles: Sidewinder Snake Desert Tortoise Gila Monster	Mammals: Jackrabbit Gray Fox Desert Cottontail Kangaroo Rat

Activity Part B:

Read a list of characteristics that one of the desert animals may possess and see if the students can identify the animal. For example:

- I move across the desert floor by throwing my body sideways.
- Who am I? (sidewinder snake)
- Where do I live? (in the desert / under a rock / in the shade)
- What do I eat? (small rodents, small reptiles, eggs)
- Who eats me? (roadrunner, hawk)

When students identify the animal that matches the characteristics described, show the picture of the animal.

Roadrunner:

- Roadrunners are quick enough to catch and eat rattlesnakes.
- Roadrunners prefer walking or running and attain speeds up to 17 mph.
- The roadrunner feeds almost exclusively on other animals, including insects, scorpions, lizards, snakes, rodents and other birds. Up to 10 % of its winter diet may consist of plant material due to the scarcity of desert animals at that time of the year.

Gambel's Quail:

- They can be spotted by the plumage on their heads.
- They move about by walking, and can move surprisingly fast through brush and undergrowth.
- They rarely fly.

Thistledown Velvet Ant:

- Fur coat keeps it cool.
- White coat reflects the sun.
- Eat citrus fruits.

Honeypot Ant:

- Certain members called “repletes” store nectar in their abdomen so that during a dry spell they can regurgitate it for others.
- By living up to sixteen feet underground, they save enough moisture for the repletes.

Sidewinder Snake:

- Live in sandy deserts with little or no vegetation, or sometimes rocky hills
- Often hide under rocks for shade.
- Move in the sideways fashion to avoid slithering along hot desert ground.
- Diet consists primarily of mice, kangaroo rats and lizards.

Desert Tortoise:

- Dig deep holes to catch the rain water.
- Eat moisture rich plants.
- Can store water in its bladder to help during the dry season.
- Stay in shaded areas.
- Skin is resistant to drying out.

Gila Monster:

- One of two venomous lizards in the world – the other being the Mexican Beaded Lizard.
- Venom in their saliva – bites hard and holds on tightly.
- No known danger to humans.
- Heavy and slow moving can get up to 2 feet long.
- Saliva is used in Diabetes research – regulates sugar in blood.
- Has large body, and can consume large amounts of food during a brief period.
- Needs to feed infrequently because it can store fat in its tail.

Jackrabbit:

- Herbivores, meaning their diet consists of only plants.
- Average height is 2 ft.
- Average life span is 1-5 yrs.
- Typically like to live in valleys and flat, open country.

Gray Fox:

- The only fox in North America that can climb trees – strong hooked claws climb for prey.
- They descend by jumping from tree to tree.
- Nocturnal – sleep in dens.
- Gray foxes are solitary hunters – omnivores.
- Their scat and urine have a distinct skunk smell – marking of territory.
- Their primary prey is the next door neighbor – cottontails.
- Hides in trees during days to stay cool, comes down to hunt at night.
- Has good night vision and hearing to help it hunt at night.

Merriam's Kangaroo Rat:

- Can jump 6 feet.
- Does not need to drink much water because the seeds it stores underground trap moisture before it eats them.
- Special kidneys concentrate its urine so that the water is absorbed back into the bloodstream.
- Burrows underground to stay cool during hot times and warm during cold time.

Desert Cottontail:

- Stays less active during extremely hot times.
- Its big ears help to dissipate heat because of the many blood vessels in them minimizing water lost due to sweating and panting.
- Burrows underground to avoid extreme temperatures.
- Gets its water from plants.

Suggested Reading:

1. ***A Tomas the Tortoise Adventure–One Hot Day*** by Mike Miller. Readers join Tomas the Tortoise as he travels from Red Rock to Lake Mead, meeting many of his desert friends along the way.
2. ***Meet the Wild Southwest*** by Susan J. Tweit. Provides many different facts about plants and animals of the Southwest.
3. ***Kissing Coyotes*** by Marcia Vaughan, Kenneth J. Spence. Readers get a glimpse of different desert animals as Jackrabbit brags about his bravery.
4. ***My Five Senses*** by Aiki. Learn more about how you use your own senses.
5. ***The Magic School Bus: All Dried Up*** by Joanna Cole. Mrs. Frizzle’s class learns about desert animals.
6. ***Animal Senses*** by Janine Scott. Readers learn about how animals use their senses.
7. ***Voices from the Wild*** by David Bouchard. This winner of a 1997 Lee Bennett Hopkins Poetry Award features poems about how animals use their senses.
8. ***Alejandro’s Gift*** by Richard E. Albert. A lonely man living in the desert builds an oasis to attract the desert animals around him. Inspires children’s appreciation for the desert’s beauty.
9. ***The Desert Is Theirs*** by Byrd Baylor. This beautifully illustrated 1976 Caldecott Honor Book depicts animal life and adaptations in the desert.
10. ***Draw Desert Animals*** by Doug DuBosque. Inspires creative kids to draw animals like the ones they see in Desert Discovery.