

27. “The Sonoran Desert Habitat”

by Core Knowledge Staff

There are many deserts all over the world. You know you’re in a desert when it doesn’t rain very much. Many deserts can also be very hot. Because it’s so hot and dry, not too many plants or animals can live there.

The Sonoran Desert is in the southwestern part of the United States and the northwestern part of Mexico. The temperature is quite hot during the day, and it doesn’t rain very much. The heat and lack of rain make it hard for plants and animals to live in the desert. They must all be specially adapted to live in the hot weather and survive with very little rain.

How do they do it? Some plants can save and store water inside their plant parts when it does rain. Other plants grow only in shady areas near mountains or rocks.

Since there are very few plants that can be used as shelter, the animals that have adapted to living in the desert often make their homes underground. Living underground helps them to stay cool when it gets hot, and keeps them hidden from other animals that may want to eat them for lunch!

The saguaro cactus is the world’s largest cactus. Cacti don’t have leaves. They have prickly spines instead. The incredible saguaro lives for up to two hundred years. In that time can grow as high as a house and weigh as much as several cars! The most amazing thing about the saguaro is that it is a habitat in itself. Not only does it manage to thrive in the desert habitat, but it provides food, water, and shelter to many different animals.

It hardly ever rains in the desert, but when it does, the saguaro cactus saves and stores huge amounts of water in its roots and stems. The cactus saves the extra water and uses it to survive during those times when it is very dry and does not rain.

In the spring, white flowers grow on the saguaro. At night, when the desert cools down, these flowers open to show sweet nectar, which butterflies, bats, and birds feed on before the flowers close the next day when it once again becomes very hot. In the summer, red fruit begins to grow on the saguaro. Many animals eat the fruit of the cactus.

Word Count: 387

NAME: _____

QUESTIONS

DATE: _____

Comprehension Questions

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Assess each student’s comprehension of the selection by asking him or her to respond orally to the following questions one on one with you:

1. **Literal** What makes the Sonoran Desert a hard place to live?
 - » heat and lack of rain
2. **Literal** How do plants survive in the Sonoran Desert?
 - » Some plants save and store water inside their plant parts; other plants grow in shady areas near mountains or rocks.
3. **Literal** How do animals survive in the Sonoran Desert?
 - » They live underground.
4. **Inferential** What is unique about the saguaro cactus?
 - » It is a habitat in itself, providing food, water, and shelter to many different animals.