Activities

Surprises of the Deserts

Grades: 3–5, 6–8

Overview
Children visit a series of websites and learn about desert temperatures and climate, plants and animals, peoples, cultures and ecosystems.

Tour Itinerary
Deserts (Virtual Biome)
http://mbgnet.mobot.org/sets/desert/index.htm
Desert Life (Desert USA)
http://www.desertusa.com/life.html
Big Bend National Park
http://www.nps.gov/bibe/index.htm
Introduction
Did you know that desert temperatures drop from 100 degrees Fahrenheit to the 40s or 50s within hours? Or that deserts receive only 10 inches of rainfall a year — but the rains come in torrential downpours? Can you believe that a fascinating array of plants and animals live within this barren habitat? You're in for a world of surprises as we visit sites loaded with desert facts and photos!
Let's start our journey at the Deserts area of the Missouri Botanical Garden's Virtual Biomes site. This is the place to learn basic facts, such as desert rainfalls, temperatures, and locations. Find out what causes desert temperatures to drop so low when the sun goes down. Then explore interesting facts about hot and cold deserts around the world — from unique geographical features to examples of wildlife — and see how no two deserts are alike.
Many plants and animals live in deserts — in fact, they thrive in this ecosystem. In order to survive, desert wildlife has adapted to the environment. To see vivid examples of this adaptation, explore the Desert Plants area and learn about the thorns of the Fish Hook Cactus. Then check out Desert Animals and look at the Sidewinder. What features do these plants and animals have to help them survive in the desert?
Make your next stop Desert Life, at the Desert USA site. Here you'll find in-depth information and colorful images of more desert plants and animals. Plus, meet People of the Desert and learn about ancient civilizations, like the Anasazi, who created large, adobe pueblos and colorful pottery, as well as present-day peoples, like the Apache Native Americans of the American Southwest.
Now that we've done our research, let's visit a desert! We'll head down to Texas to visit Big Bend National Park. Big Bend encompasses desert environments, but also mountains and rivers. Take a virtual hike in the park by watching the desert panoramas of the Dorgan House and the volcanic badlands. Visit the Nature and Science section to learn more about the animals and plants of this habitat.

Subjects:
Deserts, Temperature and Climate, Plants and Animals, People and Cultures