

Lesson Plan: Animals of the Chihuahuan Desert

4th-6th



Lesson Summary

The Chihuahuan Desert is considered to be one of the most diverse deserts in the Western Hemisphere and many different animals not only survive but thrive in this environment. In this lesson, students will learn about some of the animals and their characteristics.

Learning Objectives

Students will learn:

- How the environment in the Chihuahuan Desert plays a role in the survival of the animals.
- To recognize the unique characteristics of some of the animals of the Chihuahuan Desert.
- Interesting facts about the animals.

Background Information/Historical Context (For staff/teachers)

At about 250,000 square miles, the Chihuahuan Desert covers a large portion of North America from northern Mexico through the southwestern United States. It is home to around 1,000 different species of animals. Each of these animals have specific characteristics that help them survive in the desert. See the resource file for background information on a few of the animals in the Chihuahuan Desert and the ways in which they survive in their environments.

Preparing the Lesson

- Read the background information.
 - See Resource File 1 – All About the Animals!
 - Animal Fact Sheets Provided:
 1. Western diamondback rattlesnake
 2. Desert cottontail
 3. Javelina
 4. Coyote
 5. Gambel's quail
 6. Roadrunner
 7. Mountain lion
 8. White-tailed deer
- Print or download example photos
 - See Resource File 4 – Related Images
- Print or download the vocabulary page.
 - See Resource File 2 – Related Vocabulary
- Print or download the coloring pages
 - See Resource File 3 – Coloring Pages
- Gather the materials needed for the hands-on activities you choose to use in your classroom.

Materials Needed

- Writing instrument
- Access to library, books, or computers for research
- Blank paper or Animals Fact Sheet template provided
- Scissors
- Green cardstock
- Plain printer paper
- Measuring tape
- Painters tape
- Colored pencils, crayons, or markers

Teacher Presentation

- Talk about the environment of the Chihuahuan Desert and some of the animals who live there.
 - See Resource File 1 – All About the Animals!
- Introduce the related vocabulary list.
 - See Resource File 2 – Related Vocabulary
- Talk about predator vs. prey
- Complete hands-on activities which reinforce learning objectives.

Essential Questions to Ask

- Why does the environment of the Chihuahuan Desert make it difficult for animals to survive?
- What are some of the characteristics of desert animals?
- Which animals do you think are the scariest?
- Would any of the animals make good pets? Why or why not?

Activities

Activity: How High Can You Jump?

In this activity your students will compare their vertical jump to the jump of some of the animals discussed in this lesson plan, including the mountain lion and roadrunner.

Please see the resource files for detailed instruction on How High Can You Jump.

Activity: Create Your Own Animal Fact Sheet

The Chihuahuan Desert is home to more than 170 species of animals. In this activity, your students will select another animal found in the Chihuahuan Desert and create their own Animal Fact Sheet following the same template found in Resource File 1 including the animal's physical characteristics, diet, habitat, senses, predators, and additional interesting facts. Students can work either individually or in pairs to do research on an animal of their choice (that is not one of the eight provided in this lesson plan).

Please see the resource files for detailed instructions on Create Your Own Animal Fact Sheet.

Activity: Act it Out! Predator vs. Prey

In this activity students are presented with a simple scenario to get them thinking about the predator-prey relationship between animals that live in the Chihuahuan Desert, particularly in this case, the relationship between a coyote and a desert cottontail.

Please see the resource files for detailed instructions on Act it Out! Predator vs. Prey.

Extension Activity: Coloring Pages

See Resource File 3 for coloring pages of each animal highlighted in this lesson plan.

New Mexico State Standards

Please see Resource File 5 for a list of benchmarks and standards for this lesson.

Resources/Citations:

Please see Resource File 6 for a list of resources and citations for the background information.

Questions and Comments

We would love to hear from you and your students. Let us know about the fun you have learning about animals in the Chihuahuan Desert! Send us photos of you and your students doing some of your favorite activities from this lesson. Please contact the instructional coordinator, Alexandra McKinney, with any questions or comments at alexandra.mckinney@state.nm.us.