

Animal Life in the American Desert

Lesson Plan

Grade Level: K–8

Curriculum Focus: Biomes

Lesson Duration: Two class periods

Student Objectives

- Explore the five environments in California: ocean, mountains, desert, city, and suburbs.
- Produce a skit dramatizing events that occurred in each environment.
- Perform the skits for their classmates.

Materials

- Discovery School video on *unitedstreaming: The Jeff Corwin Experience: California: Desert and Coast*. Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

Selected clips that support this lesson plan:

- Tracking a White Shark (04:03)
 - Tracking a Black Bear (03:46)
 - Hunting Snakes (05:53)
 - Looking for the Bobcat (04:21)
 - The Mojave Rattlesnake (03:48)
 - Looking for Bighorn Sheep (02:56)
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- Computer(s) with Internet access
 - Newsprint and markers
 - Paper and pencils

Procedures

1. Begin the lesson by showing students *The Jeff Corwin Experience: Desert and Coast*. Tell students to pay attention to the different environments.
2. Ask students which environments were featured in the video. Write their responses on a sheet of newsprint. They should identify the following:
 - ocean
 - mountains

- city (Hollywood)
 - desert (Mojave)
 - suburbs (of Palm Springs)
3. Tell students that they will work in small groups to produce a skit about one of these environments. The skit should describe the environment, at least one animal that lives there, and one event that took place, according to the video.
 4. Divide students into five groups, and assign an environment to each one. If possible, let students watch the appropriate segment again to refresh their memories about events in their environment. Encourage students to be creative and add their own details about the environment or the animals. The following Web sites have additional information about some animals in California.

Great White Shark

- <http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/vertebrates/Doug/shark.html>
- <http://news-service.stanford.edu/news/2002/january9/sharks-a.html>
- <http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/sharks/species/Greatwhite.shtml>

American Bear

- <http://www.bear-tracker.com/bear.html>
- <http://www.crcd.org/bearfact.html>
- <http://danr.ucop.edu/ihrmp/oak43.htm>

California Rattlesnake

- http://www.fisheyesoup.com/article_details/133.html
- <http://www.calpoison.org/public/rattler.html>

California Bobcat

- http://www.desertusa.com/april96/du_bcat.html
- <http://www.exn.ca/AnimalTracks/RadioTracking/Story1.cfm>
- <http://dSPACE.dial.pipex.com/town/plaza/abf90/bobcat.htm>

Mojave Green Rattlesnake

- <http://www.wildherps.com/species/C.scutulatus.html>
- <http://digital-desert.com/wildlife/mojave-green-rattlesnake.html>
- <http://www.enature.com/fieldguide/showSpeciesRECNUM.asp?recNum=AR0130>

California Bighorn Sheep

- <http://www.bcadventure.com/adventure/wilderness/animals/bighorn.htm>
- <http://www.desertusa.com/big.html>
- <http://www.sierrabighorn.org/>



5. Give students time in class to work on their skits. Suggest that they assign roles, such as director, chief scriptwriter, and actors. Recommend to students that they write a short script before they begin acting; all should participate in that process.
6. During the next class period, give students a few minutes to practice their skits. Then ask for volunteers to act them out for the class. Encourage all the groups to perform for the class.
7. Conclude the lesson by asking students what they learned from this activity. Were they aware of the different environments in California? Were they aware that each environment is home to interesting animals? Were they aware of the work involved in keeping the animals safe?

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students were highly engaged in class and group discussions; worked very well in their group to write an interesting skit; did an excellent job performing the skit for the class.
- **2 points:** Students participated in class and group discussions; worked well in their group to write a satisfactory skit; did a good job performing the skit for the class.
- **1 point:** Students participated minimally in class and group discussions; had difficulty working with their group to write a skit; did not perform the skit satisfactorily for the class.

Vocabulary

American black bear

Definition: A common North American bear that lives in forests, is omnivorous, and has a glossy black or dark brown coat

Context: The American black bear is mostly nocturnal, but occasionally it can be spotted during the day.

bighorn sheep

Definition: A wild sheep of the mountains of western North America, the male of which has massive curved horns

Context: Jeff Corwin helped scientists capture and examine two bighorn sheep to determine the health of some members of this endangered species.

bobcat

Definition: A member of the cat family; the species *Felis rufus* lives in California.

Context: Jeff Corwin helped park rangers return a bobcat to the wild.

great white shark

Definition: The largest predator of the sea, a cartilaginous fish

Context: During this trip to California, Jeff Corwin saw a great white shark alive for the first time.

Mojave green rattlesnake

Definition: A rattlesnake that lives in the Mojave Desert possessing toxic, dangerous venom

Context: The Mojave green rattlesnake's camouflage helps it blend in to its environment.

Academic Standards

National Academy of Sciences

The National Academy of Sciences provides guidelines for teaching science in grades K-12 to promote scientific literacy. To view the standards, visit this Web site:

<http://books.nap.edu/html/nses/html/overview.html#content>.

Grades K-4

- Life Science: Organisms and environments

Grades 5-8

- Life Science: Populations and ecosystems, Diversity and adaptations of organisms

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

- Language Arts – Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media
 - Theater – Demonstrates competence in writing scripts
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Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>

