A Walk in the Desert
by Caroline Arnold

Expository Text tells facts about a topic. In the next selection, you will read about a walk in the desert.

Question of the Week
What can we learn by exploring the desert?
See the bright sun. Feel the dry air. It is hot—very hot! Where are we?

We’re in the desert. Let’s take a walk and see what we can find.

The ground is dry in the desert. It almost never rains. With so little water, it is hard for anything to live. But many plants and animals make their home in this harsh climate. You just have to look closely to see them.

Cactus is one kind of plant that grows in the desert. It doesn’t have leaves. Instead, it has sharp spines. The spines protect the cactus from animals who might want to eat it. A cactus stores water in its stem. It uses the water when there is no rain.
Look up at the tall saguaro. It is a giant among cactus plants. It took many years to grow so tall.

In late spring, white flowers bloom. Birds and insects drink the flowers’ sweet nectar. After the flowers die, a red fruit grows.
The saguaro cactus is home to many desert creatures. *Tap, tap, tap,* pecks a woodpecker. It is carving a hole for its nest. Old holes become nests for other birds.

A hawk is searching for food below. Its sharp eyes can spot even a tiny mouse.
What is that large bird? It’s a roadrunner. Coo, coo, coo, it calls. The roadrunner hardly ever flies, but it can run fast. Watch it chase a lizard to eat.

Here are some other lizards. Lizards need the sun’s heat to warm their scaly bodies. But when it gets too hot, they look for shade.
A rattlesnake lies next to a rock. Its earth colors make it hard to see. Rattlesnakes are dangerous. A bite from one will kill a small animal. If you hear a rattlesnake shake its tail, it is trying to scare you away.

Look! Did you see that rock move? It isn’t a rock at all. It’s a desert tortoise. The hard shell protects the tortoise from enemies and from the hot sun. The tortoise uses its sharp beak to break off tough desert grasses. It sometimes eats cactus fruits, too.
The jack rabbit is also a plant eater. Watch it sniff the early evening air. It is alert to the sounds and smells of the desert. When danger is near, the jack rabbit’s long legs help it to escape quickly.
As night begins to fall, the desert air cools. Animals who were hidden or sleeping come out to hunt and feed. A hungry coyote howls to the moon.

Do you see the small kit fox? Big ears help the fox to hear well so it can track animals to eat.

The cool night is full of activity.
The desert is an exciting place to visit. You can ride a mule along a deep canyon, slide down a sand dune, learn about wildlife at a nature center, or taste sweet jelly made from prickly pear fruit.
You can find deserts all over the world. Not all deserts are alike. Some are hot. Others are cold. But in all deserts there is little rain.

The Gila monster is the only poisonous lizard in the American Desert.

The deserts in South America have very little animal or plant life.

The Gobi Desert is cold and snowy in the winter. Temperatures are often below freezing.

The tiny fennec fox lives in the world’s largest desert—the Sahara.

The Australian Desert is home to the bandicoot.

The dromedary is a one-humped camel found in the sandy Arabian Desert.

Can you find the continent where you live? Is there a desert on it?