

The Desert Is My Mother / El desierto es mi madre

by Pat Mora

A young girl's desert home provides her with everything she needs. Using the metaphor "the desert is my mother," she tells the reader in figurative language how the desert supplies her with food, fun, health, songs, lessons for life and more. Students of all ages can appreciate the child's mood of wonder and awe at her surroundings.



TEACHING OVERVIEW

This beautifully illustrated picture book is simple, but rich in figurative language, such as personification and metaphor. Children from pre-kindergarten to third grade will enjoy the book, which lends itself to a variety of activities and themes. Most often used in a unit on deserts, the book mentions several plants, as well as the changeable desert weather. The book could be used in a broader unit on habitats or communities. However, teachers should help students gain not only an appreciation of the desert, but also the poetry and mood of the book. The text is in both English and Spanish.

COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES

BEFORE READING

PK - Grade 3: Display the cover, read the title, and ask students what they see. As students name the things they see on the cover, list these words on a chart or board. Note the vivid colors. Ask students if they think the girl is happy, sad, or afraid, and ask them to explain why they think so.

Either independently or as group, and using the words on the board, compose a short paragraph predicting what the book is about. This activity will help introduce the vocabulary. Additional words from the book can be introduced during the reading.

AS READING PROGRESSES

PK - K: As you begin to read the book aloud, explain that the desert is a very dry place, where it hardly ever rains. Questions to ask while reading: Have you ever been to the desert? Have you ever eaten prickly pear cactus? Is it possible to have rain on a sunny day? Are you afraid of thunderstorms? Can the desert really talk? Does your mother

ever sing to you?

Grades 1-3: Introduce the author's name, the setting of the book and the only character, who is a dark-haired little girl. Tell students that as you read the book aloud, they are to try to listen for ways in which the desert is like a mother.

AFTER READING

PK - K: Reread the book, but have students call out the second part of the sentences that begin "I say." Ask: What can the desert feed you? How can the desert tease you? How can the desert make you beautiful? How can the desert sing to you? How is the desert like a mother? If multiple copies of the book are available, allow children time to "read" the book in pairs.

Grades 1-3: Have students summarize the ways the desert can be like a mother. Read the book aloud again, but stop in some places and have students complete the sentence. If multiple copies of the book are available, allow students time to read aloud in pairs.

OTHER FOLLOW-UP/EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Have students create a large desert mural. If desert animals have been previously introduced, they could be included.

Listen to a recording of desert sounds.

Spend time outdoors and have students listen silently, making observations and writing down what they see and hear. These notes could be used for writing poetry.

Discuss how the book would be different if it were in a different environment. Have students write a book called *The Forest Is My Mother*, *The Prairie Is My Mother*, or *The Arctic Is My Mother*. This project would require a substantial amount of research and

teacher guidance, but it would enhance students' understanding of various ecosystems.

Have students discuss attributes of fathers. Ask how the book would be different if it were called *The Desert Is My Father*.

Serve prickly pear cactus bites on toothpicks at snack time.

Pass around sprigs of chamomile, oregano, and peppermint. Allow students to smell the different aromas. Provide information on the healing properties of each.

Prepare the book as a Readers' Theatre presentation, with some students reading the English, followed by others reading the Spanish.

CONNECTING WITH THE INTERNET/TECHNOLOGY

Children's books and activities about the desert

<http://www.nps.gov/tont/bookstore/children.doc>

<http://www.superstitionmountainmuseum.org/childrens-books.htm>

Pat Mora

<http://www.patmora.com/>

<http://voices.cla.umn.edu/authors/MORApam.html>

<http://www.eduplace.com/kids/hmr/mtai/mora.html>

Prickly pear cactus

<http://austin.about.com/library/weekly/aa080102a.htm>

VOCABULARY

blossom	oregano
cactus	prickly pear
caress	spiked
chamomile	sprinkles
chants	strokes
glare	tease
heal	turquoise

About the Author

Pat Mora, born in El Paso, Texas, is an award-winning poet and author of books for adults, teens, and children. Her awards include a Poetry Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, a Golden Kite Award, American Library Association Notable Book Awards, and honorary doctorates. A former teacher and university administrator, she is the founder of the family literacy initiative Children's Day, Book Day, El día de los niños / El día de los libros, (Día). The year-long commitment to linking all children to books, languages and cultures, and of sharing what Pat calls "bookjoy," culminates in celebrations across the country in April. Pat lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico and invites you to visit her at www.patmora.com.



OTHER BILINGUAL CHILDREN'S BOOKS BY PAT MORA

The Bakery Lady / La señora de la panadería
ISBN 1-55885-343-X, \$14.95

Delicious Hullabaloo / Pachanga deliciosa
ISBN 1-55885-246-8, \$14.95

The Desert Is My Mother / El desierto es mi madre
ISBN 1-55885-121-6, \$14.95

The Gift of the Poinsettia / El regalo de la flor de Nochebuena
ISBN 1-55885-137-2, \$14.95

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This teaching guide has been prepared by Alloy Multimedia.

Arte Público Press • Piñata Books • University of Houston
4902 Gulf Fwy, Bldg 19, Rm 100 • Houston, TX 77204-2004 • 1-800-633-ARTE • www.artepublicopress.com