

HOME IN THE SONORAN DESERT

In this activity, students study the geographic location of the Sonoran Desert, the challenges the desert environment poses to living things, and the people who have lived here for thousands of years.

OBJECTIVES:

Students should:

- Locate the Sonoran Desert within existing political and geographic boundaries.
- Understand that the ecology of the Sonoran Desert is similar throughout, resulting in similar challenges for survival for its inhabitants.
- Describe where different native groups have settled in the Sonoran Desert region.

MATERIALS:

- A copy of the reading “Home in the Sonoran Desert” for each student
- A copy of the Sonoran Desert Region map for each student
- Tan, blue, yellow, red, and green markers, crayons, or colored pencils

VOCABULARY:

- culture
- native
- natural resources
- Seri
- Tohono O’odham
- traditional
- Yaqui

DOING THE ACTIVITY

Have students read “Home in the Sonoran Desert” and answer the questions at the bottom. Discuss new vocabulary and the answers to the questions. (Answers: 1. little water, high evaporation, 2. careful observation and experimentation, 3. Tohono O’odham, 4. Seri, 5. Yaqui.) Then lead them through the mapping activity.

MAP ACTIVITY

Pass out the Sonoran Desert Region Map and colors. Give students a few minutes to review the map. Have students do the following as you ask the related questions:

- 1.) Trace the outline of the Sonoran Desert with their finger. Shade the Sonoran Desert in tan. In which countries is it found? (Mexico and the U.S.)
- 2.) List the states in the U.S. where the Sonoran Desert is found (Arizona, California) and those in Mexico (Sonora, Baja California, Baja California Sur.) About how much of Arizona’s land area is made up of the Sonoran Desert? (a little less than half.)
- 3.) Locate Tucson (or the city or community where they live.) Is it within the Sonoran Desert boundary? (yes)
- 4.) Color the Gulf of California and the Pacific Ocean blue. Point out that much of the Sonoran Desert is along the coast, and that there are desert islands in the Gulf.
- 5.) Locate the 6 labeled rivers (*ríos* in Spanish) and trace these in blue. Explain that these vital water sources support lush growth of plants that are home to many different animals in the region. Desert people would have settled in these and other areas where water was available in the desert.
- 6.) Have them fill in these landform markings (desert, sea, and rivers) in the corresponding squares on the legend.
- 7.) Have them locate Tucson and the Santa Cruz River. Explain that Tucson was estab-

ARIZONA ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

Strand 4, Geography

Concept 1: The World in Spatial Terms, PO 7

Concept 2: Places and Regions, PO 1, PO 3, PO 4, PO 5

Concept 6: Geographic Applications, PO 1

lished where it is at the base of A Mountain, because the bedrock of the mountain pushed the Santa Cruz River’s waters to the surface here so there was water available year round. Explain that Tucson’s name is derived from the name given it by the native people who lived here for thousands of years, the Tohono O’odham. The name *Chuk Shon* means “black base” and refers to the dark rocks at the base of A Mountain where water was found.

8.) Point out the circles. Explain that these roughly represent the traditional homelands of the three groups of native people you will be studying in your Sonoran Supermarket unit. Review the reading and have them point out which location corresponds to which tribe. Have them color Tohono O’odham traditional lands red, the Yaqui green, and those of the Seri yellow, then fill in the legend for each. Remind them that the Yaqui people also live in the Tucson area.

9.) Reiterate that native groups are very much a vital part of the cultural tapestry that defines our region today, and that even though their homelands may have different boundaries than they did hundreds or even thousands of years ago, their cultures are still centered in these places.

ACTIVITY EXTENSION

Provide students with more detailed maps so they can better understand the diversity within the region. Have them add more ecological details to their maps, such as mountain ranges and grasslands, or have them mark the recognized Indian Tribal lands for the Tohono O’odham and Yaqui in the U.S.

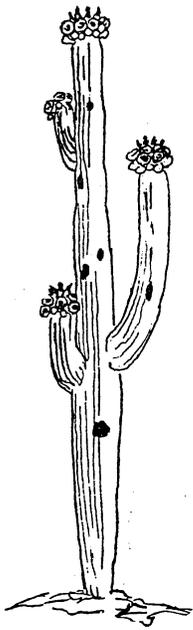
Home in the Sonoran Desert

Name _____

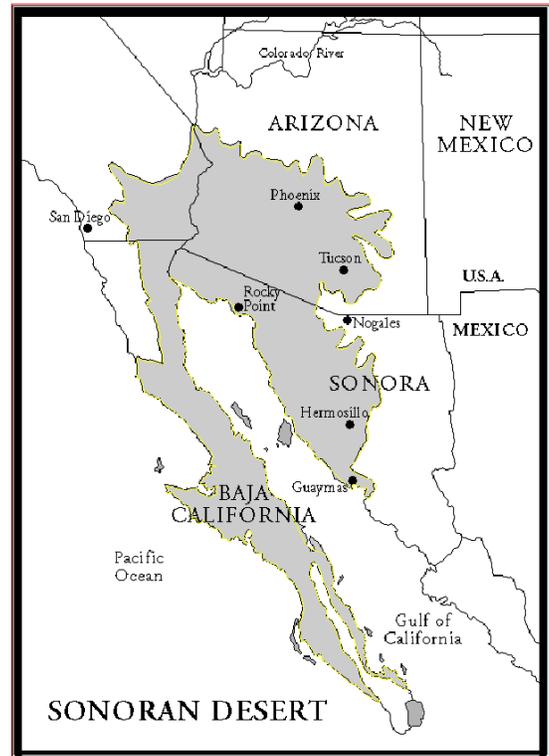
The Sonoran Desert covers a large area in the southwestern U.S. and northwest Mexico. It is a land of extreme temperatures, high evaporation, low rainfall, and little water. But even with its harsh conditions, the Sonoran Desert is full of life. It has more plants and animals than most other deserts in the world. It has also been home to **native** people for thousands of years.

Native people of the Sonoran Desert adapted to this hot, dry land by understanding their environment. They observed when wild plant foods were ready to gather, where animals passed that they could hunt, and which materials made the best shelter. Survival meant being experts in knowledge of their **natural resources**.

Many groups of native people call the Sonoran Desert home. They sometimes traded with native people from much farther away, and this brought new ideas and products to the area. For example, corn was first grown in central Mexico at least 7,000 years ago, but it's been grown in the Tucson area for at least 4,000 years.



When foreign explorers entered the region, beginning with the Spanish almost 500 years ago, they brought many changes. Some cultural traditions were lost, but new beliefs and technologies, including Christianity, wheat, livestock, fruit, and metal tools, became part of the native **culture**. Today native groups still use their **traditional** knowledge to keep their culture alive. Native foods, medicines, and building materials can teach native and newcomers alike how to live well in this desert home.



Our Sonoran Supermarket studies focus on three groups: the **Tohono O'odham**, **Yaqui**, and **Seri**.

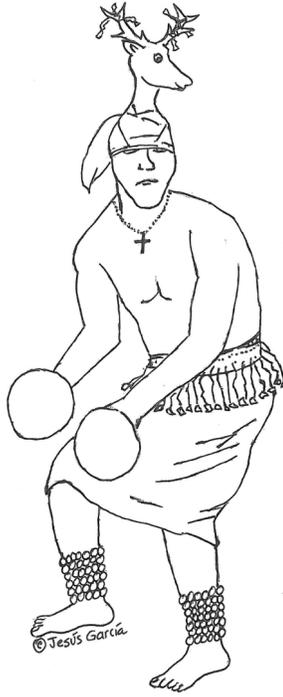
Tohono O'odham

The name **Tohono O'odham** (Toe-HO-no AH-tum) means "Desert People." For thousands of years, the O'odham homelands covered a large area of the Sonoran Desert. Today the Tohono O'odham Nation is the second largest reservation in the U.S., covering 4,460 square miles of Sonoran Desert. More Tohono O'odham communities are found just across the U.S./Mexico border. The tribe has approximately 28,000 members. Many speak the Tohono O'odham language, and children study it in school, though most use English as their first language.



Yaqui (Yoeme)

The **Yaqui** traditional homeland is the Yaqui River Valley in Sonora, Mexico, where they farmed and fished. But Yaqui family groups also lived throughout the Sonoran Desert region. The Yaqui fiercely defended their homeland for more than 400 years against foreign settlers, but many left Mexico to join families in the U.S. Today, about 32,000 Yaquis live in Sonora, and 6,000 in the U.S. Yaqui cultural traditions flourish in southern Arizona. In Tucson, Easter and Deer Dance ceremonies are open to the public and include traditional dancing, music, and masks.



Seri

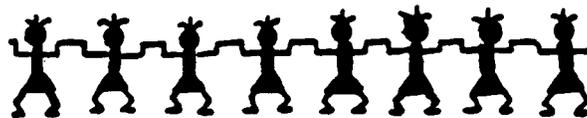
The **Seris** live along the central Gulf of California coast of Sonora, Mexico, across from the largest island in the Gulf, Tiburón. Their homeland is one of the harshest in the Sonoran Desert, with very little rain. Scarce drinking water meant communities had to be small. They had to travel over large areas of both desert and sea to find resources to survive. Today about 1,000 Seris live in two villages north of Kino Bay, Sonora, where they fish and sell baskets and other crafts.

Answer the following questions.

- 1) What are some of the challenges to life in the Sonoran Desert? _____

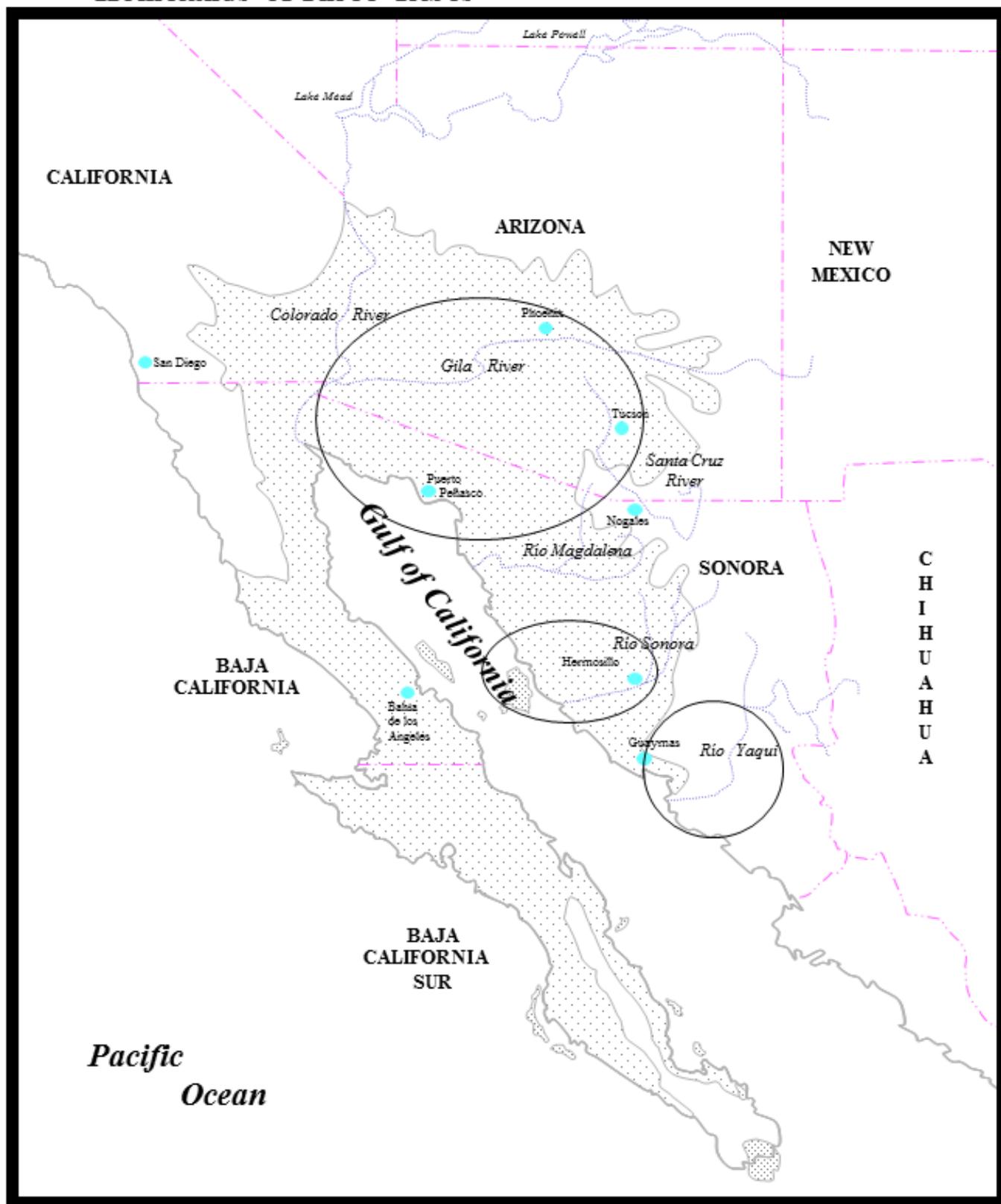
- 2) How did people survive here even with these challenges? _____

- 3) Which native group's name means Desert People? _____
- 4) Which native group depends on resources of the desert and the sea? _____
- 5) Which group is known for its Deer Dances? _____



The Sonoran Desert Region: Homelands of Three Tribes

Name _____



- Legend:**
- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Desert | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rivers | <input type="checkbox"/> | Seri |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Ocean | <input type="checkbox"/> | Tohono O'odham | <input type="checkbox"/> | Yaqui |