

Lost Words of the Desert
Acrostics and Watercolor
Poetry Lesson Plan

Grade Level: Middle/High School

Time Frame: 60 minutes

Objective: Students will learn about plants and animals from the Sonoran Desert by writing acrostics and painting watercolor illustrations.

Prior Knowledge and Skills: Grade level reading and comprehension

Required Materials: Paper, pencil, and excerpt from the book *The Lost Words* by Robert MacFarlane and Jackie Morris

Literary Model: Excerpt from the Lost Words (see end of .pdf)

Sequence of Activities:

1. Welcome and Introduction (5 minutes)

If you have a copy of *The Lost Words*, bring it with you! Share the beautiful illustrations, read a few poems, and highlight the inspiration behind this book, which is to remember parts of the natural world we may have forgotten as we go about our busy, tech-consumed lives. This is a perfect time for a discussion on outdoor adventure. The teacher can elicit personal storytelling from students. Have you walked out into the Sonoran Desert? What did you notice? What did you see or hear? Together, make a list of plants and animals that call the Sonoran Desert home.

Sample lists:

coyote
javelina
bobcat
roadrunner
elf owl
nighthawk
jackrabbit
rattlesnake

mesquite
brittlebush
palo verde
desert lupine

Mexican poppy
barrel cactus
cholla
ironwood tree

Optional: Create a slideshow of some of the lesser-known Sonoran Desert species and use the pictures (or even videos) throughout class as inspiration.

2. Literary Model and Discussion (5-10 minutes)

An acrostic is a poem wherein the poet takes a word (in this case the name of a plant or animal) vertically and then writes each line beginning with each letter. At the end of this lesson plan are two examples from *The Lost Words*.

What do you notice about these poems? Notice that each line need not be a complete sentence, and sometimes the line spills over into the next letter. In other words, each starter letter need not be the beginning of a new thought/phrase. It can carry over from the line preceding it!

3. Collaborative Writing (20-30 minutes)

Pick a word from the desert animals and plants list, perhaps a species with which most people are familiar with, and write a group poem. Students can raise their hands as ideas come to them and the facilitator can call upon students. The facilitator is a compiler of the ideas being shared and should feel free to move words and phrases around to show students how they can creatively play with the vertical and horizontal aspects of the poem.

4. Individual Writing and Illustration (20-30 minutes)

Each student should pick another word from the list and write their own acrostic.

Pass *The Lost Words* around and invite students to explore the large double page illustrations. Using extra-large watercolor paper and large brushes, students should illustrate their poem. Students often want to draw small. Encourage them to use their whole body when they paint and to feel playful. They can also try splattering, adding salt, and using sponges to make nature textures, such as water, desert rock, or clouds at sunset.

5. Sharing Poems and Illustrations (5 minutes)

fern

fern

Fern's first form is furled,

Each frond fast as a fiddle-head.

Reach, roll and unfold follows.

Fern flares.

Now fern is fully fanned.



WREN

wren

When wren whirrs from stone to furze the world around
her slows, for wren is quick, so quick she blurs the air
through which she flows, yes –

Rapid wren is needle, rapid wren is pin – and wren's song
is sharp-song, briar-song, thorn-song, and wren's flight
is dart-flight, flick-flight, light-flight, yes –

Each wren etches, stitches, switches, *glitches*, yes –

Now you think you see wren, now you know you don't.

