



The Great Saguaro

Introduction

The Saguaro - "a cactus, tall and grand" - is a home to many creatures in the Sonoran Desert. In *Around One Cactus: Owls, Bats and Leaping Rats* author Anthony Fredericks describes how the Saguaro is a mini-habitat for eight different animals. In this activity students create a model and discuss how the shape of the cactus supports the ecosystem around it.

Materials Needed

- ◆ Blocks or cylinders of Styrofoam
- ◆ 100 toothpicks
- ◆ Craft glue
- ◆ Acrylic craft paint

Key Concepts

- ◆ Plants are the base of an ecosystem.
- ◆ Models can be used in explanations.

For standards correlation please see our website.

Procedure

1. Using Styrofoam, create a large standing replica of a Saguaro Cactus.
 - ◆ Wax a serrated knife with a bar of soap or old candle to ensure smooth cuts.
 - ◆ Use wooden dowels to attach any arms.
2. Invite students to break 100 toothpicks in half and then stick each of the pieces into the model and cactus.
3. You may wish to paint the creation and let it dry before placing it in a prominent position in the classroom.
4. Students can arrange models around the cactus. Models can include the creatures mentioned in the story as well as others students learn about during outside reading assignments.
5. Invite students to discuss the Saguaro Cactus "Field Notes" located in the back of *Around One Cactus*.
 - ◆ What facts about this desert giant came as a surprise to the students?
 - ◆ What features of the Saguaro cactus allow it to survive in the desert environment?
 - ◆ What would happen if the Saguaro were to disappear from the Sonoran Desert?

Nature Connections

- ◆ Talk with students about some of the "Fantastic Facts" in the back of the book. Which ones did they find the most amazing? Invite students to create their own collection of "Desert Fantastic Facts."
- ◆ Invite students to imagine that they are a Saguaro Cactus. Encourage them to write a life story told from the perspective of the cactus. What happens to the cactus during the course of a year? During a decade? During a century? How is the cactus' life similar to or different from a human beings life?

Additional Resources

Students may enjoy eating foods made from cacti. If possible, obtain one or more of the following for students to taste:

- ◆ prickly pear cactus candy
- ◆ prickly pear cactus jelly
- ◆ prickly pear cactus honey
- ◆ prickly pear cactus syrup (makes a great "lemonade")
- ◆ cactus marmalade

Possible source: www.desertusa.com

