Desert Animals

Objective:
Learn about animals that live at Red Rock Canyon NCA

Procedure:
Have students find a comfortable place to sit. Tell them they will be learning about eight animals that live at Red Rock Canyon NCA. Show them the animal cards and have a student read the name of each animal.

Read the first poem without the title, omitting any words that might be in the poem that give the answer away. As you read, have the students touch their nose with one finger as soon as they have guessed which animal you are reading about. When you have finished the poem, have a discussion about the animal the students think it is. Have one student act out the movements of the animal described in the poem.

Do the same with each poem until finished.

Note: If using the book, exclude the Spadefoot Toad and Desert Person poems.

Grades: K-2
Estimated Time: 30 minutes

Standards Met:
- K-2 grade:
  - Science L.2.B Students understand that living things have identifiable characteristics.
  - English Language Arts 3. [K-2].2 Students read literary text to comprehend, interpret, and evaluate authors, cultures, and times.

Materials Needed:
- Animal cards (attached)
- Copy of Desert Voices by Byrd Baylor and Peter Parnall or story printout (attached)

Sources:

Desert Tortoise, Buzzard, and Lizard photographs by Stacy Dahl.

Remaining photographs by Bureau of Land Management, Red Rock Canyon NCA.

Submitted by Stacy Dahl
Jackrabbit

Cactus wren
Pack Rat
(desert woodrat)

I run to
whatever
is shiny,
find out about
anything
new.

I sniff
a gleaming mica chip,
a feather that falls
from the sky,
a pale blue turquoise bead,
a button,
the top of an old tin can,
and the pipe
that a miner
smoked by his campfire
and left on the ground
while he slept.

I take it all.

I am a gatherer of treasure….  
of leaves
and berries and roots,
mesquite beans,
sweet red summer cactus fruit,
and a piece of a clear glass bottle
turned purple by the sun.

I stay
close to home,
close to the trails I know,
close to the rocks where I was born,
close to the cholla cactus
I climb so easily.

Everything I want
is here.

In the cool evenings
I search,
darting from rock to rock,
out of sight of coyotes and owls.

I run back and forth
with my mouth full of treasures.

I go home at sunrise,
pushing
and pulling
and rolling
all the good things
back to my nest,
my pile of sticks and dirt
and cholla cactus thorns.

It holds me safe.
It hides my secrets
in the dust.
Jackrabbit

The sudden leap,  
the instant start,  
the burst of speed,  
knowing  
when to run  
and when to freeze,  
how to become  
a shadow  
underneath  
a greasewood bush…

these are things  
I learned  
almost at birth.

Now  
I lie  
on the shadow-side  
of a clump of grass.  
my long ears bring me  
every far-off footstep,  
every twig that snaps,  
every rustle in the weeds.

I watch  
Coyote move  
from bush to bush.

I wait.  
He’s almost here.

Now…

Now I go  
like a zig-zag  
lightning flash.  
with my ears laid back,  
I sail.

Jumping gullies  
and bushes and rocks,  
doubling back,  
circling,  
jumping high  
to see where my enemy is,

warning rabbits  
along the way.
Rattlesnake

I move so flat against the earth that I know all its mysteries.

I understand the way the sun clings to rocks after the sun is gone.

I understand the long cold shadows that wrap themselves around me and slow my blood and call me back into the earth.

On the south side of a rocky slope were the sun can warm my hiding place, I wait for the cold that draws me into sleep.

I understand waking in spring, still cold, hardly moving, seeking warmth, seeking food, going from darkness to light.

I understand the shedding of old skin and the tenderness of my new soft shining self flowing smooth as water over sand

I understand the sudden strike, the death I hold behind my fangs.

Wherever I go I cast a shadow of fear.
Cactus Wren

On the hottest summer afternoons when desert creatures look for shade and stay close to the earth and keep their voices low

I sit high on a cactus and fling my loud ringing trill out to the sun…

over and over again.

My home is in a cholla cactus. I won’t live where cactus doesn’t grow because I know the only safe place for a nest is a sticker branch in a cactus thicket.

I like thorns in all directions.

At the entrance of my nest I pile more cactus. I peck off the spines where I go in and out.

It is so good a nest that when we leave it other creatures will move in – a family of crickets or a cactus-climbing mouse.

But now it holds six small brown birds and me.
Desert Tortoise

I am the old one here.

Mice
and snakes
and deer
and butterflies
and badgers
come and go.
Centipedes
and eagles
come and go.

But [tortoises]
grow old
and stay.

Our lives stretch out.

I cross
the same arroyo
that I crossed
when I was young,
returning to
the same safe den
to sleep through
winter’s cold.
Each spring,
I warm myself
in the same sun,
search for the same
long tender blades
of green,
and taste the same
ripe juicy cactus fruit.

I know
the slow
sure way
my world
repeats itself.
I know
how I fit in.

My shell still shows
the toothmarks
where a wildcat
thought he had me
long ago.

He didn’t know
that I was safe
beneath
that hard brown rock
he tried to bite.

I trust that shell.
I move
at my own speed.

This
is a good place
for an old [tortoise]
to walk.
**Buzzard**  
(turkey vulture)

I am a bird of silence.  
I do not sing at dawn  
or call out to my mate  
across the sky.

Up on the cliff where we roost,  
wind is the only sound.  
I let it speak  
for me.

All day  
I ride on waves  
of hot dry desert air,  
on lifting currents  
of heat,  
circling without effort,  
wheeling  
soaring  
gliding  
drifting  
upward

I move with my large wings  
set to the wind.

Beautiful in the sky,  
I follow death.

High over the world,  
I watch.

Across valleys and canyons  
and wide flat desert land,  
others of my kind  
are watching, too.

If one of us drops down,  
another follows,  
and another…  
and from far away,  
still others come.

We kill nothing,  
harm nothing alive.
Lizard

When my mother laid her eggs
she looked for sand
that was just right.
It had to be damp
and it had to be warmed
all day by sun.

Down in that sand
she buried her eggs.

When she left,
she didn’t come back.
There wasn’t any need to.
Sand and sun
are mother enough
[for lizards].

I dug my way
to sunlight.
It didn’t take me long
to flick my tongue
and catch a gnat
and learn
that when the sun goes down
you can be warm
beneath a little mound
of sand.

It didn’t take me long
to learn

the way
a [lizard] runs-
just a flash of speed
across the sand,
almost too fast
to be a shape.

Now
the hotter the sun,
the better I like it.
The rougher the country,
the faster I run.

When I rest,
looking out over
the world
from a rock,
I show
the bright blue shining
color of my underside.
I seem to be made
of earth
and sky.

But then
I run again
and I’m nothing
but a blur
in the hot white sun.
Coyote

I may live hungry. I may live on the run. I may be a wanderer and a trickster and one who'll try anything and a lot too nosy for my own good and a lot too restless, too.

But I'm going to make it – no matter what.

I'll eat anything, sleep anywhere, run any distance, dig for water if I have to because I'm going to survive In this dry rocky land…

and while I'm doing it, I'm going to sing about it.

I sing about cold, and traps, and traveling on, and new soft pups in a sandy den, and rabbit hunts, and the smell of rain.

I sing for a wandering [coyote] band over there across the hills, telling them [coyote] things, saying We're here We're here Alive In the moonlight