Facts: 1
In the 1800s, many people used the Gila River as a trail across Arizona. This trail became known as the Gila Trail. The Gila River starts in the mountains of western New Mexico. The Gila River cuts through Arizona from the eastern border (edge) with New Mexico to the western border with California. It ends its journey when it joins the Colorado River near Yuma.

The Gila River has many rivers that join it. They are called tributaries. The main tributaries are the San Francisco River, San Pedro River, Santa Cruz River, Salt/Verde River, Aqua Fria River, and the Hassayampa River.

Tasks:
1. Label the major cities along the rivers. (Phoenix, Tucson, Yuma, Safford, and Kearny)

Facts: 2
A Spaniard named Cabeza de Vaca was lost and wandering in the Southwest. The Native Americans told him about Cibola, or the Seven Cities of Gold. When he was rescued, he told the Spaniards about the cities. This was the beginning of the Spanish exploration of the area now known as Arizona.

Another Spaniard to explore the area was a priest named Fray Marcos De Niza. He journeyed from Mexico north along the path of the San Pedro River near today’s city of Benson. He traveled farther north (perhaps to the city of Zuni in present day New Mexico) and returned to Mexico and reported that he had seen the cities but had not entered them.

The next explorer was Coronado. It is believed that he traveled north up the San Pedro River to the area near Benson and then cut across the mountains to the Gila River near today’s city of Safford. He then continued his search northward. He never found Seven Cities of Gold.

Tasks:
1. On the map trace Fray Marcos De Niza’s trail in red.
2. Trace Coronado’s trip to Safford in blue.
3. Complete the map key by indicating the color of each route.
Facts: 3
Other explorers were Christian missionaries. Father Kino traveled north following the riverbed of the Santa Cruz River. He started missions at Guevavi near Nogales, Tumacacori near Tubac, and San Xavier near Tucson. He then traveled north along the river to one of the Pima villages near the town known today as Coolidge. From there he went west across the desert to what is now Gila Bend and on to the Colorado River. Later Father Garces was ordered to look for an overland route to California. He followed the same route as Father Kino to the Colorado River and then into California.

Tasks:
1. Trace Father Kino’s route starting in Mexico traveling north along the Santa Cruz River to the Gila River and over to the Colorado River in green.
2. Locate and label the missions that Father Kino started along his route. (Guevavi, Tumacacori and San Xavier)

Facts: 4
Mountain Men also used the Gila River. Mountain Men were mostly trappers. They were given permission by the Mexican government to trap beavers along the Gila River. They went down the Rio Grande and then cut over to the Gila River. They trapped all along the Gila River and its tributaries. The Mountain Men explored and trapped most of what is now the state of Arizona.

One of the most famous Mountain Men was Bill Williams. He has a mountain, river, and town named after him.

Task:
1. Locate Bill Williams Mountain and the town of Williams. Label them on your map.
Facts: 5
War broke out between Mexico and the United States. The army needed to find a faster route to California. They followed the Santa Fe Trail to Santa Fe then down the Rio Grande and then westward to the Gila Trail and finally to California. General Stephen W. Kearny marched his army and mule train along the Gila River to California. The town of Kearny on the Gila River was named after General Kearny.

The Mormon Battalion was sent to help fight the war in California. They were the first to build a road through Arizona to California. The road was no more than a dirt trail. Their path took them further south. They traveled along the Rio Grande into what is now the state of New Mexico south into Mexico. Then they traveled north along the San Pedro River to the area near today’s city of Benson and then west to Tucson. They traveled from Tucson to the Pima villages near Sacaton (near Coolidge) and then west taking a short cut across the desert, by passing the large northward bend of the Gila River, arriving at what is today the town of Gila Bend. From there they followed the Gila River to the Colorado River and then on to San Diego. The trail was known as the Cooke’s Wagon Road.

Gold was found in California, and many people rushed to find gold in 1849. These people were known as the ‘49ers. Many used the road built by the Mormon Battalion to cross through Arizona into California.

Tasks:
1. Trace the route that General Kearny took his army and mule train in brown.
2. Trace Cooke’s Wagon Road in purple.

Facts: 6
J.B. Leach built the first road through southern Arizona. The road ran from El Paso, Texas, to Yuma. The road followed the San Pedro River north to the Gila River. The trail then followed the Gila River to Yuma. The road was cleared of brush, trees, and rocks. Water wells and tanks were built along the road. One of the main stops was Maricopa Wells, which is north of the present-day town of Maricopa.

The Butterfield Overland Mail was the first stage line to serve Arizona. It ran from St. Louis, Missouri, to San Francisco, California. It ran through the mountain passes east of Benson, through Benson, Tucson, Maricopa Wells, to Gila Bend, and then followed the Gila River to Yuma. The Southern Pacific Railroad would follow the same path through Arizona.

Lieutenant Edward Beale built the first wagon road across northern Arizona. He also built some bridges through the mountain passes. Many travelers from the eastern states to California used this road.

Tasks:
1. Trace the road that Leach built through Arizona.
2. Locate the town of Maricopa and label it on your map.
3. Trace the route the Butterfield Overland Mail and the Southern Pacific Railroad followed.