



# Desert Views - First Impressions: Travelers on the Gila Trail

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<b>Grade Level</b>	3-5
<b>Duration</b>	2 class periods

## National Standards

### GEOGRAPHY

#### Element 1: The World in Spatial Terms

1. How to use maps and other geographic representations, geospatial technologies, and spatial thinking to understand and communicate information

#### Element 2: Places and Regions

4. The physical and human characteristics of places

6. How culture and experience influence people's perceptions of places and regions

#### Element 6: The Uses of Geography

17. How to apply geography to interpret the past

## AZ Standards

### ELA

#### Reading

#### Informational Text

#### Key Ideas and Details

**3.RI.1** Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

**4.RI.1** Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

**5.RI.1** Quote accurately from a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

#### Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

**3.RI.7** Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur).

#### Writing

#### Production and Distribution of Writing

**3.W.4** With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose.

**4.W.4 and 5.W.4** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and

## Arizona Social Science Standards

### GEOGRAPHY

**The use of geographic representations and tools helps individuals understand their world.**

**3.G1.1** Use and construct maps and graphs to represent changes in Arizona over time.

**4.G1.1** Use and construct maps and graphs to represent changes in the Americas over time.

**5.G1.1** Use and construct maps and graphs to represent changes in the United States.

**Examining human population and movement helps individuals understand past, present, and future conditions on Earth's surface.**

**3.G3.1** Describe the movement of people in and out of Arizona over time.

**4.G3.1** Explain how the location and use of resources affects human settlement and movement.

**5.G3.1** Use key historical events with geographic tools to analyze the causes and effects of environmental and technological events on human settlements and migration.

#### HISTORY (Extension Ideas)

**Economic, political, and religious ideas and institutions have influenced history and continue to shape the modern world.**

**3.H3.2** Use primary and secondary sources to analyze the changes that have taken place in Arizona which could include the use of current events.

**4.H3.1** Examine how economic, political, and religious ideas and institutions have influenced the development of individual rights, freedoms, and responsibilities in the Americas.

**Patterns of social and political interactions have shaped people, places, and events throughout history and continue to shape the modern world.**

**5.H4.1** Use primary and secondary sources to describe how diverse groups (racial, ethnic,

## Desert Views – First Impressions: Travelers on the Gila Trail

organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

class, gender, regional, immigrant/migrant) shaped the United States' multicultural society within the historical timeframe.

### Overview

Many students today only know Arizona as a metropolitan or rural area that has been modified by generations of modern-day people. They see roads, houses, businesses, farms, etc. But how was Arizona perceived by some of the first American travelers as they crossed the territory in the middle of the 1800s?

### Purpose

In this lesson, students are introduced to primary source material by reading descriptions written by overland travelers on the Gila Trail. They will then use the text to draw what the travelers described and gain a better appreciation of what it would have been like to see the Arizona desert in the 1800s.

### Materials

- Southwestern United States Topography and Rivers map  
<https://geoalliance.asu.edu/sites/default/files/maps/SWPHYS4.pdf>
- Gila Trail map  
<https://geoalliance.asu.edu/sites/default/files/maps/GILATR.pdf>
- Drawing paper
- Colored pencils or crayons
- Primary Source Readings
- Background Information on the Travelers
- Images of desert plants and animals (optional but important)

### Objectives

The student will be able to:

- Locate the Gila Trail on a map
- Use primary sources to gain information
- Write a personal letter describing a plant or animal in Arizona.

### Procedures

1. Distribute the Southwestern United States map to students. Project the map of the Gila Trail and discuss how travelers used this route to come into

and through Arizona in the 1800s. Help students locate this trail on their map of the Southwest and color it. Have them label Santa Fe, Tucson, Pima Villages, and Fort Yuma. Discuss how the trail follows the Gila River for many miles.

2. Review the term "primary source," and introduce the primary source writers using the Background Information on the Travelers.

3. Return to the Gila Trail map and discuss the type of land they traversed and conditions under which they traveled (heat, dust, little food/water, and exhaustion) and that they were experiencing a new environment that is called the Sonoran Desert. Discuss why water would be so important and following a river would be advantageous.

4. (Optional) Using route information about the travelers provided, have students draw the traveler's route on the map of the American Southwest. If you are using more than one traveler, have students make a key using a different color for each traveler.

5. Read aloud the travelers' descriptions of desert plants and animals. You can use one or more of the writings. Students may need help understanding the unusual words and manner of writing. Remind them of the writers' situations at the time they wrote these descriptions and discuss why they wrote them.

### SESSION TWO

6. Distribute drawing paper and colored pencils to students. Re-read each of the primary source descriptions from Session One. Have students draw and color pictures of desert flora and fauna as descriptions are read. *Note: The teacher should read the entire description through one time and then repeat it sentence by sentence as students draw. Remind students they are not trying to guess what the plant or animal is but drawing what is described in the paragraph. If they think they know what the animal or plant is, they should not share it with other students.*

7. After drawings are finished, have students identify the plants or animals described (saguaro cactus, roadrunner, gila monster.)

8. Compare student drawings to images of the actual plants and animals.

9. Re-read the primary source description again while viewing the image and discuss the travelers' ways of describing it.

10. Remind students that one type of primary source that historians use is letters written in the past. Many

## Desert Views – First Impressions: Travelers on the Gila Trail

overland travelers on the Gila Trail wrote letters home as they journeyed west.

11. Have students pretend to be a traveler on a wagon train on the Gila Trail in Arizona and write a letter home to a family member (parent, brother, or sister), describing a plant or animal as if they were seeing it for the first time. Students should use correct personal letter format.

### Assessment

#### ELA and Social Sciences

Student letter can be assessed using the 6-trait rubric for ideas and content. Mastery will be considered 4 or higher on the rubric.

#### Geography

Map reading skills can be assessed using the Southwest Topography and Rivers map. Students should have correctly labeled the places and drawn the Gila Trail on the map. Mastery will be considered 90% or higher.

### Extensions

- Identify the difference between a published and an unpublished primary source.
- In their letter, include why they are taking the Gila Trail and some of the difficulties they have encountered.
- Apply this idea to other regions of the country, or another trail being studied.
- Discuss how letters were sent home before there was mail service. For a description of how a letter written in Tucson in 1849 was delivered to Texas, see the article "Special Delivery" in *Arizona Highways*, January, 2001, pages 36-37.

### Sources

Harris, B. B. (1960). *The Gila Trail: The Texas Argonauts and the California Gold Rush* Edited by Richard H. Dillon. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press.

Hunter, W. W. "Diary-Journal, 1849 of Events, Etc. on a Journey from Missouri to California in 1849." University of Arizona Special Collections Library, Tucson, Arizona.

Lang, W. B. (1940). *First Overland Mail*. Washington, D.C.: Walter B. Lang.

Marvin, B. (January, 2001). "Special Delivery," *Arizona Highways*, pp. 36-37.

Robards, J. L. *Papers*. "Journal of a Journey to California," Joint Collection. University of Missouri Western Historical Manuscript Collection- Columbia and State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts. Columbia, Missouri.

Use this site for background information on the Sonoran Desert:

[http://www.desertusa.com/du\\_sonoran.html](http://www.desertusa.com/du_sonoran.html)

This Arizona-Sonora Museum site has pictures of all three items described in the lesson:

<http://www.desertmuseumdigitallibrary.org/public/index.php>