

Just Deserts — A Cross-Curricular Lesson Plan on Deserts of the World

Subject: Geography; World Culture

Grades: 4-6

Overview

Even though this lesson plan is just about deserts of the world (no, sad to say, not about desserts of the world), students will gain cross-curricular practice in language arts, social studies, and technology skills as they read and interpret a WorldTeasers: Just Deserts chart and also research and complete a second chart about deserts of the world.

Objectives

Students will:

- Describe the four major types of deserts.
- Use a map of the world to locate the four major types of deserts according to their continents or world regions.
- Compare and contrast the similarities and differences among the four types of deserts.
- Interpret questions to figure out what information is wanted and use a chart to answer those questions.
- (Optional) Use Microsoft Excel or other graphing software to create a bar chart to graphically display information.

National Geography Standards

Standard 7: The physical processes that shape the patterns of Earth's surface.

Standard 8: The characteristics and spatial distribution of ecosystems on Earth's surface.

NCTE/IRA Standards for the English Language Arts

Standard 7: Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

National Educational Technology Standards

Standard 3: Technology productivity tools: Students use technology tools to enhance learning, increase productivity, and promote creativity.

Materials Needed

- Just Deserts Challenge Cards from **WorldTeasers: World Culture & Geography Edition I**
- **(Optional):** Computer with Internet connection and Microsoft Excel or other graphing software

Getting Started

Ask students what words come to mind when they think about a desert? Write those words on the board. (Some likely words might be sand, hot, cactus, camels.) Tell students that those words can describe one type or category of desert — very hot deserts called Subtropical deserts — but that there are other types of deserts as well. Tell students that, in fact, the largest desert in the world is actually very cold. It's called a Polar desert. Do they know where that desert is? (The Antarctic desert on the continent of Antarctica.)

Development

Discuss with students the definition of a desert. Explain that there are four main types of deserts: Subtropical deserts, which are the hottest, Cool Coastal deserts, where the average temperature is much cooler than subtropical deserts, Cold Winter deserts, which are very hot in the summer, but as cold as 10°F in the winter, and Polar deserts. Tell students that whether hot or cold, all deserts have one thing in common. Can students guess what that is? (All deserts receive little or no rainfall.) Deserts get less than 10 inches of rain per year. Ask: How many inches of rain do you think we get here in [*name of your city or town*]? Give students time to research on the Internet the average yearly precipitation in their city or town? (For average precipitation in your zip code area, go to www.weather.com on the Internet, type in your zip code in the box next to Localweather, click Go, and then page down and click Averages.)

Activity

Write the following WorldTeasers: Just Deserts chart on the chalkboard. (Or print out enough copies of the chart for each student or pairs of students.) Give students time to study the information in the chart. Then, ask students various grade-appropriate questions about the information on the chart. For example:

1. What is the name of the largest Subtropical desert named on the chart? (*Great Victoria*)
2. On what continent would you find the oldest desert on earth? (*Africa*)
3. How much bigger is the wettest desert on earth than the driest desert on earth? (*66,000 square miles*)
4. How are the Namib and the Atacama deserts similar? (*They're both Cool Coastal deserts.*)
5. How is the Sonoran desert different from the Gobi desert? (*The Sonoran desert is a Subtropical desert and the Gobi desert is a Cold Winter desert.*)

Allow time for teams of students to formulate their own WorldTeaser Challenge questions based on information in the chart and then challenge classmates with the questions.

WorldTeasers: Just Deserts

World Teaser Fact	Driest desert on earth	Wettest desert on earth	Coldest desert on earth	Oldest desert on earth	Desert named for a Queen	4th Largest desert on earth
Name of Desert	The Atacama	Sonoran	Antarctic	Namib	Great Victoria	Gobi
Continent	South America	North America	Antarctica	Africa	Australia	Asia
Type of Desert	Cool Coastal	Subtropical	Polar	Cool Coastal	Subtropical	Cold Winter
Land Area	54,000 sq. mi.	120,000 sq. mi.	5.5 million sq. mi.	13,000 sq. mi.	250,000 sq. mi.	500,000 sq. mi.
Location	Northern Chile	Ariz., CA, Mexico	Antarctica	Angola, Namibia	Southern Australia	China, Mongolia

Next, write the WorldTeasers: Just Deserts II chart on the chalkboard. Divide the class into teams to research and fill in the blanks under each category.

WorldTeasers: Just Deserts II

World Teaser Fact	Largest non-Polar desert	Largest U.S. desert	Largest desert in Americas	Desert with longest sand dunes	Largest Asian desert	Most northern desert
Name of Desert						
Continent						
Type of Desert						
Land Area						
Location						

Extension

Have students locate on a world map the 12 different deserts mentioned in the Just Deserts charts I and II.

Extension (optional)

Using the information in the chart and Microsoft Excel or other graphic software, have students create a bar graph to show the relative size of the six deserts named in the chart.

Assessment

Challenge students to take the WorldTeaser Challenge. Put the six Just Deserts Challenge Cards on a table. One at a time, ask a volunteer to come up and select a challenge card and read it out loud to the class. See by a raise of hands who can win the WorldTeaser Challenge.

For more Teacher Lesson Plans and Resources go to www.worldteasers.com.