



Desert Plants

by Kate Herenger

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT

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A Plant Called Cactus

 The desert is a hot, dry place. It gets very little rain. Plants need water to live. How do plants **survive** in the desert?

Only some kinds of plants can grow in a desert environment. These plants have **adapted** to the hot temperatures and lack of rain.

 The most common desert plant is the cactus. Take one look and you can tell a cactus is not like other plants. For one thing, it usually has no leaves! There's a good reason for that.



Many types of cactus grow in the desert.

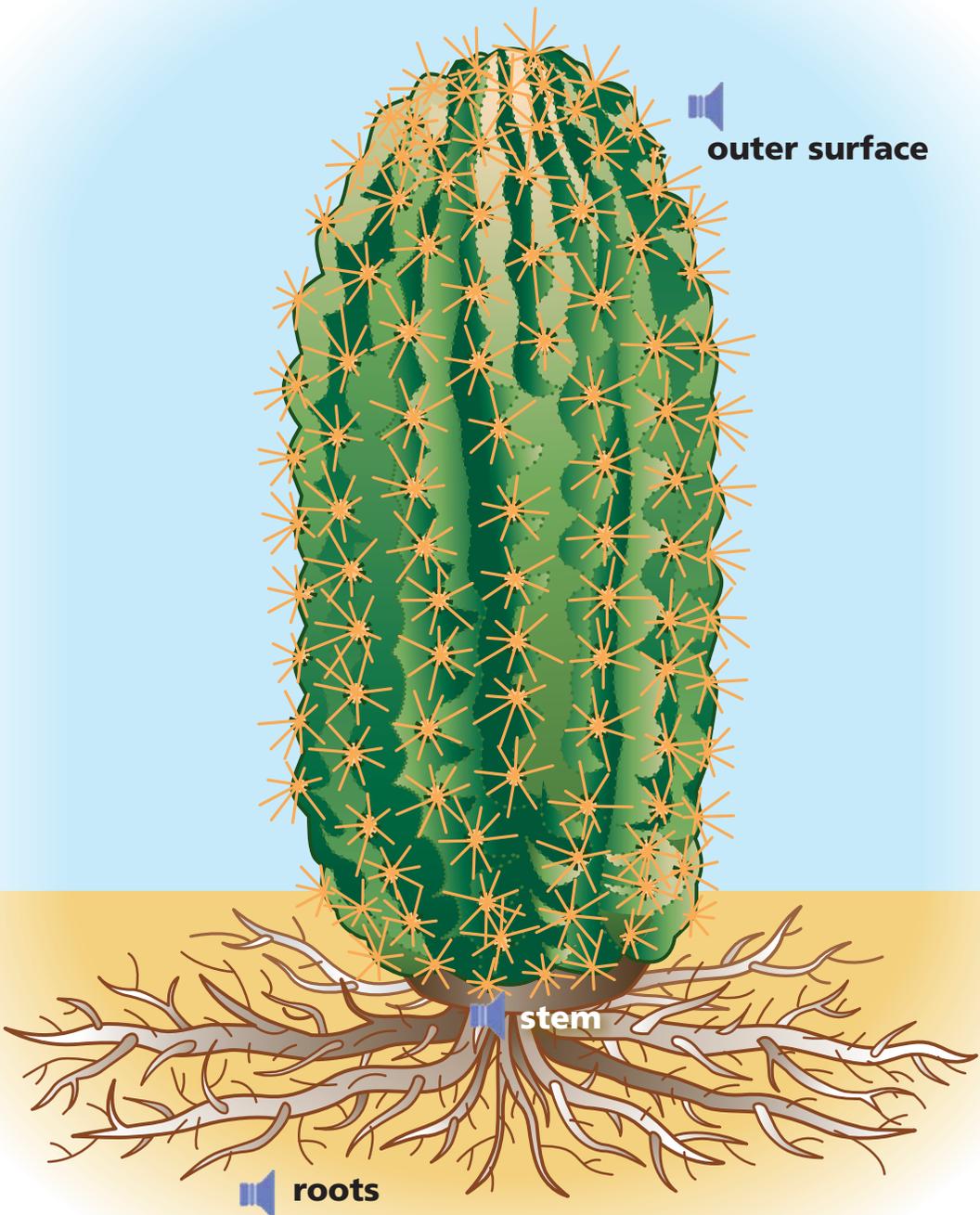


Finding Water and Food

 Water **evaporates** easily through a plant's leaves. That means the water goes out into the air instead of staying in the plant. Without leaves, a cactus can keep more water inside it.

Leaves help most plants get their nutrition. Leaves make food from sunlight, air, water, and minerals. Since a cactus often has no leaves, its stem and outer **surface** do the job of making food.

 A cactus is unlike other plants in another way. It has short roots. Why? A cactus's short roots are close to the surface of the ground. That means they can soak up rain almost as soon as it falls. The faster, the better!



outer surface

stem



roots

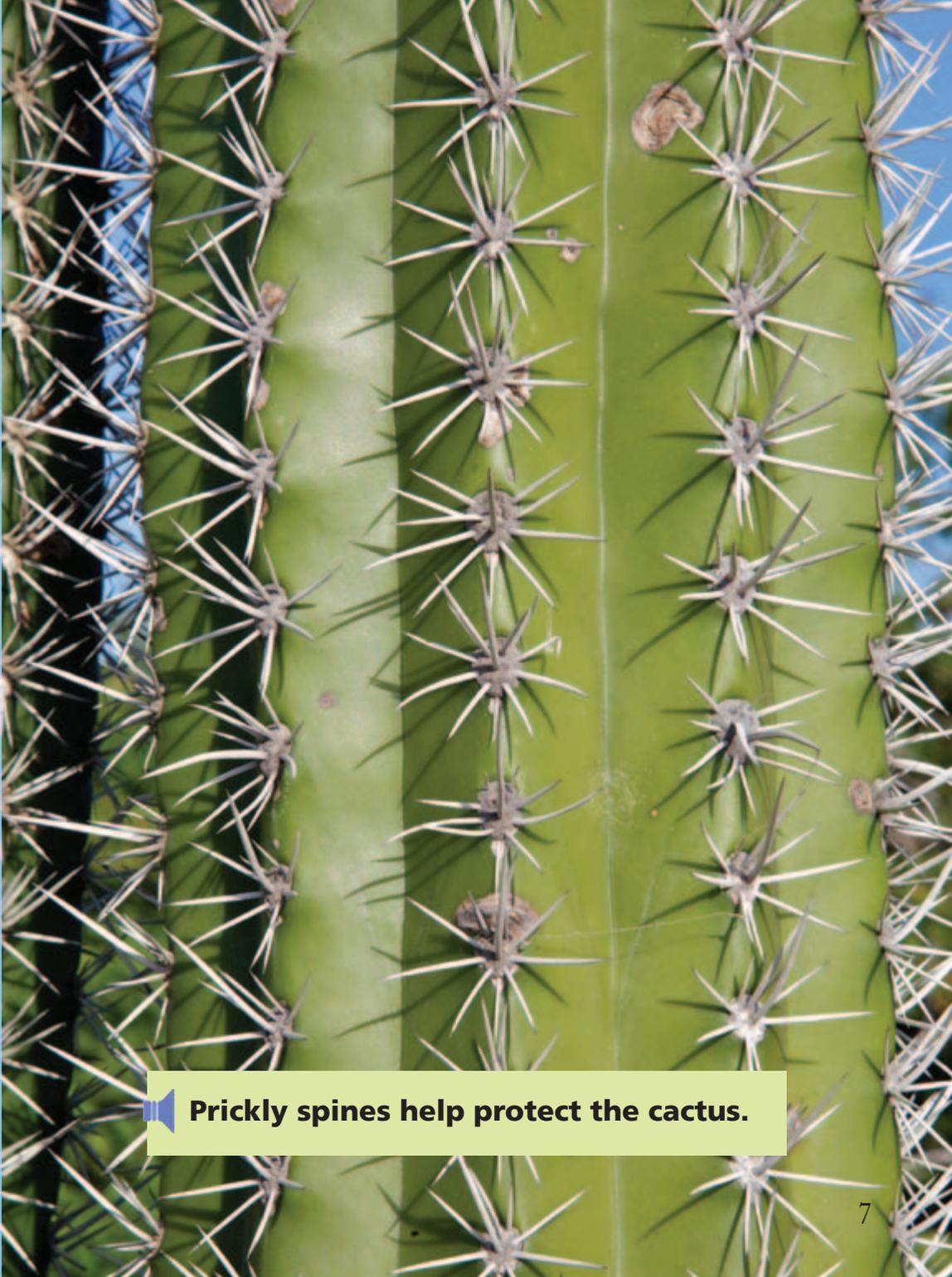
Surviving in the Desert

 After the cactus's roots absorb water, they can store it for a long time. The cactus stem can store water too. The stem has a waxy skin, or outer layer. That also helps hold water in. When you think about it, a cactus is almost like a large, prickly water bottle.

A cactus can survive for years from the water it collects in just one rainfall! That's a useful skill in the desert.

 Many kinds of cactus have sharp spines. How does being prickly help a cactus survive? Spines help absorb water when it rains. They also give the cactus some shade from the hot desert sun.

Most importantly, spines protect the cactus from hungry desert animals. Animals may think the cactus looks tasty. They will have a hard time taking a bite out of it, though!



Prickly spines help protect the cactus.



Trees have special ways to survive in the desert.

Desert Trees

The cactus may be the most famous desert plant, but it is not the only one.

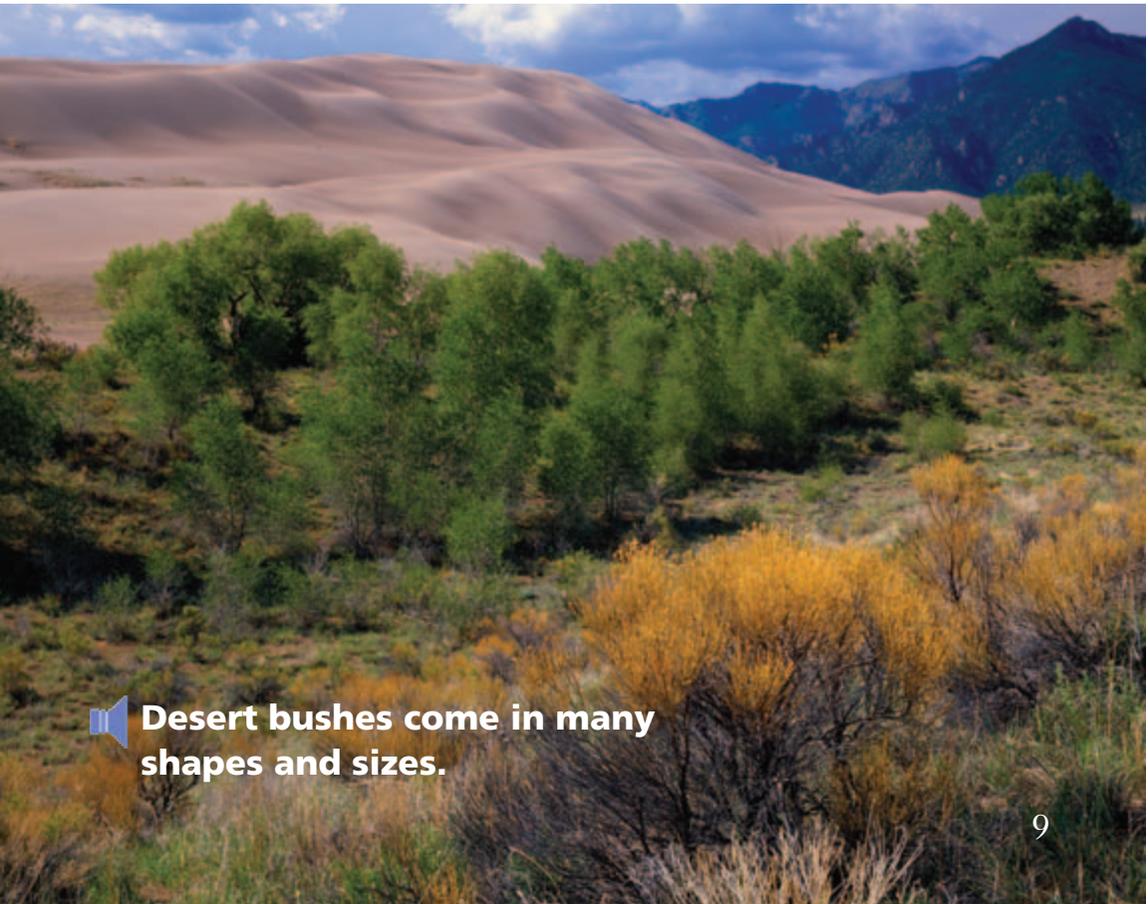
Trees grow in the desert too. Unlike a cactus, a desert tree has long roots. Why? Long roots help desert trees reach water that is deep underground. One type of desert tree has roots that are up to 80 feet long!

Desert Bushes

 Bushes grow in the desert too. Some of them have adapted to the hot, dry environment even better than the cactus or desert trees.

What is their secret?

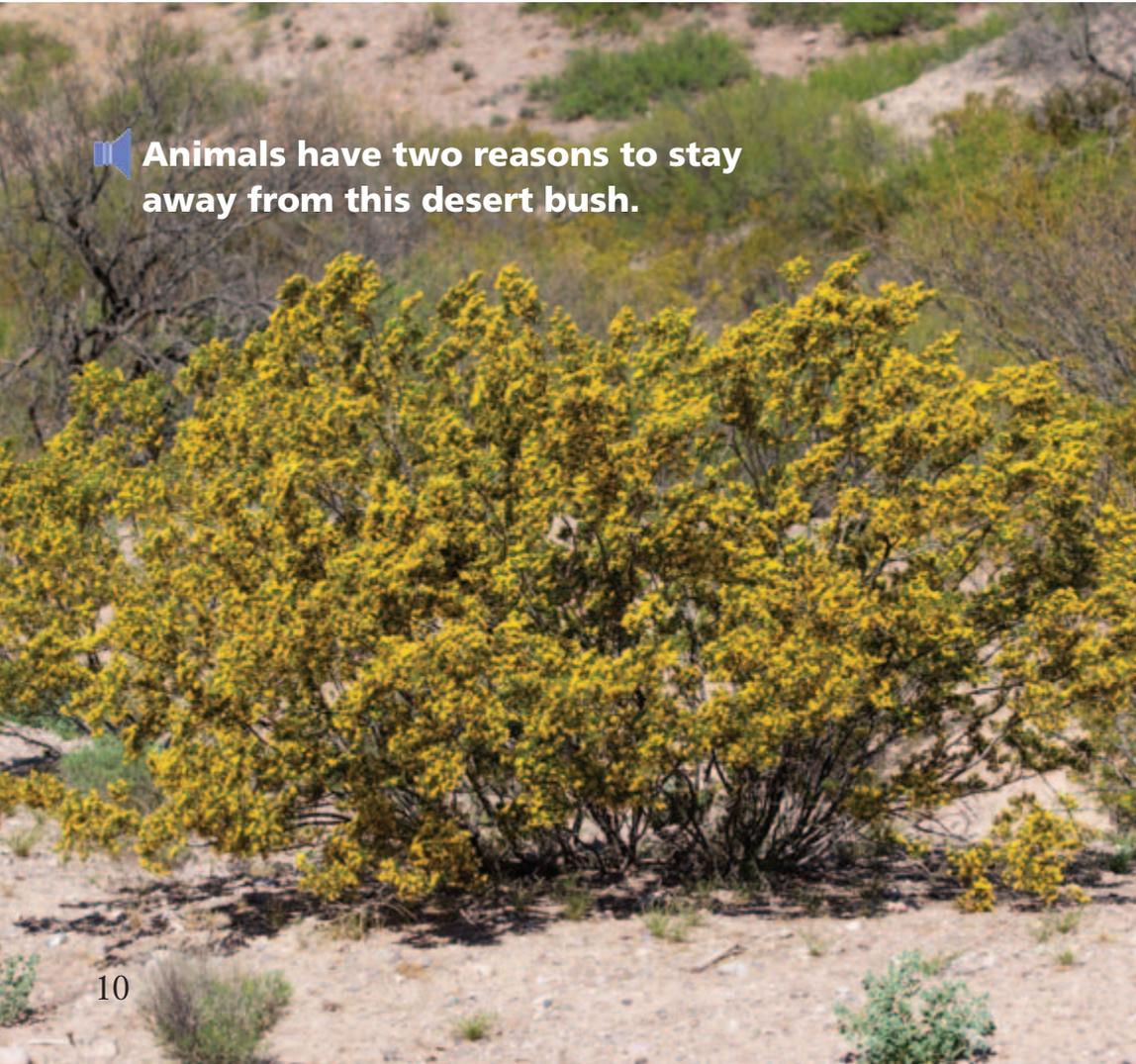
Some desert bushes have short roots, like a cactus. They also have very long roots, like a desert tree! That means they can soak up new rainfall as well as water deep underground.



 Desert bushes come in many shapes and sizes.

🔊 One type of desert bush has a special way to protect itself from hungry animals. It doesn't have spines, like a cactus. Instead it has a very bad smell! Some animals ignore the smell and bite into the bush. Then they get a surprise. The bush has a very bad taste, too!

🔊 **Animals have two reasons to stay away from this desert bush.**



Many desert plants survive by becoming dormant.



Waiting for Rain

Other desert plants have their own special ways to survive. Some plants become dormant during long periods without rain. Being **dormant** is a lot like hibernating. That's what bears do in the winter.

After the Rain

 When desert plants are dormant, they don't need to take in water or make food. They rest and save energy. Then, when the rain comes again, the plants wake up!

Some kinds of desert plants grow and die very quickly. In the spring, when there is just the right amount of sunshine and rainfall, these plants suddenly sprout up from the sandy desert soil.

 The small shoots appear and then blossom in only a few days' time. The plants are not large, but they are colorful. Their beautiful flowers brighten and soften the desert **landscape**.



In spring, the desert comes alive with color.



 Bats and bees visit the flowers. They carry away grains of pollen. These creatures will spread some of the pollen to other flowers. That will help the flowers make seeds. After the flowers fade, seed pods appear. Seeds drop from the pods, or the wind picks them up and blows them across the desert.

Meanwhile, the small plants die as quickly as they appeared. Some of them live only a few weeks! Soon, though, many new, amazing desert plants will grow!

 **Animals and insects help desert plants spread and grow.**



Responding



TARGET SKILL Text and Graphic

Features What do the photos in this book show you about desert plants? Copy the chart. List a photo from the book. List what the photo shows you about the desert.

Photo	Page	What it Shows
cactus	page 7	many spines



Write About It

Text to World What else would you like to know about the desert? Use an encyclopedia or other source to research more about it. Then write a paragraph that includes the facts you learn.



TARGET VOCABULARY

grain

nutrition

pod

root

shoot

soak

soften

tasty

EXPAND YOUR VOCABULARY

adapted

dormant

evaporates

landscape

surface

survive



TARGET SKILL

Text and Graphic

Features Tell how words go with photos.



TARGET STRATEGY

Monitor/Clarify

Find ways to figure out what doesn't make sense.



GENRE

Informational text gives facts

about a topic.

Level: N

DRA: 30

Genre:

Informational Text

Strategy:

Monitor/Clarify

Skill:

Text and Graphic Features

Word Count: 720

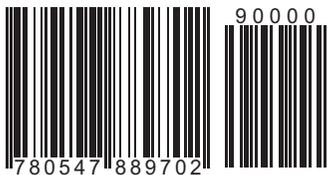
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