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# ALEJANDRO'S GIFT

Author: Richard E. Albert

Illustrator: Sylvia Long

Publisher: Chronicle Books

## THEME:

Water offers the gift of life to all living things.

## PROGRAM SUMMARY:

The "gift" Alejandro gives to various desert animals is that of water.

LeVar explores how important water is for all living things. He visits a California oasis and talks with a naturalist about the importance of this water source for the Cahuilla, a Native American tribe of the past, as well as for animals. Viewers visit Niagara Falls and find out how waterpower can provide electricity.

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Alejandro gave the gift of water. Discuss other "gifts" that people can give to animals.

At the end of the book, the author said that Alejandro had *received* a gift. Discuss what that gift might be. Alejandro also felt a great deal of satisfaction about what he had done. Have the students talk about a time that they felt very pleased with something they had done for someone (or something) else.

Before viewing the program, brainstorm a chart "What We Know About the Desert." After viewing, use a different color of marker to add newly acquired information to the chart. Continue adding to the chart as students gain information from other sources. Using a different color of print for each source helps students visually understand how much they learn by using a variety of sources.

Before viewing the program, discuss the concept of "survival." What do plants and animals need to survive? Do people need different things for survival? How would a person survive if she/he were lost in the mountains, in the desert, in a forest, etc.

## CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Have students research the animals and plants mentioned and pictured in story. The glossary at the back of the book may get them started.

Have students collect pictures from magazines and other sources and create a collage, "Ways that People Use Water."

On a large piece of tan mural paper, have students make a map of Alejandro's place, including his adobe house, the burro's shed, his garden, the windmill and well, and the desert road. Have them create a desert scene on the mural by adding plants and animals depicted in the story. After they have added these details, students will need to decide where to put Alejandro's first water hole and the second one.

Set up an experiment with some common garden vegetable plants to test the effects of soil composition, water, and heat on plant growth. Carrots, beans, tomatoes, and melons offer a good contrast in types of plants and were all part of Alejandro's garden. Plant seeds or small plants in different combinations of these conditions: sandy soil, rich soil, limited water, adequate water, moderate temperature, hot temperature. (There are 8 possible combinations of these 3 conditions. For a useful math activity, have students determine the number of possible combinations and what they are). Keep light as a constant, so that soil, water, and temperature are the factors being compared. Have students keep a written log of changes they notice. Encourage them to make sketches in their logs as well. At the end of the experiment, students can compile all the data from their logs onto a chart. Based on the data, discuss some of the challenges that Alejandro had in maintaining a productive garden.

Brainstorm a list of ways in which people can conserve water. Books such as *Going Green* by John Elkington, J. Hailes, D. Hill, and J. Makower (Puffin Books) and *50 Simple Things Kids Can Do to Save the Earth* by the Earth Works Group (Scholastic) may give the students some practical ideas. Some of these tips could be printed on word bubbles and posted at various places in the school building, such as above drinking fountains and sinks.

Have students generate a collection of "water words." Sort the words into categories, such as bodies of water (lake, creek, pond, etc.), words that describe movement of water (geyser, waterfall, trickle, etc.), and water sounds (splash, drip, patter, etc.). They might creatively display the words by putting the bodies of water on blue paper cut in a pond shape, the movement words on waves of water, and the water sounds on raindrops.

Brainstorm a list of wild animals in your area. Invite a wildlife specialist into the classroom to talk about appropriate behavior toward and around wild animals.

Investigate how a windmill works. David Macaulay provides an explanation in *The Way Things Work* (Houghton Mifflin) and in the CD-ROM of this title (Dorling Kindersley).

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**RELATED THEMES:**

water cycle  
water conservation  
desert life

**RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:**

Program #8 — Gila Monsters Meet You At The Airport  
Program #62 — Desert Giant: The World Of The Saguaro Cactus  
Program #67 — Jack, The Seal And The Sea

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Richard E. Albert began his career as a writer of pulp westerns. He stopped writing for 30 years to pursue engineering, but has returned to writing with *Alejandro's Gift*, his first book for children.

**ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR:**

After years of working as an artist, Sylvia Long only recently began illustrating books for children. Her affection for animals and the outdoors inspired her illustrations for *Alejandro's Gift*.

**BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:**

IT RAINED ON THE DESERT TODAY  
by Ken and Debby Buchanan, illus. by Libba Tracy (Northland)  
THE DESERT ALPHABET BOOK  
by Jerry Pallotta, illus. by Mark Astrella (Charlesbridge)  
WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE  
by Mark J. Rauzon and Cynthia Overbeck Bix (Little, Brown)

**SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:**

WATER  
by Frank Asch (Harcourt Brace)  
THE DESERT IS THEIRS  
by Byrd Baylor, illus. by Peter Parnall (Scribner's)  
THE MAGIC SCHOOL BUS AT THE WATERWORKS  
by Joanna Cole, illus. by Bruce Degen (Scholastic)  
IT COULD STILL BE WATER  
by Allan Fowler (Children's Press)  
SPLISH SPLASH  
by Joan Bransfield Graham, illus. by Steve Scott (Ticknor & Fields)

**CARING FOR OUR WATER**

by Carol Greene (Enslow Publishers)

**LISTEN TO THE DESERT**

by Pat Mora (Clarion)

**WATER'S WAY**

by Lisa Westberg Peters, illus. by Ted Rand (Arcade)

**MOJAVE**

by Diane Siebert, illus. by Wendell Minor (Crowell)

**DESERTS**

by Seymour Simon (Morrow)

**WATER UP, WATER DOWN: THE HYDROLOGIC CYCLE**

by Sally M. Walker (Carolrhoda)

**WATER**

by Angela Webb, photographs by Chris Fairclough (Franklin Watts)

