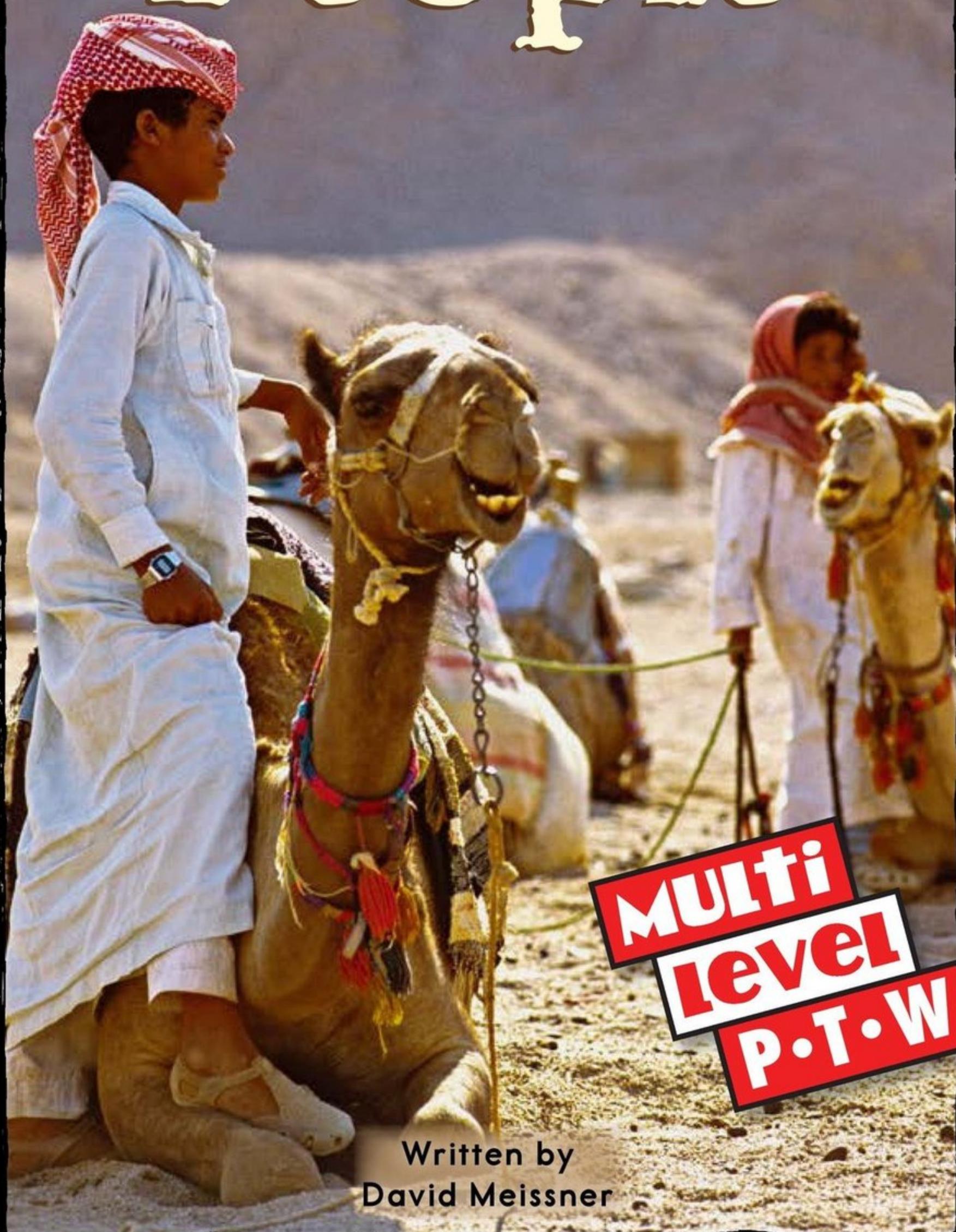


LEVELED BOOK • P

# Desert People



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Written by  
David Meissner

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Sunrise in the desert

## What Is a Desert?

Would you know a desert if you saw one? Would it have camels or rattlesnakes? Would it have sand or rocks?

Earth has many different kinds of deserts, but all deserts are dry. They usually get less than 25.4 centimeters (10 in) of rain a year. Some deserts are very cold, but most are sunny and hot.



Finding shade in the desert can be challenging.

## Desert Living

How do people stay alive in such hot, dry places? Where do they find food and water? How do they build their homes?

For thousands of years, desert people have used what they found in their local areas to get food, water, and shelter. Each desert is different, and each desert has its own solutions.

In this book, you will learn about two desert peoples: the Tohono O'odham and the Bedouin. Both of these groups have found ways to **adapt** and live successfully in their desert homelands.

## World Deserts Comparison Table

	<b>Sonoran</b>	<b>Sahara</b>	<b>Gobi</b>	<b>Atacama</b>
<b>CLIMATE</b>	Good rainfall for the desert	Very hot and very dry	Cold and windy	Driest desert in the world
<b>CONTINENT</b>	North America	Africa	Asia	South America
<b>SIZE</b>	310,100 (sq km)	9,064,960 (sq km)	1,036,000 (sq km)	139,860 (sq km)
<b>TERRAIN</b>	Flat basins, mountains	Gravel plains, mountains, sand dunes	Stony, sandy soil, grasslands	Sand, salt basins, lava
<b>EXAMPLE OF DESERT PEOPLE</b>	Tohono O'odham	Bedouin	Mongols	Atacama Indians
Compare these four deserts. Notice that they are all different.				

## The Tohono O'odham

*Tohono O'odham* means “desert people.” The Tohono O'odham are Native Americans who still live in the Sonoran Desert.

Long ago, the O'odham slept in round homes made of dried mud, branches, and grass. There was one main room with a fire pit. Families slept on grass mats. Fires gave them light and heat during cold winter nights.



For many years, they were called the Papago. Today, Tohono O'odham is the official name of the tribe.

### Word Wise

**Desert:** a dry, barren area of land, especially one covered with sand, that is ... desolate, waterless, and without vegetation.\*

\* *This is the official New Oxford American Dictionary definition of desert.*

## The Sonoran Market

The Sonoran Desert can be a difficult place to live. Months may pass without rain. Summer days can reach 49° Celsius (120°F). Winter nights can be freezing cold.

But, for a desert, the Sonoran is full of life. Historically, the Tohono O'odham lived where 30.5 centimeters (12 in) of rain fell each year. The rainfall supported many plants and animals. Shady trees, cacti, and flowers all grew there. Many insects, birds, rabbits, and other animals lived there, too.



The Sonoran Desert is home to many kinds of life.



The desert is filled with resources, if you know where to look.

## A Different Kind of Shopping

The desert was the Tohono O'odham market. When they needed vegetables, they planted seeds. When they needed water, they went to a spring. When they needed meat, they hunted.

### *Fruits and Vegetables*

In the early summer, O'odham people planted seeds. In the late summer, the rains flooded the fields. The O'odham grew corn, beans, and other vegetables. In the winter, they grew wheat, peas, and fruits.

## *Meat*

The Tohono O'odham hunted rattlesnakes, rabbits, and birds in the desert. In the mountains, they killed deer, mountain sheep, and sometimes even bears.



A desert jackrabbit

## *Desert Foods*

The Tohono O'odham also gathered wild desert foods like chile peppers, onions, beans, and cactus fruits. In the mountains, they found acorns, roots, and pine nuts. O'odham men even made four-day trips to the ocean to get salt!

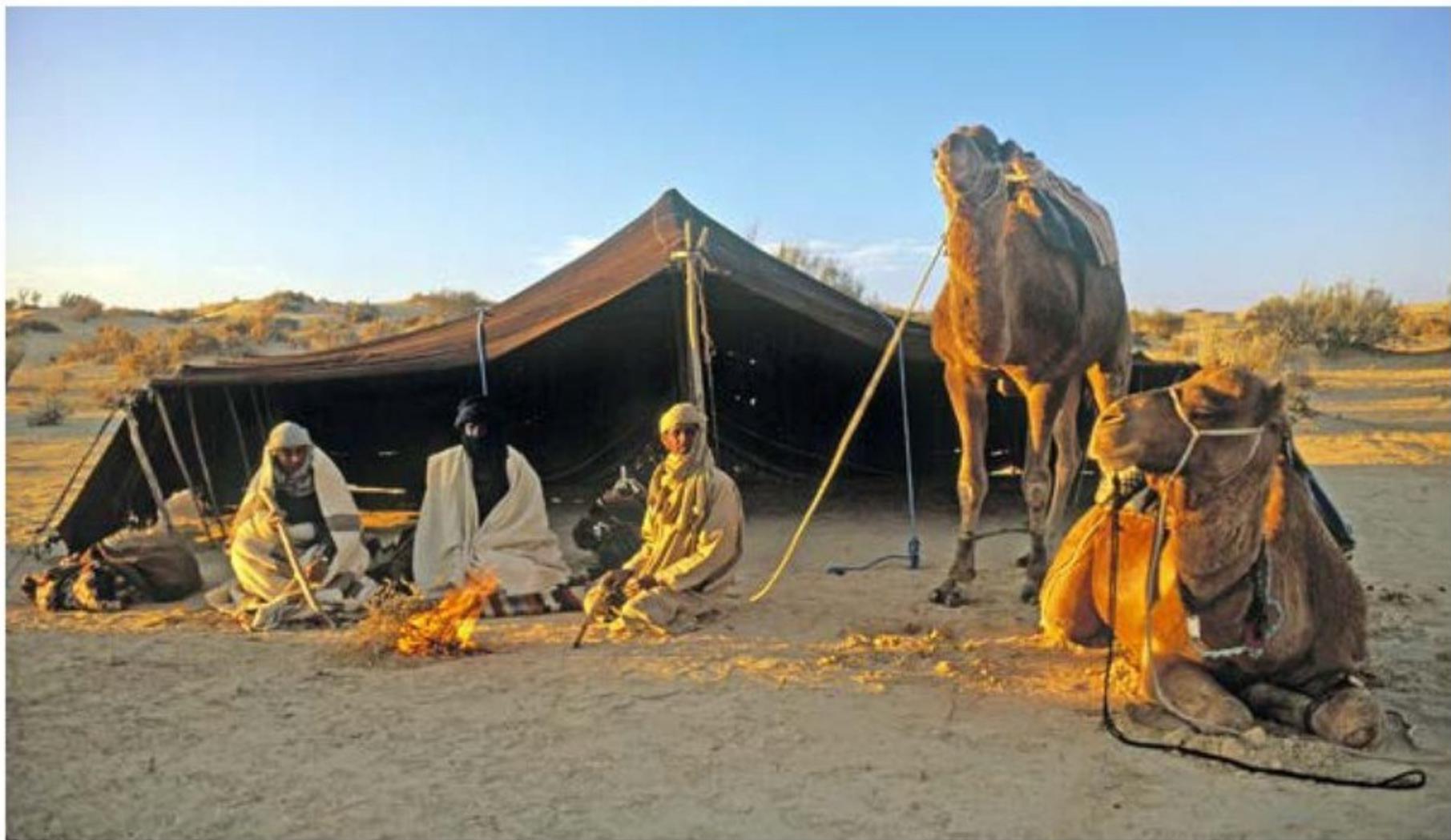


Prickly pear cactus fruits

The O'odham traded salt and cactus syrup with other native peoples for corn, beans, and wheat. This food helped the O'odham during long periods without rain.

## *Drinking Water*

Some O'odham villages were near springs and streams. Other villages dug wells in the ground. But many people lived far away from water. Young girls hiked into mountain canyons to get water.



Bedouin tents are low to the ground so the wind will not blow them over.

## The Bedouin

Can you imagine moving to a new place every week? Another desert people, known as the Bedouin, moved from place to place on camels in search of food and water. Because they moved so often, the Bedouin owned very few items. *Bedouin* means “people of the desert.”

The Bedouin lived in tents. In a few hours, they could pack up and move. Today, many Bedouins still travel the Syrian, Arabian, and Sahara deserts.



An oasis in the Sahara Desert

The Sahara Desert is the largest desert in the world: 9 million square kilometers (3.5 million sq mi). In some parts, it rains less than 25 millimeters (1 in) per year!

Less rain falls in the Sahara than in the Sonoran Desert. Fewer plants and animals live there. The Bedouin had to travel far in search of food and water.

The Sahara is more than sand. It also includes mountains, valleys, and **oases**. An oasis is a place in a desert where water creates a rich green area.

Deserts cover roughly one-fifth of the Earth's surface. Can you find the Sonoran Desert? The Sahara Desert?

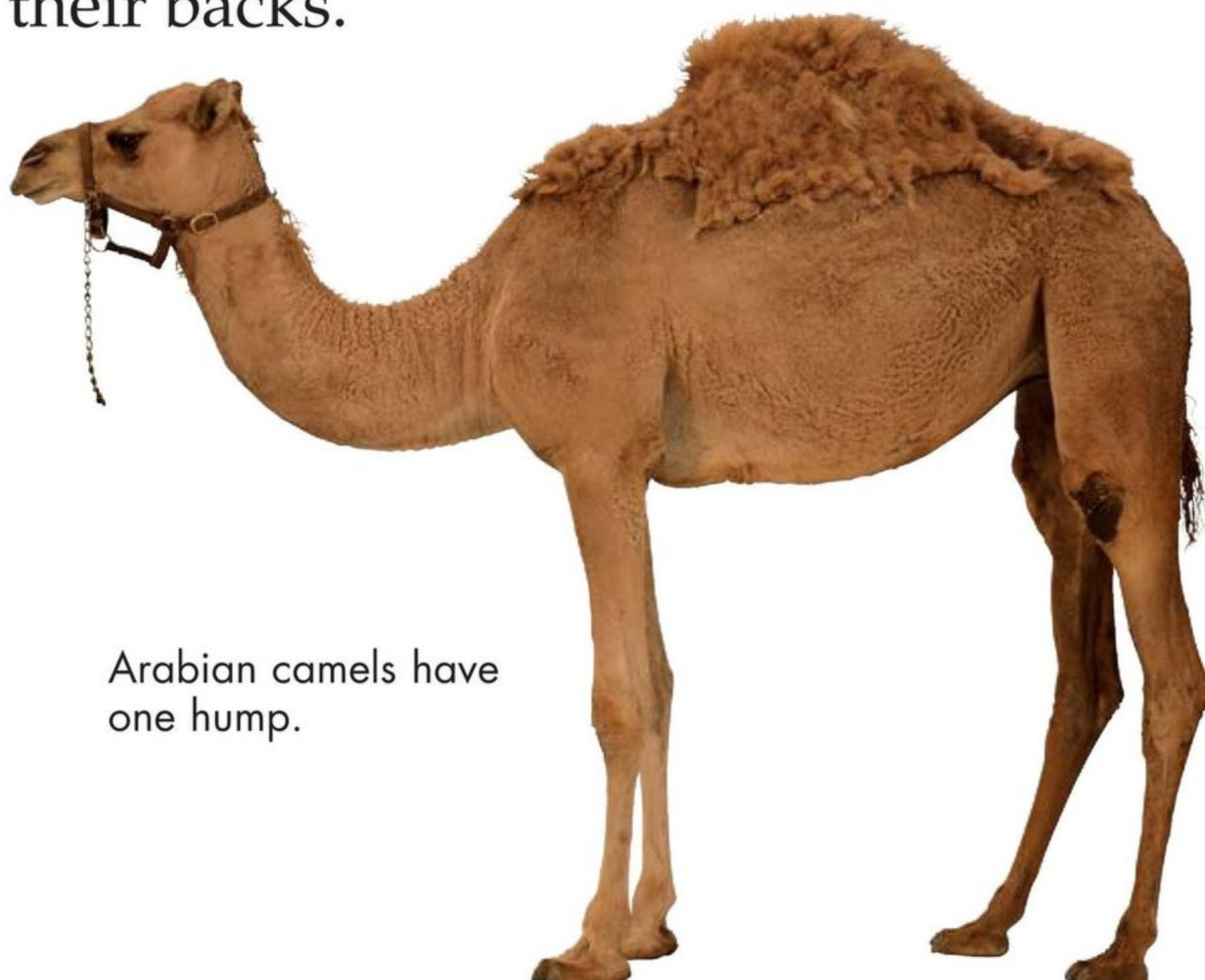


## Camping with Camels

Arabian camels gave the Bedouin shelter, clothing, food, and rides.

The Bedouin wove camel hair into tents and clothing. They also drank camel milk and ate camel meat. They even burned camel **dung** for campfires!

Camels can go a long time without water. Arabian camels can walk 50 kilometers (30 mi) in a day. They can carry up to 270 kilograms (600 lbs) on their backs.



Arabian camels have one hump.

## Fruits and Vegetables

The Bedouin did not grow many crops. But in late summer, they camped out near oases with date palms. Bedouins ate some dates fresh and dried others to save for later.



People living around the Sahara Desert have been eating dates for at least 6,000 years.

## Meat

The Bedouin hunted desert animals for food. Sometimes trained dogs rode with the Bedouin to track animals. Can you imagine a dog riding a camel?

## Drinking Water

The Bedouin knew where to find oases. They dug wells to pull water from the ground. They carried the water in bags made of camel skin.

## More Desert People

The Tohono O'odham and the Bedouin are just two of the world's desert peoples. There have been many more.

**Australian Aborigines** hunted with spears and throwing sticks. Women gathered food. The Aborigines wore very little clothing. They slept by the warm campfire.



Aboriginal kids at a playground near Alice Springs, Australia

**Nomads** traveled the cold and windy Gobi Desert. They raised sheep, goats, and cattle. They lived in round tents.

Atacama Indians in South America lived in the dry **Atacama Desert**. They raised guinea pigs and llamas. They also planted crops.



Kalahari Bushmen in southern Africa carry small bows.

**Bushmen** lived in the Kalahari Desert. Women gathered plants and roots. Men hunted with bows and arrows.

For thousands of years, people have found food, water, shelter, and more in the desert. Desert people have learned how to live in these beautiful and challenging lands.

## Try This

Do you think you could grow food like the Tohono O'odham?

You probably could! Ask a teacher, parent, or friend to help you. But be careful, you might plant a seed in their head, too!

### Grow Your Own Food

- ① Find out what kinds of fruits, vegetables, and herbs grow in your area.
- ② Decide what you want to grow, and buy the seeds.
- ③ Choose a sunny spot with soft soil.  
(You can also fill a pot with soil.)
- ④ Get help from someone who knows how to grow plants (or read the instructions on the seed packet).
- ⑤ Dig a shallow hole.
- ⑥ Place a seed in the hole and wait for the seed to grow!



## Glossary

<b>adapt</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to adjust to new conditions (p. 5)
<b>Australian Aborigines</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the native people of Australia who lived there before Europeans came (p. 17)
<b>Atacama Desert</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the high-desert region in northern Chile (p. 18)
<b>Bushmen</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	one of the native peoples of southern Africa (p. 18)
<b>dung</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	animal manure (also known as poop) (p. 15)
<b>nomads</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	people who move from place to place with no permanent home (p. 17)
<b>oases</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	fertile places in the desert that have water (p. 13)

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## PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Bedouin: (BED-oo-in)

Tohono O'odham: (toe-HOE-noh OH-eh-dom)

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### Correlation

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