

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills ~~6~~⁶th Edition

DIBELS

DIBELS Oral Reading Fluency Progress Monitoring Sixth Grade Student Materials

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Instructions:

These are reusable student materials. Make one copy for each person who is doing the progress monitoring testing. They can be laminated and comb bound for reuse.

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Another Kind of Water Safety

Suppose you're hiking with friends on a hot summer day, and you come to a sparkling stream of clear, cool water. The water in the stream looks so inviting, and you suddenly realize that you're thirsty. Should you take a drink from the stream?

The answer is as clear as the stream water: don't drink it! Most freshwater isn't safe to drink, even if it looks pure. Most mountain and forest water contains microorganisms—tiny living things—that you can't see but that can make you sick.

Your safety is optimized if you take your own water with you on outdoor adventures. If you can't carry all the purified water you'll need, though, you have some viable alternatives. You can boil freshwater to make it safe to drink. Boiling kills the harmful microorganisms, but it may not remove all toxins or dangerous chemicals from the water. It also requires that you carry heavy equipment such as a pot, a stove, and fuel.

You can also take along chemicals that kill germs in water. These chemicals make the water safe to drink, but they often give it a bad taste. Another method for purifying freshwater is to use filters, but experts caution people to choose carefully since not all filters make water absolutely safe to drink.

If you find yourself running out of water, you can conserve your "inner water" by staying out of direct sunlight, by covering your skin so that you don't lose as much water through perspiration, and by wearing a hat. Don't eat salty snacks, because these will increase your thirst.

In an emergency, if you have to drink untreated water, avoid water that is near shores. Drink from an upstream source of

water, if one is available, and beware of shallow water or water that has a bad odor. If you develop a stomachache a few days or weeks after drinking untreated water, visit a doctor to find out if you caught a disease from drinking contaminated water.

Wondrous, Wet World

A tropical rain forest is like no other place on Earth, with its dense canopy of trees and amazing variety of animal and plant life. Howler monkeys, boa constrictors, and giant spiders are but a few of the inhabitants of these lush forests.

If you were a weather forecaster for a rain forest, your job would be easy. You could give a consistent forecast for almost every day of the year. “Today’s weather will be hot and humid, with a ninety percent chance of rain.” Tropical rain forests are located just north and south of the equator, the imaginary line that appears as a belt around the globe.

Although tropical rain forests cover only about seven percent of the world, more than half of the world’s wildlife resides there. We don’t know for sure how many different plants and animals there are, though, because the rain forest is so inaccessible. Scientists are still discovering new animal and plant species in rain forests. In the Amazon rain forest, for example, scientists have counted at least two thousand species of butterfly, and on just one jungle tree, they found two hundred different kinds of ants.

Many rain forest animals live their whole lives in trees that can grow as high as two hundred feet. Animals such as colobus monkeys find everything they need in their lofty tree homes and rarely descend to the ground.

Rain forests are endangered and some are quickly disappearing, though. People are chopping down the trees for wood or burning the forests to farm the land. This means that the animals that live in the forests are also disappearing. Scientists worry that the destruction of the forests will have dangerous

effects on global weather patterns and that many plants that might provide valuable medicines will become extinct.

Fortunately, people around the world are working to preserve the rain forest ecosystems. You can help by learning more about these forests and sharing what you learn with others. If you avoid buying endangered rain forest animals or plants, or products made from them, you reduce the market for them. You can also find out what different groups are doing to save the rain forests and consider helping them. Your help can make a world of difference.

Food for Thought

Jay is growing up on a farm where almost nothing he eats comes in a wrapper. For example, for breakfast yesterday he had two eggs gathered from the henhouse and a peach he plucked from a backyard tree. For lunch, he ate a sandwich made with homemade bread, and for supper, he had squash and tomatoes picked from the garden and fish that his dad had caught.

Jay is aware of other ways of eating, though. He is familiar with the endless rows of snack foods on the shelves of the supermarket in town and the boxy restaurants that sell hamburgers and fried chicken to go. He doesn't understand why these are called "convenience foods," since you have to drive all that way to get them, when you could just walk to the kitchen and slice a piece of homemade pie or pick a plum off a tree in the yard. Jay thinks they should be called "inconvenient" foods because it takes so much more work to get them.

Last summer, he visited his cousin Ben for a week. "Are you hungry?" Ben asked on the day Jay arrived. Jay was indeed hungry after the long train trip, so Ben opened a huge bag of potato chips. In no time, Ben and Jay had eaten most of the chips.

Jay was surprised at how many chips he ate, but he was even more surprised at how hungry he still felt. As the week went by, Jay ate many other kinds of snack foods and fast foods. He couldn't exactly say that he liked the salty and sugary foods, but he found himself eating a lot of them, even when he wasn't hungry.

When Jay returned home and to his usual way of eating, he had a new appreciation for the fresh, homegrown foods his

family ate. He saw that it meant something to be connected to the food he ate, especially when it came to him from human hands instead of out of a bag.

Zoo Food

Our class paid a visit to the zoo, but it wasn't an ordinary trip. We went to learn about feeding zoo animals. Before the field trip, our class researched the needs of various animals and made a list of questions. For example, one student wanted to know how they fed crocodiles, my friend wondered if anteaters ate ants, and someone else had questions about feeding snakes.

When the class arrived at the zoo, a caretaker greeted us in a special building where meals are planned and prepared. She explained that zoos rarely feed the animals what they eat in the wild. "An animal's natural foods aren't easily available," she said. "We have to find substitute diets that are appealing and good for the animals."

The caretaker took the class into the spotless zoo kitchen where several giant refrigerators are available for storing meat, fish, chicken, fruits, and vegetables. She showed students the storage room, with its huge bins filled with grain pellets, cereal, biscuits, peanut butter, nuts, and seeds. Then she let them read the notebooks that listed types and amounts of foods for each animal.

One of my friends inquired about the anteater. "We can't supply the thousands of live ants and termites this animal eats," the caretaker said, "But we've discovered they will eat cat food soaked in water." As for snakes, she explained that keepers open the door to a snake exhibit very carefully before placing a mouse or rat inside. "If several snakes live together, we'll separate them for a meal so they don't fight over the food," she added.

"With crocodiles, keepers usually go in the exhibit area, following the same routine every day, so the crocodiles get used

to them,” the caretaker said. “For extra safety, we carry long poles and never take our eyes off the animals.”

Before they left the zoo, the students watched a caretaker feed a rare pink pigeon chick. As the students boarded the bus to go back to school, our teacher asked them to sum up their feelings about the visit in one or two words. I raised my hand first. “That’s easy,” I said. “My overall feeling is, I’M FAMISHED!”

The Coolest Game

Any game that's played on a frozen surface is bound to be cool, but hockey is cool in the other sense of the word. It's an exciting game played at lightning speed by two teams that consist of six players each. A team wins a hockey game by scoring more goals than its opponents.

The players use wooden sticks that curve at the bottom to move a rubber disk called a puck across the ice and into a net to score a goal. One player on each team serves as a goalie and is responsible for protecting the team's goal. Players wear padded uniforms and helmets, mouth guards, and ice skates with blades specially made for the sport.

In hockey, the action never stops. Referees and other officials monitor the action, while players keep the game moving and try to avoid penalties. A hockey rink is marked with red and blue lines and circles that show different playing zones.

No one knows for certain exactly how hockey originated, but the game most likely developed as a version of "stick and ball" games played on land in Europe for hundreds of years. British soldiers in eastern Canada first began playing ice hockey in the middle of the nineteenth century. By the end of the century, women had begun playing the sport, too.

Hockey rules, mainly based on the game of rugby, were written in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The rubber ball originally used in the game evolved into a block of wood and later into a hard rubber disk known as a puck.

Interest in the game of hockey spread quickly. With the invention of the first indoor rink of artificial ice, the sport caught

on in the United States. Early in the twentieth century, professional teams and leagues were formed.

Today there are professional teams all over the United States and the world. More people are playing and watching hockey than ever before. It's fast, colorful, and thrilling. In other words, hockey is one of the coolest sports around!

Mount Fuji

The most famous symbol of Japan is not an electronic game or a car that saves fuel. It's a cone-shaped mountain known as Mount Fuji. Located near the Pacific coast about sixty miles west of Tokyo, Fuji is the tallest mountain in Japan. It rises to a height of over twelve thousand feet.

Fuji is actually a volcano formed from layers of ash and lava and crowned by a wide crater. Even more accurately, it is three overlapping volcanoes. Over thousands of years, lava and ash from the youngest volcano have covered the two older volcanoes. This process has helped create the tapered form of the mountain.

The name is thought to mean "everlasting life." Fuji has long been considered sacred in Japan. Its graceful cone has inspired poets and artists throughout the centuries. To add to its majesty, Fuji is surrounded by beautiful forests and lakes.

Fuji has erupted at least ten times since the eighth century. Although nearly three hundred years have passed since the volcano last erupted, geologists still consider it active. There are areas of hot sand on the rim of its crater. This leads some scientists to think that the volcano may erupt again.

Every year, thousands of pilgrims flock to the shrines and temples that surround the volcano. Hundreds of thousands of hikers and tourists from around the world also climb one of several zigzag routes to the summit during the summer climbing season. The hike up the mountain can take between five and seven hours or longer. The trip down can take about three hours. Some of the hikers set out at night, flashlights in hand. This allows them to reach the crater rim just as the sun is rising from

the ocean to set the sky ablaze. What could be more fitting than standing at sunrise on the highest peak in Japan, a country known as the Land of the Rising Sun?

Jerome's Artwork

It began with idle doodling in the margins of his notes during class, which might have seemed to an observer like a nervous habit or a sign of boredom. At any rate, Jerome seized every opportunity to draw. Sometimes he used pencil, sometimes pen. He experimented with different styles of drawing by imitating lines and shapes from artworks he admired.

Jerome had to be secretive about drawing, because he didn't want his teacher, Ms. Holt, to catch him and assume that he wasn't paying attention to her lectures about pronoun antecedents or Civil War generals. When Ms. Holt's back was turned, he drew, and when she was across the room helping a student, he drew. As far as Jerome knew, his drawing had gone unnoticed by Ms. Holt.

One afternoon, Jerome was nearly out of the classroom when Ms. Holt called his name. "We have something to discuss," she said. Jerome turned around and walked to her desk, resigned to the fact that at last, he was going to get in trouble for drawing during class.

"I see that you like to draw," Ms. Holt began. "And by your responses in class and your work on tests, I can tell that drawing doesn't interfere with your learning. So I'm not going to ask you to stop." Jerome was relieved, but he could tell that Ms. Holt wasn't finished with the subject.

Ms. Holt explained that the school wanted to create a permanent mural for the main hallway and that she had recommended to the principal that Jerome design the mural. "We'd like for you to submit two or three suggestions for the mural," she said.

When Jerome left school that day, he was excited about the prospect of putting his drawing ability to good use. He worked all weekend on suggestions for the mural and turned them in on Monday. That day, as he listened to Ms. Holt's English lesson while sketching in the margins of his paper, Ms. Holt looked at Jerome briefly and smiled. Jerome smiled back and then went back to his drawing.

The Subject of Subways

Some people call it the tube, some know it as the metro, and others call it the underground. You might know it as a subway. All these terms refer to an underground railway system of connected cars that transport people from place to place in cities and suburbs.

Subway passengers board or exit the cars at stations along a route. Steps or escalators usually connect a subway station to the street level. Some subways emerge above ground at the far end of a line. Most subways pass under city streets, but they can also pass under rivers or even ocean bays.

The first subway, in London, was begun less than two hundred years ago and finished three years later. Workers dug trenches below the streets, built bricked sides and arches in the trenches, and then covered them with earth and restored the streets to their original condition. The first subway line used steam locomotives. This new way to travel was an immediate success, carrying more than nine million passengers during its first year.

A few years later, another subway line was begun in London, using a special tunneling shield that pushed through the clay deep underground so that street traffic wasn't disrupted. On later subways, electricity was being used to operate the lines.

Other cities began to build subways. The first subway line in the United States was constructed in Boston and was completed about one hundred years ago. A few years later, New York City began what was to become the largest subway system in the world.

In the twentieth century, developers began using computer and aerospace technology to build automatic subway trains. The first completely automatic system was developed in the San Francisco Bay area. This system is operated by remote control. Most of today's subway cars have air conditioning and offer smooth, fast rides.

When you consider the problems caused by increasing traffic on city streets, subway travel makes good sense. You're doing your part for clean air, you're avoiding the bother and risk of car travel, and your attention is free for reading or daydreaming. The subway is a smart way to go.

The Boy and the Scorpion: A Modern Fable

A boy and his family had recently moved to a home near the woods. To the boy, it seemed that he had moved to the Land of Ten Thousand Bugs.

Every day or night, there would be a new, jarring discovery. For example, the boy would be startled by a centipede crawling across the floor or a beetle clinging to the screen door. One morning, when the boy slipped a foot into his running shoe, he felt a fierce sting on his toe. He turned the shoe upside down and shook it, and out dropped an outraged scorpion that scampered away before the boy could respond.

After that, the boy declared war on insects and would stalk about the house, alert for any indication of a crawling creature. “The only good insect is a squashed insect,” was the boy’s motto.

One morning, the boy awoke and was halfway down the stairs when he felt the house suddenly rise and then come crashing down. The boy was tossed about like a rag doll.

When he regained his footing, the boy saw that his house had completely changed. The walls were made of canvas and had no windows, a huge flap lay in the middle of the floor, and two large ropes were draped on either side of the flap. The boy realized that he was standing inside an enormous shoe.

Next, he saw an immense human foot entering the shoe. Terrified that he would be squashed, the boy reached up and pinched the foot with all his strength, and the foot retreated quickly. Then the boy felt the shoe being shaken. He tried to cling to one of the ropes, but the force was too great and he

dropped to the floor, where he scrambled in panic under a giant bed.

When the boy awoke from his terrible and disturbing dream, he considered his experience and decided he had a new attitude toward insects. He saw that they meant no harm, except when they were threatened. From that time forward, when the boy found a bug in the house, he gently coaxed it into a jar and emptied the jar respectfully in the woods.

Moral: Before judging others, try putting yourself in their shoes.

Yoga for Kids

What's your favorite type of exercise? For many kids, it's soccer, basketball, tennis, swimming, or maybe pressing the buttons on a computer game, but another form of exercise that's becoming more popular is yoga.

Yoga is a great way to exercise the whole body, regardless of your physical ability. Yoga exercises consist of poses, or postures, that help strengthen, stretch, and tone the body. In addition, they promote balance and relaxation.

No special equipment is required to practice yoga. Some people use exercise mats, but you can always use the bare floor and a towel. When practicing yoga, you should wear comfortable clothes such as tights or shorts and a loose shirt.

You can purchase or check out books and videotapes that teach the basics of yoga, or you can attend a class. The best way to learn yoga is from an experienced instructor who enthusiastically practices yoga.

If you were to attend a yoga class, you might begin by warming up with some gentle stretches. Next, you might do special work poses such as the "tree pose." In this pose, you stand on one leg with the foot of the other leg placed on the inside thigh of the standing leg. Then you slowly raise your arms above your head, placing your palms together.

Some poses may be sitting or squatting poses, or you might lie on your back with your legs stretched over your head. Some yoga poses may look strange, but they feel great, like a nice long yawn.

Breathing deeply and steadily is quite important in yoga, because it helps you stretch your body and relax into the poses.

Speaking of relaxing, an essential part of a yoga session is lying still and quiet for several minutes at the end. “Allow your body to melt into the floor,” a yoga instructor might say. This is a time of rest and making room for the calm, silent part of us that sometimes gets lost in the noise of everyday life. No wonder this is the most popular part of a yoga session!

Hot Springs National Park

This is an idea that just doesn't make sense to most children. A person would actually travel long distances and pay money just to take a bath? It sounds outrageous, and yet, for more than two hundred years, people have come from all over the world to bathe in hot mineral springs in a resort in central Arkansas. In fact, Native Americans were the first to discover and bathe in the spring waters hundreds of years before that.

The springs are located at the base of Hot Springs Mountain in Hot Springs National Park, the oldest park in the National Park System. There are about forty-seven hot springs in the area. Minerals in the water are said to treat ailments such as arthritis. The average temperature of the water is around one hundred degrees Fahrenheit. There are also crystal-clear, cold-water springs in the park, which people use for drinking.

A spring develops when surface water from rain or snow finds its way deep into the ground through layers of rock, where geothermal processes in the earth heat the spring water. The spring water is uncontaminated, and the park service takes care to preserve its purity for bathing and drinking.

The park service has set up a system for collecting and distributing the spring water to the bathhouses in the park. What's it like to visit a bathhouse? First, you lock your valuables in a security box when you enter the bathhouse. Then you're escorted to a private bathing area, where you might be given a cup of hot, pure mineral water to drink to help you enjoy the atmosphere of your hot bath.

Next, you step into the bath and relax for about twenty minutes. After the bath you might take a bracing, cool shower.

Then you rest for twenty or minutes or so. Some people choose to receive a massage after their bath. After dressing and retrieving your valuables, you leave the bathhouse feeling relaxed and refreshed. The idea sounds wonderful, doesn't it, unless, of course, you're a typical child.

Mrs. Lee's Other House

One day I asked my friend Jin Lee if we could visit the firehouse where her mother is stationed. The station happens to be in our neighborhood, so we walked there on a Saturday morning.

Mrs. Lee greeted us at the station. "Welcome to my second home!" she said, referring to the several nights a month that she sleeps there. The first things I noticed were the uniforms and helmets, called "turnout gear," all neatly hanging on hooks on a wall. Jin told me that the gear can weigh as much as seventy pounds.

Mrs. Lee showed us the dormitory bedrooms where firefighters sleep, the exercise room where they stay fit, the kitchen, and the recreation room with its television, VCR, and shelves full of books. There were two gleaming fire trucks in the garage, and as we sat in one of the trucks, Mrs. Lee described the feeling of going on a call. "The sirens are on, the lights are flashing, and your heart is pumping," she said. "During the ride, I wonder what I'll find and whether I'll be able to help."

I asked Mrs. Lee about the skills a person needs to be a firefighter. "First, you have to be physically fit because you have to carry around a lot of heavy equipment and move quickly," she said. "And you need good instincts and the ability to stay calm in an emergency."

"I like doing something exciting and necessary," Mrs. Lee said when I asked her what she liked best about firefighting. When I asked her what she liked least about the job, she said, "The worst part of my job is when I am not able to help, and I don't like to go on false alarms."

Walking back home from the fire station, my mind was buzzing with all I'd seen and learned. That night, lying in bed, I had a vision I hadn't had since I was a little girl. It was of me, dressed in full turnout gear, jumping out of a red truck to help people in need.

Saving a Life

“Todd is going to be fine,” said the doctor to Todd’s mother in the television program. “He lost a lot of blood in the accident but the donated blood saved his life.” As Yoko watched the program, she became curious about blood donation. Then she realized that she could put her curiosity to work by using the topic for a school research report.

She began by listing questions about the topic. The next day, she called the local blood donation center and spoke to a volunteer named Hal, who explained that to be a donor, a person must be at least seventeen years old, weigh one hundred and ten pounds or more, and be healthy.

“First, you fill out a form about your health history to see if it’s safe for you to donate blood,” Hal said. “Next, we check your blood pressure, pulse, temperature, and red blood cell count to make sure you’re healthy. If you’re a suitable donor, you lie in a comfortable seat while we insert a needle and draw out a pint of blood. You’ll feel a slight pinch from the needle.”

He told Yoko that drawing out the blood takes about ten minutes and that most people feel fine afterwards. “The body replaces the lost fluids within a day,” he said.

Yoko learned from Hal that the blood is tested to determine the donor’s blood type and to ensure its safety. Then it’s separated into red cells, platelets, and plasma. Hal explained that these different parts serve different functions. “When we split the components into three parts, you have the chance to save three lives,” he said. “Then we store the components at an appropriate temperature until they’re needed.”

“Every two seconds, someone in this country needs blood,” Hal added. “Blood donations help people treated for accidents, surgeries, and serious diseases.”

After Yoko shared the information with her parents, they both donated blood. Yoko’s teacher also donated blood when she read Yoko’s report. Yoko was not yet old enough to be a donor. But, in a way, her curiosity about blood donation was on its way to saving lives.

Martha Graham

Imagine a woman sitting for hours in front of a lion's cage in a zoo. She watches the lion very carefully, studying its every movement as it paces back and forth across the cage. Then, the woman goes home and teaches herself to move as the lion moved.

The woman so interested in a lion's movement was Martha Graham, one of the greatest dancers of the twentieth century. She changed people's ideas about what dance is by exploring new ways of movement and by connecting dance and feelings.

When Martha saw her first live dance performance as a teenager, she made up her mind to become a dancer. She began taking lessons, eventually becoming a lead dancer in the dance company that was part of the school where she studied.

Soon Martha was performing around the country and gaining fame as a dancer. After a few years, she struck out on her own, teaching and creating a personal dance style. She formed her own dance group, creating experimental dances that expressed feelings such as joy and grief in new ways and doing away with fancy costumes in favor of simple outfits and bare stages.

Not everyone loved Martha's dances. Some called them hard to understand and even "ugly," but Martha was not discouraged. She kept pushing her talent as far as she could, striking out in new directions. She added male dancers to her company and began to use spoken words. The company performed all over the world, and Martha became an international star, widely celebrated as a genius.

Martha's last dance performance was at the age of seventy-five. She continued to teach and to direct her company and travel

abroad with them until shortly before her death, at the age of ninety-six. Since her teenage years, dance had mattered more than anything in her life. “I did not choose to be a dancer,” Martha once said. “I was chosen.”

Four-Legged Heroes

Not all of the heroes in a rescue are firefighters, police officers, or medical personnel. Some aren't even humans. They're dogs, most of them specially trained to search for humans who need help. Rescue dogs also help comfort victims and escort people out of danger.

Dogs such as Gus, a yellow Labrador retriever, appear on the scenes of disasters in the United States, often within hours of an event. Gus and his owner, Ed Apple, are part of the Tennessee Task Force One Urban Search and Rescue Team. Gus is trained to work closely with Ed, who uses hand signals and voice commands to guide Gus over surfaces such as unstable concrete and other wreckage. Gus's job is to sniff the air for the scent of a human trapped beneath the rubble.

According to Ed, rescue dogs love their work. "They'll keep looking until you call them off," he says. Rescue dogs usually work in shifts and take time out for rest and play. Some rescue dogs are specially trained to help comfort people. The dogs are brought to the site of a disaster so that victims can hug and talk to them. This helps people who are suffering from the fear and sadness of having gone through a disaster.

After undergoing special training for two years or more, rescue dogs have to pass difficult tests, such as safely climbing up ladders and through tunnels. They must obey a handler's commands without being distracted by other sounds or activities, and they must go only where their handlers indicate. When rescue dogs find survivors, they are trained to stay in one place and bark for thirty seconds.

Rescue dogs have saved hundreds of lives, and are important members of rescue teams. To Ed, Gus is far more than just a pet. “Gus really lives up to being called man’s best friend,” he says with pride.

An Ideal Snack

Suppose you're asked to design the perfect snack food. The food must provide its own packaging, taste sweet and satisfying, give you a quick burst of energy, and be very good for you.

Actually, the perfect snack food has already been "invented." It's the banana, possessor of its own packaging, a thick peel that protects the fruit and is easily removed. Not only are bananas delicious, they're good for you. Bananas provide more potassium by weight than all other fruits except avocados. Potassium helps balance fluids in the body and regulate blood pressure and heartbeat. Bananas also contain carbohydrates, which provide quick energy.

Bananas ripen best after they've been picked. Some people like the tart taste of barely ripened bananas with spotless yellow skins that have green tips. Others prefer the sweet and creamy taste of fully ripened bananas whose skins are flecked with brown spots.

Bananas are available all year and are the most popular fresh fruit in the United States, but they're not grown commercially in this country. They're cultivated in tropical areas such as Central and South America.

The banana is actually a type of berry, and a banana tree is a type of herb. Banana "trees," whose "trunks" are tightly wrapped layers of leaves, can grow from fifteen to thirty feet high.

When shopping, look for bananas that are plump, firm, and brightly colored. Bananas that aren't completely ripe should be stored at room temperature. You can place them in a paper bag to speed up ripening. To slow ripening, place bananas in the

refrigerator. The skins will turn dark, but the fruit will be fine. Bananas will keep for up to two weeks in the refrigerator.

For snacking, you can't beat a banana. Actually, you can beat a banana with a little cold evaporated skim milk to create a tasty topping. You can slice and freeze banana chunks for a great frozen snack, or you can slice a banana on cereal. Any way you slice it, a banana is an ideal snack.

Waterspouts

When is a tornado not a tornado? When that furiously spinning column of air known as a tornado is rotating over water, it's called a waterspout. A waterspout can form out of a small thunderstorm and drop down over water, or, in coastal areas, it can begin as a tornado on land and then move out over water.

A waterspout extends down from a towering cumulus cloud to a large body of water. Waterspouts have been spotted over lakes, oceans, and wide rivers. They are usually smaller than tornadoes, and the winds are not as strong, although there have been some exceptional waterspouts reported over the years. As with tornadoes, waterspouts can occur in series and take on different characteristics. Their usual speeds are about fifty miles per hour but their speeds can vary substantially.

A famous waterspout occurred over the ocean near Massachusetts a little over one hundred years ago. Those who witnessed the waterspout estimated that the column was about three thousand feet long. It lasted for about thirty-five minutes, disappearing and reappearing several times.

Where is a good place to see a waterspout in the United States? You can usually find them in the Florida Keys or on the Great Lakes. Waterspouts occur most often during spring and summer in the northern United States and year-round in southern areas.

Although there have been few proven cases of waterspouts destroying large ships, they can be dangerous to small vessels. They can also become deadly when they move from water onto land in populated areas.

One myth holds that firing a cannonball into a waterspout can break it up, but this has no scientific basis. Also, some people have reported waterspouts sucking up fish and seaweed from the water and then carrying them inland and raining them onto the land. I know what you're thinking. You're picturing the weather forecaster on the nightly television news pointing to the Florida coast and saying, "The forecast for tonight is cloudy, with a thirty percent chance of fish."

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument

In a landscape of rugged mountains and stark plains grows a plant common in Mexico but rare in the United States. The plant is the organ pipe cactus. It is named for its clusters of tall fingers that resemble the pipes of an organ. It grows on slopes that face south, the better to catch the sun's rays. In late spring and early summer, its pale purple and white blooms open at night. This cactus is one of more than twenty species found in the desert wilderness of Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in Arizona.

The animals and plants of the park have adapted themselves to extreme temperatures and little rainfall. Nature has equipped them with ways to conserve moisture, since there is little water to drink. Temperatures on summer days can be scorching. Nights are much cooler than the days, during all seasons.

Animals are less visible than the plants in the park, especially during the day. On an afternoon hike, you're not likely to see the kangaroo rats, elf owls, jackrabbits, or snakes. These creatures rest in cool, shady spots during the day. At nightfall, they emerge from their hiding places. If you are lucky, you might see bighorn sheep, birds, lizards, and coyotes in the early morning or late afternoon.

The park's mountains were formed from ancient volcanoes. Its basins were formed from flowing water. Perhaps the most unexpected natural feature in the park is the presence of springs. A variety of plants grow near these rare sources of water. Wildlife from the surrounding desert are drawn to the springs. The largest spring in the park can be reached from a hiking trail.

The park can fool the casual gazer. It may seem lifeless and unwelcoming at first. But to the careful observer, it reveals an abundance of life and amazing scenery under the clear desert sky.

What Happened to Sky?

I can't recall a time when my sister, Rosa, wasn't in love with birds. When Rosa was four, my parents bought a birdfeeder, filled it with birdseed, and suspended it from a tree outside the kitchen window. Rosa would watch her feathered friends for hours, studying their behavior and then reporting on her observations.

After much pleading from Rosa, my parents finally surrendered and bought her a parakeet. Rosa was six at the time and had become an expert on pet birds, and understood the responsibilities of pet ownership. At a local pet store, Rosa selected a light blue parakeet, which she named Sky, for obvious reasons.

Every afternoon, for about half an hour, Rosa would let Sky out of his cage to get his exercise. One day Sky was flitting around the den and settling on his favorite perches in the room, including on our dog Sam's head and the fireplace mantel. The family was accustomed to this activity, so no one was supervising Sky closely. The next thing we knew, though, Sky had disappeared and it was hours before we found him.

At first, we suspected Sam, but Sky and the dog were good friends. Rosa called Sky, who recognized his name and usually came when called, but he didn't respond. We searched every square inch of the den.

By bedtime, we'd looked everywhere throughout the house and outside and were exhausted, so we all went to bed. I was fairly certain that Rosa wasn't going to get any sleep that night with her beloved bird missing, and I suspected that Sky had vanished for good.

Rosa later told us that she lay in her bed in the dark, alternately worrying and dozing. In the dark, she heard Sam pad into her room and approach the bed. Rosa extended her hand to pat Sam's head, but she felt something unusual, so she sat up and switched on the bedside light. There, atop Sam's head, perched Sky.

We never did figure out where that rascal Sky had gone. Too bad Sam can't talk.

For the Love of Books

Several years ago, Jon's parents and others in the community raised money to build a small library because residents had grown tired of driving twenty miles each way to the nearest public library. The library building was modest, but its shelves bulged with all sorts of books that had been donated by people in the community.

The library director was a retired librarian named Mrs. Hong, who accepted a small salary for her work. Volunteers kept the bookshelves in order and helped library visitors find and check out books. During summers and sometimes after school, Jon volunteered at the library. He loved reading books, and he took pleasure in just being near them.

One day, Mrs. Hong was telling Jon about her dream of adding a children's wing to the library. She had learned that such an addition would cost much more money than the library could afford. When Jon left the library that afternoon, his mind was churning with ideas.

He talked to several friends about ways to raise money. With Jon's help, they developed a plan that consisted of various fundraising events kids could put on during the year, including car washes, bake sales, errand services, and yard cleanups. Jon and his friends went from classroom to classroom at school, inviting kids to help.

Jon was amazed at the kids' enthusiasm and willingness to help. Parents wanted to help, too, by donating items for an auction and by conducting a huge garage sale. Building a children's wing at the library became a community cause.

Less than a year after Jon’s conversation with Mrs. Hong, the community had raised enough money to build the children’s wing. During the ceremony for the dedication of the new wing, Mrs. Hong called Jon to the front. She was holding a plaque, which she read to the crowd. “This children’s wing is dedicated to the young persons in the community whose hard work, under the leadership of Jon Mills, made a dream come true.”