

The Tale of the Three Little Bilbies

A creative writing activity in Science

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In this activity, children from Stage 3 will construct a story book or electronic presentation to share with a Kindergarten or Stage 1 class.

The story is an adaptation of the familiar tale of the *Three Little Pigs*. However in this version, the story takes place in the Australian desert and the central characters are Bilbies and a Dingo. Have the students research various Australian animals which are to be the central characters in the story. They will also need an animal that makes a home from straw (Mitchell grass) and another which uses sticks. Some suggestions are provided. They will also need some supporting actors, other desert animals (including reptiles and birds, even invertebrates).

You will need:

- a copy of *The Three Little Javelinas* by Susan Lowell or script available from <http://www.surfcitydelux.com/readerstheater/3LittleJavelinas.html>;
- information on, and images of the bilby, Julia Creek dunnart, Greater Stick-nest Rat, dingo and other Australian desert animals from web sites or books;
- information on, and images of plants of the Australian deserts such as salt bush, Mitchell grass and mulga from web sites;
- information on, and images of desert landscapes to provide a background from web sites or books; AND
- computer and software to create an electronic presentation; OR
- materials for students to create a story book.

What to do:

- Read the children *The Three Little Javelinas* or the script. *The Three Little Javelinas*, written by Susan Lowell is set in the Sonoran Desert in North America.
- Discuss the desert as it is described in the story and depicted in the book. What plants are found in the Sonoran Desert? What animals live there? What is a javelina? What people live in the desert?
- Discuss how the story might be different if it was set in an Australian desert.
- Research Australian deserts and its plants and animals to create the environment in which an Australian version of the story might take place and to establish the central and supporting characters.
- Story board the action. Consider alternative outcomes.
- Create a book with illustrations or prepare an electronic presentation using *PowerPoint*, *KidPix* or *HyperStudio*.
- Share your story with Kindergarten or Stage 1 classes

A selection of useful web sites can be found at the *Australia: Our Dry Continent* web page at <http://science.uniserve.edu.au/school/sciweek/2006/dryoz.html>

Suggested scenarios

A House of Straw

There are extensive areas of Australia with native grasses such as Mitchell Grass and spinifex. These provide a habitat for many small mammals such as the various species of dunnart and the Spinifex Hopping Mouse.

The habitat of Sandhill Dunnart is the low sand dunes of the Eyre Peninsula in South Australia. The dunnart is a nocturnal forager which searches for insects during the night. During the day the dunnart prefers to hide in a large clump of spinifex, burrowing itself into the centre.

A House of Sticks

The greater stick-nest rat was once widespread, inhabiting the arid saltbush areas of southern Australia. It had become extinct on the mainland and is now restricted to a few island. However it has recently been reintroduced to conservation areas on the mainland. This species is so named because it builds a large communal nest up to one metre high and 1.5 metres wide, and may be occupied by up to 10 or 20 animals. The nests are built of sticks and are often constructed around a bush that eventually forms part of the nest.

A House of Bricks (?)

Once occupying most of the southern half of Australia, today bilbies are only found in scattered colonies in the isolated desert areas of the Northern Territory, Western Australia, and south-western Queensland. Bilbies are mainly found in grasslands and acacia scrublands amongst spinifex and tussocks. Bilbies construct burrows which have a single opening which may be hidden by a small bush, grass tussock or termite mound. The burrows spiral downwards to a depth of about two metres and, in any colony there may be as many as two dozen burrows in use at any one time.