
GILA MONSTERS MEET YOU AT THE AIRPORT

Author: Marjorie Weinman Sharmat

Illustrator: Byron Barton

Publisher: Macmillan

THEME:

The best way to dispel fears about the unknown is to find the truth about someone or something.

PROGRAM SUMMARY:

A New York City boy has some preconceived ideas about life in the West, and it makes him very apprehensive about the family's move there. LeVar learns just what a gila monster is and more about the West when he introduces a biologist who takes viewers on a tour of the Arizona desert and describes the plant and animal life there.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Invite students to share their experiences with moving. Talk about the mixed feelings of being sad and excited at the same time. What are the best, and worst, things about moving?

Both boys in the story had misconceptions about where they were moving. Ask students how they think the boys got those misconceptions. Talk about any inaccurate ideas the students might have had about something and then learned what was actually true.

The biologist in the program explains how plants and animals adapt to desert life. Discuss with students what it means to "adapt." Will the two boys in the story adapt to their new communities? Why or why not? Discuss how people often need to figure out ways to adapt to their surroundings just as animals and plants do.

Invite students to share any experiences they have had with traveling in an airplane. What can a person *really* find at an airport?

CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

On a large map of the United States, depending on your geographical location, find "Out West" and "Back East." Also, locate "Down South" and "Up North." Discuss how these names probably originated.

Set up a chart for both of the boys in the story. Title the charts "Home Sweet Home." Divide the charts into two columns. On the chart for the boy moving

west, head one column "Out West" and the other column "Home in New York." On the other boy's chart, head one column "Back East" and the other column "Home in the West." Ask students to recall details from the story to complete both charts.

Divide the class into four groups and give each group a directional name—North, South, East, and West. Have each group brainstorm a list of characteristics of their respective locations, such as what people do there, the types of homes they have, animals, the climate, etc. Display the lists and then take the students to the library media center to find information about states within their directional area. Have the groups modify their lists as needed when they return to the classroom and prepare a travel poster inviting visitors to their area (e.g., "Welcome to the West").

Have students work in small groups to role play how to welcome a new student to the classroom and to the neighborhood. After the groups have had a chance to plan and practice their scenes, allow them to present their dramatizations to the whole class. Discuss what the scenes have in common, i.e., what is important to remember when someone new moves in?

Send home a map of the United States with the states outlined and labeled. Have students work with their families to color states that correspond to these two items: States Where I've Lived and States I Have Visited. Instruct them to use two colors—one for each item. Have students return the maps to school. Place a large map of the United States on a bulletin board and choose a color for marking states visited and one for states lived in. Have students use the two colors to make small nametags that can be fastened to straight pins. Using their own U.S. maps as guides, have them place the pins in the appropriate states.

Set up keypals with a classroom in a geographical location that is very different from your own. Exchange information about the school and school activities, the community (its size, what it's known for, famous landmarks, etc.), the weather, plants and animals in the area, and other information that distinguishes the two areas. Take the class on a walking tour or field trip to photograph places in the community and the surrounding area. Scan the photographs into the computer or take the pictures with a digital camera and load them directly, and then e-mail them to your keypals.

Have students research plants and animals of the American southwestern desert to make a desert alphabet book. With the help of the school library media specialist, make available nonfiction books about the desert. Write the alphabet on the board and as the students find plants and animals for the letters, write the words next to each letter. Decide who will be responsible for each page and allow students to choose what they will put on the pages.

They will need to include information and draw pictures. Bind the pages into a book for the classroom library.

Watch the **Reading Rainbow** program, *Raccoons and Ripe Corn*, in which naturalist and author/illustrator Jim Arnosky shows how to determine that different animals have been in wooded areas and near lakes and streams. Compare and contrast the types of animals with those found in a desert habitat. Also compare his tips for wildlife watching with those given by the biologist in *Gila Monsters Meet You at the Airport*.

RELATED THEMES:

United States geography
habitats

RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:

Program #62 — Desert Giant: The World Of The Saguaro Cactus
Program #113 — Alejandro's Gift
Program #44 — Meanwhile Back At The Ranch

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

A native of Portland, Maine, Marjorie Weinman Sharmat, began writing when she was eight—when she created a newspaper filled with news she obtained by spying on adults for her “detective agency.” This fascination with detective work led to the creation of the *Nate the Great* mystery series, a **Reading Rainbow** review selection. The idea for *Gila Monsters Meet You at the Airport* came directly from personal experience when the Sharmat family decided to leave New York and move to Tucson. Her son Andrew had been warned by his friends about the strange things he would find out West. Marjorie is married to author Mitchell Sharmat. They still live in Tucson.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR:

Byron Barton is the author/illustrator of numerous picture books, many of which explain objects and places in everyday life, such as boats, trucks, and airports. His trademark vibrant illustrations and easy-to-read texts are ideal for young readers.

BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:

PETER'S CHAIR
by Ezra Jack Keats (HarperCollins)

MITCHELL IS MOVING
by Marjorie Weinman Sharmat, illus. by Jose Aruego & Ariane Dewey (Macmillan)

THE BIG HELLO
by Janet Schulman, illus. by Lillian Hoban (Greenwillow)

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:

WE ARE BEST FRIENDS
by Alike (Greenwillow)

GOOD-BYE, HOUSE
by Robin Ballard (Greenwillow)

DESERTS
by Gail Gibbons (Holiday House)

GOOD-BYE/HELLO
by Barbara Shook Hazen, illus. by Michael Bryant (Atheneum)

MOVING MOLLY
by Shirley Hughes (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard)

A DESERT SCRAPBOOK
by Virginia Wright-Frierson (Simon & Schuster)

DESERT TRIP
by Barbara A. Steiner, illus. by Ronald Himler (Sierra Club Books for Children)

NO FRIENDS
by James Stevenson (Greenwillow)

ALEXANDER, WHO'S NOT (DO YOU HEAR ME? I MEAN IT!) GOING TO MOVE
by Judith Viorst, illus. by Robin Preiss-Glasser (Atheneum)

IRA SAYS GOODBYE
by Bernard Waber (Houghton Mifflin)



Wild Republic Rubber Gila Monster Toy, Kids Gifts, Educational Gifts, Black & Orange, 7". 4.4 out of 5 stars 20. \$3.99. The Three Little Javelinas (Reading Rainbow Book). Susan Lowell. 4.8 out of 5 stars 106. Hardcover.Â This one wasn't as funny as I expected. It's okay, but I wish I had checked this one out at the library instead of buying it. Read more. Helpful. Comment Report abuse. Petra DeVerona. 5.0 out of 5 stars there should be more like this. March 12, 2014. Michigan Geographic Alliance. Gila Monsters Meet You at the Airport. Marty Mater. 2. Ask students if they know what a Gila monster is (It is a venomous lizard living primarily in Arizona and Mexico, the extreme southeastern corner of California, the southern tip of Nevada, and the southwestern corners of Utah and New Mexico. It can grow to 22 inches long). 3. Give students an outline map of the United States. The young boy in our story has been told that Gila monsters will meet him at the airport. Do you think this is true? Some of the ideas the boy has are unusual and funny. When you hear the