

Alejandro's Gift

Book by Richard E. Albert

Unit study by Celia Hartmann and Ami Brainerd

Social Studies: Geography – Southwestern United States: Our story does not tell us the specific setting. Based on Alejandro's clothing and the plants and animals in the story, we know that it is in North America. The glossary (in the back of the book) mentions the Southwestern region of the United States which is made up of Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah. We also know that this story takes place in a desert. Did you know that there are four deserts in North America? They can all be found in the Southwest. Make a story disk and place it in one of the states mentioned above or in one of the deserts mentioned below.

Sonoran- A relatively small region of extreme south-central California and most of the southern half of Arizona, east to almost the New Mexico line.

Mojave- A portion of southern Nevada, extreme southwestern Utah and of eastern California, north of the Sonoran Desert.

Great Basin- The northern three-quarters of Nevada, western and southern Utah, to the southern third of Idaho and the southeastern corner of Oregon. According to some, it also includes small portions of western Colorado and southwestern Wyoming. Bordered on the south by the Mojave and Sonoran Deserts.

Chihuahuan- A small area of southeastern New Mexico and extreme western Texas, extending south into a vast area of Mexico.

Social Studies: Homes and Houses

Discuss houses with your child. Why do we take shelter in houses? Who made your home? What was it made out of? What different types of homes are there around the world? Some live in tents, some live in huts, some live in igloos. Discuss these different houses with your child if you want after reading *A House is a House for Me* by Mary Ann Hoberman. The house that Alejandro lives in is called an *Adobe*.

Until recent times most people around the world have built their homes from available natural resources. In New Mexico, both the Pueblo Indian and Hispanic people have built their homes with adobe bricks since the Spanish introduced the brick mold. Many people in New Mexico still build their own homes from this and other materials.

Make a miniature Adobe house

Materials needed in real Adobe making/Materials you will need for your miniature house

Shovel and hoe, hose and bucket / Hand-held garden hoe and potting shovel

Dirt/Clay (Earth) /Dirt/Clay (Earth)

Straw/Water/Mixing Site /the same (make a sign that says MIXING SITE)

Cardboard Boxes (for molds)/ice cube trays for mini-mold

Rag

Procedure: Adobe Making

1. If wood is not accessible, locate one or two uniformly shaped sturdy cardboard boxes whose tops or bottoms measure approximately 15 x 10-in. Measure 4-in. up from bottom with ruler and draw a line all around box. Take a utility knife and cut along the line. The resulting shallow box will serve as an *adobera* or adobe mold. *Use your ice cube trays for your miniature project or let your older child make his own miniature cardboard molds.*
2. Mix earth, straw and water using shovel and hoe in appropriate outdoor site. (Students need to be careful not to mix with hands and shovel or hoe at the same time). Mix to a thick consistency or paste. This is the mud or *zoquete*. *Using your hand-held garden shovel, throw the straw and mud into a large mixing bowl. Use the hoe to mix it up-- or your feet!*
3. Lightly wet the inside of the cardboard mold with a wet rag. Pour stiff mud into mold and turn over carefully. Lift mold slowly to release adobe. Allow adobe to dry for three or four days in the sun before handling. They can be turned several times.

Put your mixed mud in the ice cube tray. Let it dry in the sun for a few days (until hard) before popping them out.

Building A Wall (*You will need more mud)

1. Take three adobes and lay them in a straight line leaving small gaps between them for mud mortar. Next take three more adobes and lay them perpendicular (at right angles) to the first adobes. Make sure the edges of the two adobes are flush. You should have an L shape. *(To determine how many blocks to use for each wall, count your mud blocks and divide by four)*

Place mud mortar on the surface of the first level and cross a single adobe from the second row over the first. Place adobes behind the first adobe. The bricks will be naturally staggered through this procedure and students will have built a sturdy corner.

2. Mud plaster the wall by simply wetting the wall with sprinkles of water and then coating it with mud $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. thick. Smooth it with the palms of your hand.

Human Relationships: Loneliness

Sometimes people, especially older people, live alone. The feeling of loneliness can make them feel sad or depressed. Alejandro is busy working almost all of the time and yet he still felt alone. Sometimes, someone (like my great-grandmother) has lots of family, but the children, grand-children, great grandchildren, and even great-great grandchildren live far away), and possibly their spouse has passed away. Other older people who live in a nursing home have these same feelings of loneliness. Maybe you and your student would like to take a special treat (call first to find out what would be appropriate) and some homemade cards to a nursing home to help cheer those who feel alone.

The Old Woman Who Named Things may be a good go-along.

Character Quality: Selflessness

"Even though the animals only came for water, ..."

"He built a second hole even though he wouldn't be able to see them come and

drink..."

Alejandro wasn't selfish at all. Ask your student if he can think of a way that Alejandro was giving. Alejandro built a well for the animals, but they didn't come to it because they were afraid. He knew if he built a second hole that the animals would only come to drink; they wouldn't be coming for friendship. He knew that he had to build it far away from himself; he knew that no animal would ever thank him for what he did. Why did he build the well? He built it because he loved the animals and because he knew it was a good thing to do. Commend your student this week any time you notice him being selfless. It is a wonderful Christ-like characteristic to have.

Character Quality/Bible Study: Patience and Perseverance

Many people would've given up after they spent time digging a huge water hole for the animals. They would consider it the animal's loss; they would be frustrated and simply say forget it. In what areas does your student need to persevere?

Alejandro waited days-- even weeks for the animals to come...he didn't allow his frustration or sadness to hinder him from doing something wonderful for the animals. In what areas does your student need to be patient? Waiting can be such a hard thing to do! You can also discuss waiting on the Lord (to answer a prayer, etc.). You may even want to have a Bible study comparing/contrasting all the verses that mention waiting on the Lord, or, you may want to choose one as a memory verse. Here are some verses you will find in Psalms about waiting on the Lord.

Psalms

27:14

33:20

37:7

37:9

37:34

40:1

59:9

62:1

62:5

69:6

130:5

130:6

Language Arts: Vocabulary

companion- friend

refresh- to restore or maintain by giving a new supply

cherished-to hold dear : feel or show affection for

warily- very cautious

plodding- to walk heavily or slowly

drudgery- hard or dull work

shunned-to avoid purposely or by habit

Language Arts -- Suffixes: Suffixes are at the end of a word, and give the word a new meaning. The suffix *-less* means "without." Our story has the words **thoughtless** and **countless** in it. What do they mean? Can you define the word using the word "without" in it?

thoughtless = without thought (He didn't think it out carefully)

countless = without count (So many that it's impossible/hard to count)

Can you think of other words with the suffix *-less*?

The suffix *-ful* means "full of." Our story has the words **hopeful** and **fearful** in it. What do they mean? Can you define the word using the words "full of" in it?

hopeful = full of hope

fearful = full of fear

Can you think of other words with the suffix *-ful*?

Language Arts -- Prefixes: Prefixes are at the beginning of a word, and also give the word a new meaning. The prefix *re-* means "again." Our story has the word **refresh** in it. Can you define the word using the word "again" in it?

refresh = to make fresh again

Can you think of other words with the prefix *re-* ?

The prefix *un-* means "not." Our story has the word **unexpected** in it. Can you define the word using the word "not."

unexpected = not expected

Can you think of other words with the prefix *un-* ?

Language Arts -- Compound Words: Compound words are two words that have been put together to make one word. Examples from the story are: windmill, roadrunner, woodpeckers, nightfall, hoof beats. Can your student come up with others?

Art -- Details: Illustrator Sylvia Long is well-known for her detailed art work. For more information on her, see her website and be sure to read her biography there.

Have your student look closely at her drawings: the fur of the animals, the hair on Alejandro's arms, the spines on the cactus, the leaves of the plants, etc. An illustrator who spends so much time getting the details just so must really love what he or she draws. Sylvia Long admits to loving animals and nature (she once wanted to be a veterinarian!); that's easy to see when you look at her drawings. She says she receives the greatest joy in knowing that her artwork just might make difference in a child's life. Has her work inspired you to draw more details in your own artwork? Try your hand at adding lots of details to one of your pictures!

Art -- Faces: Notice the pictures where Alejandro's hat covers most or all of his face (on his knees in the garden, with the burro, digging the second water hole). If your child does not like to draw faces because "he just can't get it right" ask him if he'd like to try drawing a person with a hat covering the face....it may be less intimidating!

On the other hand, if you have a budding artist who likes a challenge, have him look at the pictures where you can see only the side of Alejandro's face (close-up in the garden or the first water hole under the windmill). When we can only see the side of a person in a drawing that is called a profile drawing. Have your artist try drawing a profile.

Art -- Western Sunset: At the beginning and end of the story are pictures that show a little bit of desert on the bottom of the page and a whole lot of sky above. Point out that the warm sunset colors get lighter as you go up to the top of the page. Perhaps your artist would like to make a desert picture. Create a "Painted Desert" with ripped strips of overlaid tissue paper. Include sky, sand dunes, mountains, cactus, sun, etc. Consider using *Alejandro's Gift* as a guide for what colors to use in your western sunset sky.



Science -- Air Power / Windmills / Irrigation: Study the pictures of the garden. Do you see the water traveling in little rows between the plants? This is called

irrigation (bringing water to an area that needs it). Irrigation gives water to the plants so that they can grow. In ancient days, farmers lived near a river and would dig a canal from the river to the gardens. Alejandro didn't live near a river, so he built a windmill. When the wind blows and turns the arms of the windmill around, water is pumped from underground springs up to the surface where the water can be kept in containers until needed.

Science -- Desert Fauna and Flora: The animals (fauna) and plants (flora) of the desert need to be specially made to survive the desert conditions. Deserts are very hot during the day, and very cold at night...and they get very little rain. Isn't it awesome how God made certain animals and plants specifically for the desert? Name some of the animals and plants from the story.

Some plants have a waxy coating that helps them keep moisture inside. Some plants produce seeds that lay on/in the ground asleep (dormant) until it rains. Many of the desert plants have fine hair on them that help give shade. Other plants are covered in spines to keep animals from eating them. Some plants store water to use during times of no rain. Many desert plants have very long roots that allow them to seek water way down in the earth.

In the desert, a rabbit's big ears helped to cool him and allow him to hear enemies from far away. Did you know that there are even some animals that never drink water!?! They get all the moisture they need from what they eat! Other animals are nocturnal (more active at night) and that helps them to keep cool and not sweat. There are even some animals that will sleep during the driest of times; this is called aestivation. Wow, God knew exactly what the desert needed, didn't He!

*At the end of the book, you will find an animal glossary. Enjoy reading it and learning with your student.

Go-along book: *Magic School Bus Gets All Dried Up: A Book About Deserts*

Create a [Giant Cactus Forest Desert Diorama](#).

Health-- Sun/Heat: The story tells us that Alejandro loved tending his garden and that "he often stayed for hours, working until driven indoors by the desert heat." Why is not good to be out when it's really hot? When the sun is high in the sky, it is often very hot. During this time, your skin can easily get burned by the sun and you can also get so hot that you become ill! It's best to stay out of the strong sun. If you do have to be out, you need to wear a hat (to provide shade), drink lots of water (to replace your body's moisture from sweating), and to wear sunscreen (to help you not get sunburned).

Science: Gardening

"Alejandro planted a garden. A garden filled with carrots, beans, and large brown onions. Tomatoes and corn. Melons, squash, and small red peppers." What vegetables grow in your area? If the time is right, consider letting your student plant a small vegetable garden. If it isn't the right season, plan a vegetable garden on paper. This topic could also lead into a discussion of vegetables and healthy eating.

Math: Right Angles

A simple definition of a ray is a half-line. Two rays that share the same endpoint form an angle. (for your older student-- The point where the rays intersect is called the vertex of the angle. The two rays are called the sides of the angle.) Draw some rays and angles for your student.

You will need a protractor for this next part. Show your child 180 degrees and that it makes a straight line. There are three different types of angles and we can tell which one is which by measuring them. An obtuse angle measures between 90-180 degrees. It is very "open" looking. An acute angle measures between 0-90 degrees. And a right angle measures at exactly 90 degrees. Look at Alejandro's adobe house. While being designed, it is important that adobe houses are made from right angles. (If you choose to do the adobe house project listed under Social Studies: Houses and Homes, your student will experience this first hand.)

If you have more than one student, you can tell them each to pretend they are a ray and make some of each angle with their bodies on the floor. (this will take some guidance from teacher! You may even want to be a ray to demonstrate). To really grasp the idea, you could draw some huge angles (sidewalk chalk?) and let the rays (your students) find their places. You can also let them draw some angles and then measure them with your protractor to determine what type of angle each one is.

If you have a young child, you may just want to show him what a right angle is. No matter what age, go searching in your home for right angles. They are used in construction to make buildings stand strong. You will find some in every room! You could even look at the alphabet and determine which letters make right angles! (E, F, H, L, T, and I) How many right angles does each letter have?

Library List

The Water Hole by Graeme Base (ISBN 0-8109-4568-1). As ever-growing numbers of animals visit a watering hole, introducing the numbers from one to ten, the water dwindles.

Wildlife of Cactus and Canyon Country by Marj Dunmire (ISBN: 0-942559-05-3). It includes coloring pages, puzzles, hidden pictures, mazes, and more.

Creatures of the Desert World: A National Geographic Action Book (ISBN 0-87044-687-8)

Cactus Hotel by Brenda Z. Guiberson (ISBN 0-590-99544-8)

Wonders of the Desert by Louis Sabin (ISBN 0-89375-574-5 and 0-89375-575-3)

Just for Fun

If your student thinks that desert plants are neat, help him plant a little **cactus garden**.

Alejandro understood that the **sounds of nature** were something to treasure. On your next nature walk, stop and listen for the sounds! Record what you hear.

Desert Terrarium: Using a midsize, clear plastic Rubbermaid container (14" long, 12" deep, 9" high), fill the bottom approx. 1" deep with gravel or small stones. Fill the next 2-3" with sand. Fill terrarium with various cactus. Embellish with plastic bugs and snakes (appropriate to desert wildlife, that is!) We also made a snake, and a scorpion with babies.

Maybe your student could make wildlife found illustrated with descriptions at the very end of the book.

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