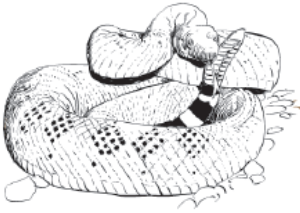


# Teachers' notes

## Desert regions



Large amounts of sunshine and scarce, unreliable rainfall ensure that desert areas feature among the most hostile environments on Earth. Receiving less than 250mm of rain in an average year, high temperatures and dry winds quickly evaporate any moisture that does exist. While daytime temperatures may reach 50°C, nights can fall below freezing.

Hot deserts, such as the Sahara, occur in subtropical regions with high temperatures throughout the year. High altitude and continental deserts, on the other hand, experience hot summers and cold winters. In semi-arid conditions, there is sufficient moisture to sustain small areas of vegetation.

Deserts extend across North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and into Central Asia. The Great Basin of North America covers several western states, with a further belt in New Mexico and Mexico itself. South American deserts stretch down the coasts of Chile and Peru and into Patagonia, while elsewhere in the southern hemisphere, deserts take in a swathe of southern Africa and cover large areas of central and western Australia.

Dry ground is vulnerable to weather erosion which gives rise to strange and imposing landforms. These include wind-shaped sand dunes, steep-sided plateaux remnants called 'mesas' and 'buttes', rock pillars and isolated hills – such as Ayers Rock (Uluru) in Australia. Salars – large salt basins – occur in the Chilean Atacama and many desert areas contain deposits of minerals and precious metals.

Desert conditions are currently on the increase in various parts of the world as a result of land mismanagement. In areas where grazing animals strip away vegetation, soil erosion speeds up, desertification begins and land is put permanently beyond use. Over 250 million people are currently affected by food shortages and population displacement that arise from desertification.



### Top tip

Introduce work on deserts by downloading our September issue's **Online photocopiable**, 'World map' ([www.scholastic.co.uk/juniored](http://www.scholastic.co.uk/juniored)). Ask your class to use atlases to locate desert regions and mark these on this map.

### ICT links

- [www.idahoptv.org/dialogue4kids/season3/desert/facts.html](http://www.idahoptv.org/dialogue4kids/season3/desert/facts.html) – has information on plants and animals of the North American Desert.
- <http://42explore.com/deserts.htm> – links to many sites about all aspects of desert life.
- [www.wateryear2003.org](http://www.wateryear2003.org) – an excellent online teachers' pack, 'Learning to combat desertification', is available from the Education Corner.