



Landscape Storytelling

Activity Description:

Make inferences about the surrounding landscape to tell the story about how it's changed over time and about how plants and animals live in the environment.

Materials:

- This activity sheet
 - Pencil
-

Just like every person, places have a story to tell. Take the Tucson Mountains, for example.

Let's go back in time, maybe some 200 million years ago. The Tucson area looked very different then. For instance, the climate was warmer and wetter, much like a tropical forest. Instead of deer and javelina, dinosaurs like the hadrosaur lived here. The Tucson mountains were much larger, often with billowing steam and smoke rising from its body. Infact, looking around, hazy skies from volcanic smoke would be a common sight. The Tucson Mountains were a very active volcanic mountain range with many eruptions during its active life. They were not as far west as they are now either. As tectonic plates shifted under continental crust over millions of years, the Tucson mountains were dragged west away from the Catalina Mountains during a period known as the *Basin and Range Formation*, opening a great big valley. This is where Tucson is now! About 65 million years ago, the Tucson Mountains exploded from a massive eruption. This eruption caused the mountains to crumble into themselves, creating a formation called a caldera.

If we traveled back in time 10,000 years, we would see that the Tucson mountains were covered in pine trees. Yes...pine trees. This was during our last *glacial maximum* at the height of our most recent ice age, when temperatures on the planet were much cooler. During this time, giant woolly mammoths could be seen drinking water from rivers while large dire wolves rested in their dens located in the Tucson Mountains. As global temperatures increased over time, the pine trees began to grow in cooler areas, eventually ceasing to grow in the Tucson Mountains at all. Instead, they were replaced with oak and juniper trees, then grasses and succulents, followed by cactus and desert trees which we

see today. Every layer of the biological community was affected, changing to survive in their new environments. This includes humans.

Archeological evidence shows that humans have lived at the base of the Tucson mountains continuously for approximately 5,000 years. Prehistoric cultures such as the Hohokham were masters of desert farming, using ingenious irrigation canals to collect water from mountain slopes and arroyos. Their descendants, the Tohono O'odham, use their ancestors' knowledge, applying it to the slopes of the Tucson mountains in the distant past. As water fell from the mountains down into the valley, it would collect in the Santa Cruz river. Here the Tohono O'odham still use irrigation canals to move water into their farms. Some of the traditional crops that are grown here are cotton, corn, beans, squash, and much more. Historically, the Santa Cruz river flowed all year long, and farm fields extended far into the Tucson Valley. Now the river is mainly dry, and the farmlands have been replaced with cities. The Tucson Mountains are used for learning, ceremonies, hiking, bike riding, nature watching, and food harvesting.

Fun Fact: Did you know that the name *Tucson* is a spanish mispronunciation of the Tohono O'odham name *Chuk'son*? It translates to "spring at the base of black mountain." Black mountain refers to the sacred mountain commonly referred to as *A Mountain*.

Directions:

1. **Find a nice place to sit and observe your surroundings.** Take a couple minutes to notice what's around you. What do you hear? See? Smell? Feel?

2. **Look more closely at the details of what's around you.** Take some notes in the space below.
Consider these questions: What color is the soil? What texture are the rocks? What plants are near you? What animals do you hear or see signs of? Why do you think these plants and animals live here?

3. Reflect in a couple of paragraphs on the back of this page: **If your surrounding landscape had a story to tell, what would it say?**

Feel free to get creative! You can even put yourself in the shoes of a rock or an animal.

4. **Share your reflection with Seeds of Stewardship.** Send us photos of your writing and outdoor experience:

- Post your photos to Instagram and tag [@aztsos](#)
- Or email your photos to
 - julie@aztrail.org for Northern AZ
 - treven@aztrail.org for Southern AZ

Thank you for being a part of our story!