

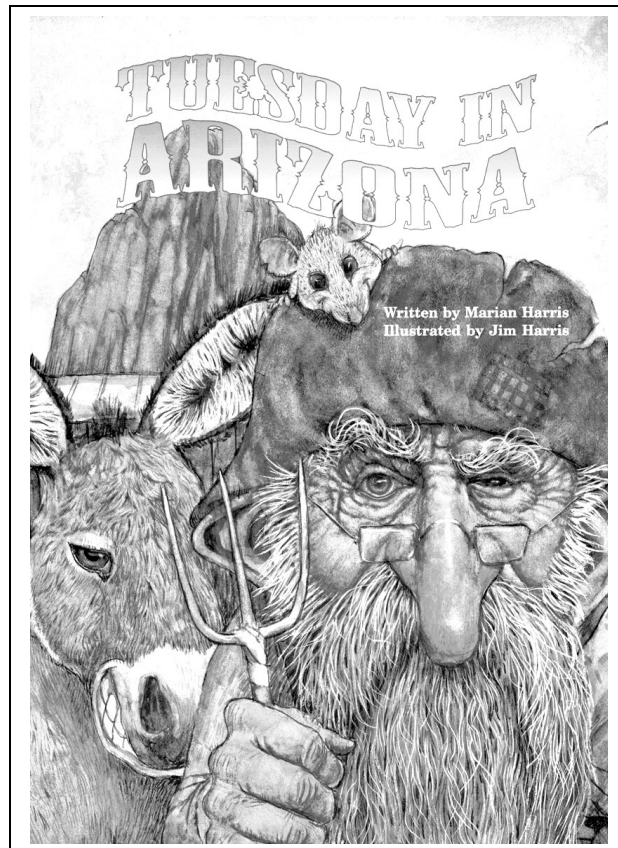


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How a Story Happens . . .

***A Week's Worth of Creative-Writing Ideas
and
Desert Activities for***



Featuring...

A desert food-web poster
Re-creating nineteenth-century folk songs
Gold-rush pen pals
A pack-rat journal
“The well-equipped desert rat”
Writing poems in character
Story-starters

Guide created by
Marian Harris

**Worksheets to
photocopy**

More About Miners, Forty-Niners

Researching a historical setting

FORTY-NINER FOLK SONGS: *Tuesday in Arizona* takes place around the middle of the 1800s (that's the nineteenth-century, remember). Back then one of the most popular songs in the entire world was Steven Foster's "Oh, Susanna, Don't You Cry For Me, I've come from Alabama with a banjo on my knee." But the prospectors, who were heading west, looking for gold in places like Arizona and California, changed the words. They sang, "Oh, Californy, that's the land for me, I'm bound for Sacramento with my washboard on my knee."

Sing "Oh, Susanna" the original way and then the prospectors' way.

Re-write a few folk songs the way a lonely old prospector might have around his campfire in the desert. Try these songs for starters:

Way Down Upon the Swanee River
My Bonnie Lies Over the Ocean
Yankee Doodle
Shoo-Fly Don't Bother Me
I've Been Working on the Railroad

Do you know?

Where do baby burros come from? *From Mommy burros.*

and a donkey? *Nada. Nichts. Nothing at all!*

Sing your new versions!

FORTY-NINER POETRY: Poems express strong feelings. Whether they rhyme or not, poems tell us what someone is singing, laughing, shouting, or crying about inside. Pretend you are the old miner in *Tuesday in Arizona*. Pick one of the miner's "bad days" and write a poem that tells how you feel. Then write another poem that tells how you feel at the end of the book--on Tuesday morning after you've discovered the gold.

DESERT GOLD DIORAMA: Make a diorama based on the characters in *Tuesday in Arizona*.

First, decide what to include in the diorama. You'll need *characters* (the miner, his burro, the sheriff, the bandits, and the pack-rat); *props* (the prospector's shack, a wagon, tools, the trading post, the packrat's house, and the prospector's "dig"); and the *setting* (a large flat tray or cut-down box filled with sand and decorated with cactus, shrubs, hills, lowlands and, even a stream—a hose section cut in half lengthwise to form a trough and sunken into the sand works pretty well).

You can get ideas for how to make your diorama from the art in *Tuesday in Arizona* and from encyclopedias and books about the nineteenth-century gold rush, prospectors, mining, and the American Southwest desert.

Recycle odds and ends like paper-towel tubes, cardboard milk cartons, and cut outs from plastic jugs in creating your diorama, in addition to creating the shapes you need from cardboard, clay straws, and construction paper. Be sure to paint your creations as they would have appeared in the hot, dusty desert environment.

PEN PALS: Read a library book about a gold rush (they happened in California, Arizona, Alaska, New Zealand, Australia, and elsewhere). Have a friend read the same book. Then write a series of letters back and forth as if one of you were a miner during that gold rush and the other were a friend who stayed home. If you're the miner, be sure to tell what's making you happy and what's making you miserable. If you're the friend back home, be sure to keep the gold-rusher up to date on all the hometown news.

Finding the Jokes:
Discovering hidden meanings

Tuesday in Arizona is full of jokes. Many of the jokes are words that seem to mean one thing, while the pictures show that they mean something very different.

For example, when the story says “the neighbors stopped by an’ cleaned house,” you might think of a friendly neighbor helping wash the dishes and sweep the floor. But that’s not what the picture shows, is it?!

Fill in the blanks below with all the phrases you can find with double meanings in *Tuesday in Arizona*. See if you can find seven jokes:

1. The neighbors stopped by an’ cleaned house _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____



How They Say It in the Desert

Recognizing local color

Some stories could happen anywhere—in Texas, or Tallahassee, or Timbuktu. Other stories, like *Tuesday in Arizona*, happen someplace particular (like the Arizona desert) or sometime special (like during a gold rush). These stories use words and phrases designed to give you the feel of being in that time or place. These words and phrases are called *local color*.

Find the words in *Tuesday in Arizona* that add local color. Below are “generic” words for places and things. Find the “desert” words and expressions that *Tuesday in Arizona* uses instead of the generic words to give us the feel of being with an old prospector in the Arizona desert.

- flower
- cactus
- hat
- nap
- food
- mountain
- store
- ruts
- trees

More about local color

Find other stories at your library that use local color. Can you find a story that uses a big city’s local color? A foreign country’s local color? A farm’s? A boat’s? A jungle’s? Make a list of the “local color” words in one of your favorite books.

Desert Characters

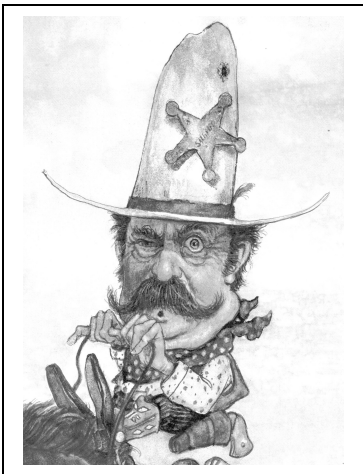
Defining characters

What's your favorite character in the story *Tuesday in Arizona*? Mine's the miner. I think I feel sorry for him because he's always having such a terrible time.

Characters in a book are different from real people. It takes *lots* of words to describe real people.



Take my husband, Jim, who illustrated *Tuesday in Arizona*, for example. He's tall, very strong, loves math, is a good painter, reads slower than he wants to, enjoys Snoopy and Garfield, hates to wash dishes, doesn't care about how his clothes look, goes fly-fishing in the summer, and is afraid of strange dogs. He also used to draw cartoons of his teachers for his school yearbook.



But characters in a book are usually *stereotyped*. That means they can be described in just one or two words. This is because authors pick one or two characteristics and make everything the character does show those one or two things. Don't ask me why this works; all I know is that this makes a story more fun to read.

Can you figure out how I stereotyped the characters in *Tuesday in Arizona*?

Below, on the left, list all the characters from *Tuesday in Arizona*. (Don't forget the characters that show up in the pictures but aren't mentioned in the text.)

On the right side, describe each character in one or two words. Compare your descriptions with someone else's and see if you both shared the same feeling about the characters.

Characters

Description

Tuesday's Terrible ... But Wednesday's Worse

Pacing a plot

Anybody know what a *plot* is? It's a fancy way of saying a good story has a problem at the beginning that gets solved at the end. Some stories have a plot that takes weeks and weeks to happen. Other stories start and finish all in a few hours. *Tuesday in Arizona*'s plot takes one week: it starts on a Tuesday and ends the next Tuesday.

Write a story that takes a week. Here's how:

Start your story on the "Tuesday" line below. Tell just a little about a problem that the main character in your story is having. Then tell how the problem gets just a little worse on Wednesday, and a little worse on Thursday, and a little worse on Friday, and even WORSE on Saturday, and becomes positively unbearable on Sunday.

Then, on Monday, describe something that happens to your main character that seems like a ray of hope, a small chance things could get better. And on Tuesday, tell how the whole problem is cleared up and things are just wonderful for your character again.

On TUESDAY, _____

WEDNESDAY, _____

THURSDAY, _____

FRIDAY, _____

SATURDAY, _____

SUNDAY, _____

MONDAY, _____

TUESDAY, _____

There, you did it! You *paced* a plot to last a week. Good job!

Did you say . . .
“Ain’t nothin’ in the desert but cactus”???

Researching a setting

Tuesday in Arizona happens in a desert. Authors say it has a “desert setting.” Of course, before you can write a story with a desert setting, you have to know what it’s like being in a desert. These projects will help you see what it’s like digging up details on a desert setting.

Make a desert food-web poster. First, rustle up a BIG piece of poster board or heavy paper, a book about desert animals, and an encyclopedia.

Pick a medium-sized desert animal (like a jackrabbit or a kangaroo rat) and draw its picture in the middle of the paper. Use the encyclopedia to find out what the animal eats and draw pictures of all those plants and animals scattered around on the paper BELOW your first animal. Draw red arrows from the first animal to each thing it eats.

Now, find out what animals hunt and eat the first animal. (Sniff!) Draw these predators scattered around on the paper ABOVE the first animal. Draw red arrows from the predators to your first (center) animal.

Now things get tricky.

Look up each of the upper predators in the encyclopedia and see what other things they eat. (Some of their foods will already be on your poster.) Add any of their foods that aren’t on your poster (putting bigger predators toward the top, medium-sized animals around the middle section, and tiny animals and plants toward the bottom). Draw a blue line from each predator to its foods.

Almost done! Label your poster with the name of each animal and plant.

There, you’re done. You made a *desert food web*. Pretty amazing, isn’t it?

Prove there’s more than cactus in the desert.

Read a few books about deserts and desert plants. Pick ten desert plants (include trees, shrubs, cacti, and “regular” flowers). Make a chart that shows each plant’s name and a drawing of that plant, and tell where it lives in the desert (by streams, on hills, under large shrubs, etc.), how tall it grows, what eats it, what animals live in or on it, and how it is specially designed to survive in the desert.

Create a desert camouflage scene. Use the library to find the names and pictures of four or five animals that use camouflage to hide from their enemies or to wait secretly for a meal to come along. Design a picture that shows these animals camouflaged in the desert near each other, but so well hidden they don’t see each other.

“The well-equipped desert rat.” A “desert rat” is, well, a rat in the desert. But people also use the term “desert rat” to describe someone who loves to live and work in the desert.

Do some reading about weather in the desert. Find out how the temperature changes from day to night, what it’s like when it rains, and how dry the air is.

Then make a poster that shows a “desert rat” in a good desert outfit. Remember to include clothes and equipment that keep your “desert rat” warm enough, cool enough, watered enough, protected from strong sunlight, and safe from the desert animals (like rattlesnakes) and plants (like cactus). Be sure he’s well equipped from head to toe.

Label your “rat’s” paraphernalia to show what each piece is used for. Include a few jokes if you want.

“Packrat Journal.” Read about pack rats in desert books and encyclopedias. Find out how they get their food, how they build their houses, how they raise their babies, and any other interesting tidbits you can dig up. Then write a journal entry for a typical day in the life of a pack rat. Illustrate your entry with a drawing of a pack rat house or maybe a “map” of a pack rat’s territory.

Did you know . . .

Most of the forty-niners took a burro or two along to carry their food and equipment. But after they’d been out in the desert for a while (and especially if they hadn’t found any gold), they got pretty fed up with their burros’ stubborn tricks. So . . . sometimes, they let burros go. “Go on, you lousy critter!!!”

This was just fine with the burros. In fact, there’s so many wild burros (descended from those prospector’s burros) in the Arizona desert now that the government has to round them up every once in a while (so they don’t eat all the desert plants) and let people have them as pets.

But I Can't Think of Anything to Write!!

Story starters

Hi! I'm Marian Harris, the author of *Tuesday in Arizona*. And there are a lot of times I can't think of a single thing to write either. But when that happens, here's what I do:

Twenty Minutes, Please

Every day—yes, I said EVERY day—write something, anything, for 20 minutes. Just scribble whatever comes into your head—something that happened to you lately; something that made you happy, angry or sad; a joke you heard—anything! The first few days you might not have much to write, but if you keep at it 20 minutes EVERY day for two weeks, all of a sudden you'll have more to write than 20 minutes will allow for. Try it; it's amazing!

One Change

Think of a very ordinary happening. Somebody spilling milk; somebody jumping rope; somebody teasing too much. You can think of millions of ordinary things. Pick one ordinary thing and then change just one part of the idea to make it unusual. For example, instead of a story about a kid spilling milk, write a story about a *mouse* spilling milk. Instead of a story about someone jumping rope, write a story about the *queen of England* jumping rope. Or instead of a story about someone teasing too much, write a story about someone *sneezing* too much.



Marian Harris, trying to think of something to write—hopefully a best seller.

Title First

This is fun. Don't worry about coming up with a story at all; think of crazy titles instead. Titles like, *Marbles in My Soup!*; *The President Hates Spinach*; *The Dinosaur Who Drove a Porsche*; or *Six Giraffes Visit the Superbowl*. When you have ten crazy titles written down, pick your favorite and write a story to go with it.

Details, Details

Have you noticed how hard it is to write about something you've never done or seen yourself? Try this: get four interesting (that's important) books about a person or place or creature that you are dumb as a rock about. Read the books. (They **HAVE** to be interesting books. Did I say that already?) Then write a short story about the topic. Whenever I do this, I get so many ideas my editors say, "Stop. STOP. ENOUGH is ENOUGH!"

TUESDAY IN ARIZONA

Written by Marian Harris

Illustrated by Jim Harris

A downtrodden miner and his pack rat companion show that perseverance conquers all and that attitude is everything in this story filled with funny wordplay.

A week in the life of a lonely, nameless miner proves to be filled with nothing but heartache. Throughout the week, a friendly pack rat scurries about collecting his loot and watching his human neighbor. As the miner copes with his incredible hunger, robbers take what few valuables he has left. He does not surrender to despair, however.

What a difference a week can make. Even when things look their worst, the miner does not give up. His determination and persistence, along with a little help from his pack rat friend, prove that “you jus’ never know what’ll turn up next on Tuesday in Arizona.”

Marian Harris is the author of several well-received children’s books, including *Goose and the Mountain Lion*, which won a Colorado Children’s Book Award. She met her husband, Jim, while she was a writer and he was an illustrator for their college newspaper. With a bachelor of science degree in pre-med, Mrs. Harris has ghostwritten several biology textbooks. A former high-school teacher, she currently enjoys homeschooling her children.

Jim Harris is a prolific illustrator of children’s books, including best-sellers with more than 200,000 copies in print. He is the writer and illustrator of Pelican’s *Three Little Dinosaurs* (\$15.95), a hilarious twist to the classic tale of the three little pigs as a hungry, pea-brained T-rex chases three brachiosaur brothers. He counts among his many awards a silver medal from the Society of Illustrators, the coveted *Communication Arts* Award of Excellence, and an Arizona Young Readers Award. He lives happily with his wife in New Zealand.

TUESDAY IN ARIZONA

By Marian Harris

Illustrated by Jim Harris

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