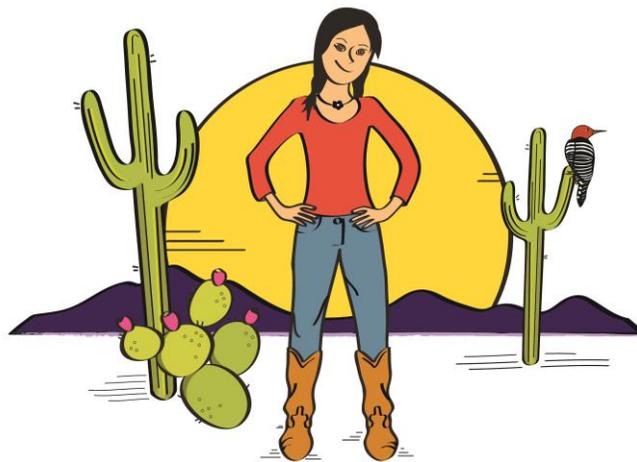


AT HOME IN THE DESERT BY PHYLLIS STRUPP

A COMPANION GUIDE FOR TEACHERS



At Home in the Desert

“Look deep, deep into nature, and you will understand everything better.”

Albert Einstein

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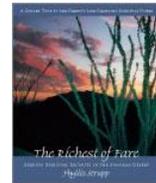
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1. What is *At Home in the Desert*?



The 2012 Arizona Centennial may be over, but the legacy continues. Arizona Centennial Legacy Projects were conceived to have continuing impact and scope, from restoration of historic properties to public art and musical compositions. Legacy Projects are created and supported by members of the community, with the approval of the Arizona Historical Advisory Committee.

One of the Legacy Projects, *At Home in the Desert*, was written by Carefree, AZ resident Phyllis Strupp and inspired by her award-winning book *The Richest of Fare: Seeking Spiritual Security in the Sonoran Desert*. This original one-act play helps tweens learn to be resilient in the face of social difficulties by connecting with the natural world around them. The play, which promotes diversity and communication, is available to schools statewide as a tool to enhance tolerance and reduce bullying. The license agreement is in section 13 of this guide.



The story features the adventures of twelve-year-old Chloe, who learns valuable life lessons from the Sonoran Desert with the help of some mysterious friends (historical figures, desert plants, and animals). Alex, a teen with autism, is a hero who defends Chloe against Jimmy, the playground bully.

The original production of *At Home in the Desert* was directed by Aubrey Grace Watkins and choreographed by Kenda Newbury, with original music by Kevin Glenn. Hohokam-inspired animal masks were designed by Robin Ray and created during an after-school workshop.

The play was first performed for the public on April 30 and May 1, 2014, at the Cactus Shadows Fine Arts Center in Scottsdale, Arizona. The original production of *At Home in the Desert* is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJUOihAuhls>.

Phase I of the Legacy Project was writing, fundraising, and workshopping the script with staged readings. Phase II was the live production. Phase III is the finalization and distribution of this Teacher's Kit, which includes classroom use suggestions, the script, the original director's observations on casting and the creation of costumes and sets, and instructions for making masks for the characters.

At Home in the Desert has been sponsored by the Cave Creek Unified School District, the Cave Creek Museum, the Foothills Community Foundation, the Desert Foothills Library, the Desert Awareness Committee, the Desert Foothills Theater, the Kiwanis Club of Carefree, and Partners in Education.

For questions or to receive a copy of the teachers' kit, please contact the Foothills Community Foundation at 480-488-1090 or at info@azfcf.org. For more information visit www.azfcf.org.

2. Playwright's Note: Setting for *At Home in the Desert*

The idea for *At Home in the Desert* was born far away in my hometown of Moorestown, New Jersey. I was discussing what to write next with a good friend when her 11-year-old daughter said, "Why don't you write about a girl who moves to the desert, where all her dreams come true—you know, like what happened to you?"

The Arizona Centennial Legacy Project program provided an ideal opportunity to write a play set in our Desert Foothills community at the time of the Arizona Centennial, inspired by my book *The Richest of Fare: Seeking Spiritual Security in the Sonoran Desert*.

To receive approval, the project required community collaboration, and our team of sponsors has played an essential role from the beginning. Their practical and financial support enabled us to attract a first-rate director, Aubrey Grace Watkins, who assembled an experienced production crew and a talented cast, most of whom were new to theater.

I hope that *At Home in the Desert* will help people of all ages to believe in a magical place "somewhere over the rainbow," where good things happen and dreams come true.

In addition, I wanted to capture significant aspects of Arizona's culture from the time of the Centennial. The play features several themes, including:

- constructive and effective responses to bullying
- impact of a home foreclosure on families
- international adoption
- kindness and tolerance toward people who are different
- Native American difficulties with climate change in the thirteenth century
- nature as a source of inspiration for coping with setbacks and building resilience
- relocation challenges for school-age children
- scientific perspectives on natural phenomena and climate change
- technology as a social bridge for children with autism

On behalf of our sponsor team, may this project continue to inspire children and adults to help everyone feel at home in the desert.

Phyllis Strupp

3. *At Home in the Desert* and the Arizona College and Career Ready Standards

The Arizona College and Career Ready Standards aim to ensure that all high school students develop literacy skills that will enable them to succeed in college and careers.

The Arizona Academic Standards in the Arts provide guidance for establishing the foundation for the arts disciplines of dance, music, theatre, and the visual arts. This foundation is designed to help students at all grade levels to build respect for others as well as important life skills, such as listening, problem solving, focus, discipline, creativity, planning for the future, and teamwork.

At Home In The Desert addresses the arts component of the standards as indicated below and can be integrated across the disciplines of social studies, environmental studies, and creative writing.

Arizona Theatre Standards

The standards are available online at <https://www.azed.gov/standards-practices/files/2011/09/theatre.pdf>.

Theatre Strands and Concepts

Strand 1—Create: The processes and experiences developed related to theatre.

Strand 2—Relate: How the human experience influences and is influenced by theatre.

Strand 3—Evaluate: The informal and formal reflection and critical analysis to address and assess the qualities of theatre.

Concept 1:

Collaboration

Collaboration includes working jointly, cooperating, negotiating, and articulating ideas to reach consensus that forms theatrical art.

***At Home in the Desert* gives children in grades 3–8 the opportunity to build group participation skills, including initiating and responding to others, doing an individual part to contribute to the whole, and encouraging and supporting others.**

Concept 2:

Acting

Acting is the process and art of representing a character in the classroom, on stage, or in other media.

***At Home in the Desert* gives children with differing social abilities the opportunity to act and build self-esteem. Many of the play's parts are desert plants and animals that emphasize character portrayal through movement rather than speaking.**

Concept 3:

Theatre Technology and Design

Theatre technology uses craft skills, knowledge of design, equipment, and materials to construct the elements necessary for the visual and aural aspects of production that serve the script and the action.

Staging *At Home in the Desert* calls for creative thinking in order to represent a range of environments, moods, times of day, and nonhuman characters. School faculty members as well as middle and high school students can be recruited to assist with production and the making of sets, costumes, and masks.

Concept 4:

Playwriting

Playwriting is the process of conceptualizing, devising, improvising, developing, writing, and revising original written work for the stage and other media.

Live or video performances of *At Home in the Desert* can be used as a starting point for creative writing, including playwriting inspired by the play's characters or themes. Video available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UIUOihAuhls>

Concept 5:

Directing

Directing is the process of conceptualizing, organizing, and leading a collaborative process with the intent of performance.

Insights from Aubrey Grace Watkins, director of the original production of *At Home in the Desert*, are included at the end of the director's script (section 10 of this guide).

4. What Kids Say About *At Home in the Desert*

During the development of *At Home in the Desert*, several play readings were performed by camp counselors at the Desert Foothills Theater summer youth camp for some 60 children ages 6–12. The kids were obviously engaged. When the playwright asked what they thought the play's message was, they offered these responses:

- I am never alone.
- I feel at home in the desert.
- It's OK to be different.
- How you look doesn't matter.
- Don't let other people get you down.
- Be at home where you are and connected to nature.
- If you go to a new home, you may not like it at first, but you may come to like it.
- If someone bullies you, someone else might stick up for you—the bullies don't always win.

5. Using *At Home in the Desert* in the Classroom

At Home in the Desert can be used in a variety of ways within the existing curricula of grades 3–8:

1. **Live performance:** One or more grades can collaborate to stage the play and perform it for other students, parents, and teachers.
2. **Discussion:** A live performance or the YouTube video can be used as the basis of a group discussion. See section 6 of this kit for discussion question suggestions.
3. **Creative writing:** A live performance or the YouTube video can be used as the basis of a creative writing exercise. For example, after performing or watching *At Home in the Desert*, children could collaborate to write and perform their own play.
4. **Arts and crafts:** The plants and animals in the original *At Home in the Desert* production wore papier-mâché masks created during an after-school workshop. This workshop could also be conducted during class time for a creative, hands-on activity that stimulates young brains.
5. **Environmental studies:** *At Home in the Desert* offers a story as an accessible context for scientific concepts such as the theory of relativity and natural processes.
6. **Sonoran Desert:** *At Home in the Desert* provides a fun way to learn about the Sonoran Desert within the fourth-grade curriculum requirements.
7. **Arizona Centennial:** As an official Arizona Centennial Legacy Project, *At Home in the Desert* provides the opportunity to engage with cultural issues from 2012 that continue to be relevant today, such as home foreclosure, international adoption, and bullying. See section 2 of this kit for more information about the setting for *At Home in the Desert*.

6. Discussion Questions for *At Home in the Desert*

GENERAL

1. How might life in the desert be different from life in other places?
2. What is your greatest fear when going to a new school?
3. How important are friends to you?
4. How often do you take walks alone (in a safe place)? Do you enjoy being out in the natural environment?

LOSS VERSUS GAIN

1. How do we remind ourselves, when something bad happens, to search for the good?
2. Was the garage window in scene 1 a metaphor for that idea?
3. When we realize we are a small connection to something bigger, like the family of the desert, does it give us strength?

NO ONE IS PERFECT

1. Even the smartest people, like Albert Einstein, lack strengths in some areas. How do we figure out where we lack strengths? How do we remind ourselves to learn and grow?
2. Albert Einstein was viewed as a highly intelligent yet eccentric individual. If he had been labeled “autistic” as a child, do you think that would have helped him or hindered him? How did *At Home in the Desert* influence your views of people with autism?

BULLYING

1. What is bullying?
2. How would you deal with a bully?
3. Can you give some examples of bullying that you have witnessed?
4. Have you ever been bullied? How did that make you feel?

5. Have you ever bullied someone? How about a younger brother or sister? How did that make you feel?
6. Were there examples of bullying in the play *At Home in the Desert*?
- a. Who was the bully?
 - b. What did he say to Chloe? How do you suppose that made her feel?
 - c. Why do you think the other boys laughed?
 - d. Who stood up for Chloe? What happened to him? Why?
 - e. Why do you think the other girls did not stand up for Chloe?
 - f. What could the other boys and girls have done to help Chloe and Alex?
 - g. How did Chloe express her feelings about being bullied to her mother?
 - h. How was Chloe's response to Jimmy's bullying different at the end of the play?
 - i. What had Chloe learned from her encounter with Mashath and Albert?
 - j. How did that encounter change her feelings about herself?
 - k. Why was she now able to stand up to Jimmy?
 - l. Why do you think the other boys and the girls changed their attitude when Chloe stood up to Jimmy?
 - m. What are some things you learned from this play that may help you in the future if you or someone else is being bullied?
7. What is the difference between innocent teasing and bullying? How do we know when that line is crossed? Who is the best judge—teachers, parents, or kids?
8. Chloe can tell Aunt Ruth what happened to her in school, and Aunt Ruth knows what to say. Is it always easy for kids to tell adults about bullying? Do adults always know the right thing to say or do? What can we do to make it easier for everyone to talk about bullying?
9. Would you stand up for someone else who is being bullied? Why or why not? What can other people do in that situation?

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

1. Why do you think the masks were designed and built the way they were? What did they bring to the production? Why were they important?
2. Why do you think the set was designed and built the way it was? If you saw the video, did it feel natural to you? What about the set did you like or dislike?
3. Did you think the actors were professional actors? Why or why not? For a production like this, do you think it's important to have professional actors? What skills do actors need to make the production a success?
4. What role did sound and music play in the production? Why do you think the director chose to include a live musician (a drummer) in the production? Could you tell what was live and what was prerecorded?
5. How did the lights help to tell the story? What did they do to suggest different moods, places, events, or times of day? How do you think those effects were created (e.g., use of color, texture, vibrancy)?
6. The director's role is to create a cohesive vision and story based on the words of the play. Do you think the director was successful in doing that? Why or why not?

7. Experiencing Nature: Learning About The Desert Ecosystem

1. Every desert plant has its own secret of survival. For example, the roots of the mesquite and the creosote go very deep, which is why ecologists say that in the desert there is no wet or dry season below 6 feet underground. Some plants have tiny leaves to minimize evaporation. Others do not flower, or even produce leaves, in times of severe drought or cold. What other ways do plants and animals have of surviving in the desert?
2. Discuss the term “snowbound.” Apply that concept to the desert and discuss what the term “sunbound” might mean. Psychologically, these terms mean that people are shut inside due to inclement weather outside. How do people change their behavior in the summer desert? What changes do plants and animals make? For example, animals forage in early morning and after sundown, so they are sunbound in their burrows or shady areas all day long. Plants such as the jojoba turn their leaves away from the sun.
3. Compare the amount of rainfall which falls here to rainfall in other areas: 8-10 inches in Phoenix, 40 inches in New England, 60 inches for the Deep South states, and 144 inches in parts of Washington State. Compare the appearances of these regions (use pictures if necessary). Discuss what differences are visible in the Sonoran Desert. The mountains (foothills) are nude, with very little growth, which means you can see every contour and rock outcrop. The plants are spaced far apart, allowing each to gather as much as possible of the scarce rainfall. How does this habitat change the way plants and animals grow and behave?
4. Desert trees are short and stunted compared to trees in other habitats. Compare desert plants like mesquite, palo verde, ironwood, and saguaro with trees from other areas, like the ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, Engelmann spruce, red maple, bald cypress, hickory. How are the shapes of the trees adapted to their environment?
5. Is the desert an “unfavorable environment”? Many might say yes, but is it unfavorable for the plants and animals that live there? How have they adapted in order to survive? How do people adapt when they are faced with difficult problems? Discuss these ideas as related to the characters in the play.
6. The Hohokam people were known as canal builders due to the remarkable irrigation systems they built throughout the desert. They are also acclaimed as some of the finest artists found in the Southwest. Why might people who showed such advanced capabilities disappear? Pose some theories which might help to explain how such a thing could happen. Is there anything happening today which might pose a threat to civilizations?

8. *At Home In The Desert* Plot Summary

When their home in Scottsdale is foreclosed on just before Christmas, Dana and her adopted 12-year-old daughter, Chloe, are forced to move to Aunt Ruth's house at the northern edge of the Valley of the Sun. Chloe is upset about leaving her friends and going to a new school. One afternoon during recess on the playground, Alex, a teenager with autism, is teaching Chloe, Beth, the Playground Girls and two Playground Boys how to play a game on a computer tablet. Jimmy begins to bully Chloe to impress his friends. When Alex defends her, he is also ridiculed.

Chloe comes home from school and tells her aunt what happened at school that made her mad. She takes her old dog, Peppy, out for a walk in the desert, disobeying Aunt Ruth's advice to use a leash and avoid the path that leads north. A rabbit appears, and Peppy runs off in hot pursuit despite her advanced age. As coyotes howl in the distance, Chloe runs after Peppy but can't keep up and gets lost.

She comes upon a strange place and cries for help. Mashath, a Native American girl the same age as Chloe, appears and explains that they are in a vortex (a mass of spinning air that pulls things to its center). Mashath has been sent by the Great Keeper to help Chloe return home. Chloe, hoping to stay with Mashath in the vortex, agrees to enter a wormhole in the vortex to travel in time and meet Mashath's guide, Albert. After teaching Chloe the secret of how to feel at home in the desert, Mashath and Albert say goodbye and disappear.

Chloe finds herself right where she entered the vortex and safely navigates her way home. She confesses to Aunt Ruth that she has lost Peppy by not putting her on a leash and that Peppy disappeared and may have been killed. Peppy comes from another room to greet her, unscathed. Aunt Ruth reveals that she once met Mashath after becoming lost and entering the vortex. Dana comes home from work. As she tucks Chloe into bed, they talk about what happened at school that day, and what Chloe's birth parents were like. During the night, Chloe dreams about the events of the day.

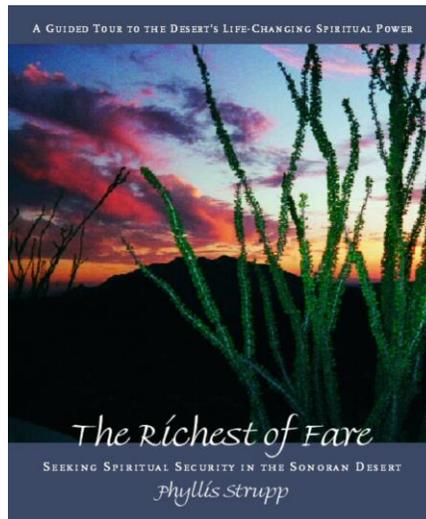
The next day on the playground, Jimmy once again begins to bully Chloe, emboldened by his success the day before. She gently but firmly stands up to him, and Alex and Beth stand up for her too. The tables turn on Jimmy as Paul leads the Playground Boys away for a game of basketball. Chloe thanks Alex for defending her and tries to connect with him. Beth asks Chloe why she was so brave and insists she share the secret of feeling of "at home in the desert."

9. Actor's Script

AT HOME IN THE DESERT

A one-act play

by
Phyllis Strupp



This original play is inspired by the nonfiction book *The Richest of Fare: Seeking Spiritual Security in the Sonoran Desert*, by Phyllis Strupp, winner of the Independent Publishing award for the best mind-body-spirit book in 2005.

Both of these works are grounded in respect for the dignity of every human being and the natural world whence we evolved, particularly as we experience it in the magnificent Sonoran Desert. The play, an official Arizona Centennial Legacy Project, takes place around the time of the 2012 Arizona Centennial.

AT HOME IN THE DESERT

Plot Summary

When their home in Scottsdale is foreclosed on just before Christmas, Dana and her adopted 12-year-old daughter, Chloe, are forced to relocate to Aunt Ruth's house at the northern edge of the Valley of the Sun. Chloe is upset about leaving her friends and going to a new school. One afternoon during recess on the playground, Alex, a teenager with autism, is teaching Chloe, Beth, the Playground Girls and two Playground Boys how to play a game on a computer tablet. Jimmy begins to bully Chloe to impress his friends. When Alex defends her, he is also ridiculed.

Chloe comes home from school and tells Aunt Ruth about the bullying incident at school, how she hates her new school, and would like to find a new place to live. She takes her old dog, Peppy, out for a walk in the desert, disobeying Aunt Ruth's advice to use a leash and avoid the path that leads north. A rabbit appears, and Peppy runs off in hot pursuit despite her advanced age. As coyotes howl in the distance, Chloe runs after Peppy but can't keep up and gets lost.

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AT HOME IN THE DESERT

Time:

Around the time of the Arizona Centennial (February 14, 2012)

Place

Valley of the Sun, Arizona

Scenes

- Scene 1** Dana's house in Scottsdale, December 2011
- Scene 2** The school playground, recess, February 13, 2012
- Scene 3** Aunt Ruth's house, after school on the same day
- Scene 4** The desert wilderness north of Aunt Ruth's house, the same day
- Scene 5** In the wormhole
- Scene 6** Aunt Ruth's house, that evening
- Scene 7** The school playground, recess, the next day

Characters

Named Characters: 10

Chloe, a 12-year old girl

Chloe has grown up in Arizona after being adopted from outside the United States as an infant by Dana. She has grown up without siblings. A good student with exotic looks (perhaps Asian), she was happy at school until home foreclosure forced Chloe and Dana to move suddenly to another area. This move has separated Chloe from her friends, shaking her confidence. Because of this and her distinctive appearance, Chloe is an easy target for a bully. She has a coming-of-age experience in the desert that helps her put her problems in perspective and continue on her way to becoming the great scientist that Albert predicts she will be.

Dana, Chloe's mother

Dana is an outgoing, energetic, warm-hearted, and free-spirited person who has a tendency to be more optimistic than realistic. After two divorces, she decided to adopt a child as a single parent. She had a good job as a marketing assistant, but she was laid off in the economic crash of 2008. She took a job as a waitress instead, but that didn't pay enough to cover the mortgage on their house. She showed up unannounced with Chloe on Ruth's doorstep, afraid that Ruth would have said "I told you so" if she had known they were coming.

Jimmy, a 12-year old boy

Jimmy is the likeable, tough-guy leader of the Playground Boys. Having grown up with an emotionally abusive father, he is plagued by insecurity and uses the bullying tactics he has learned at home to try to gain attention and power on the playground.

Paul, a 12-year old boy

Paul is Jimmy's best friend and part of the Playground Boys group. He is good-natured and easy-going. As a younger sibling in a large family, he knows how to go along and get along, but he is also jealous of Jimmy. At the end of the story, when he gets a chance to be the leader of the Playground Boys, he is quick to recognize and seize the opportunity.

Alex, a 14-year old boy

Alex is an intelligent, sensitive boy with autism. He looks like a geek. He is socially awkward and blunt and does not make eye contact when he speaks to people. He enjoys using technology and playing games, and doesn't mind showing others how to use them. He does not belong to the Playground Boys but sometimes follows them while keeping his distance. He has been bullied many times and is stirred by Chloe's plight.

Joey, a 12-year old boy

Joey is clearly a follower of Jimmy and Paul. He wants to please them and be accepted by the Playground Boys. But he is also aware of what it is like to be scorned and bullied for being different. He also has a friend who is very active in helping his autistic brother cope with school through the Best Buddies program, so Joey has a more tolerant view of individuals with autism such as Alex.

Beth, a 12-year old girl

Beth is the leader of the Playground Girls. The oldest in a medium-sized family, she likes to have fun and hang out with her friends. She is popular and has significant influence on boys and girls alike. She eventually sticks up for Chloe and Alex because she remembers what it is like to be an outsider from the time when her father's job took her family abroad for three years.

Ruth, Dana's older sister

Ruth is smart, practical woman who is very interested in spiritual matters. After being widowed in her early forties, she left her job as a financial analyst on Wall Street, moved to Carefree, Arizona, and began studying the world's religions to gain insight into the deeper questions of life. She is a writer and a thinker. She enjoys being alone. Her advice to Dana about money and life has fallen on deaf ears.

Mashath, a 12-year old Hohokam girl

Mashath (pronounced MA-shath, emphasis on first syllable) is a Native American girl who lives in the vortex. Her name means "moon" in the Hohokam language. It is not clear whether she is alive or a ghost. Mashath has been given special powers of intuition and empathy by the Great Keeper, who trusts her to use her powers only to help the lost, like Chloe. Since Mashath also got lost in the desert once, she feels drawn to Chloe as a soul sister.

Albert, a 76-year old man

Albert lives in the wormhole and also helps people who are lost. The audience discovers along with Chloe that he is Albert Einstein. The Great Keeper has given Albert a second

chance to learn an important lesson about human relationships that he never learned while he was alive. Although Mashath thinks Albert is her guide, he reveals to her that he is really her student. He is a kind, wise, humorous and helpful companion for Mashath and Chloe.

Desert inhabitants with speaking parts: 6

Sun
Saguaro
Gila woodpecker
Rattlesnake
Javelinas—at least 2

Other Characters: at least 17

The number of plants and animals can be increased as desired.

Neurons, nonspeaking characters who provide comic relief throughout the play—at least 2
Playground Girls, friends of Chloe—at least 2
Playground Boys, other friends of Jimmy—at least 2
Peppy, Chloe's dog
Rabbit
Ocotillo
Palo Verde
Gambel's quail family—at least 4 2 adults and 2 chicks
Hawk
Packrat
Rock

SCENE ONE

Dana's home in Scottsdale, December 2011

Introduction music plays. Sound cue starts as the lights fade up on our scene. The front door of a house has a Christmas wreath and a large sign that says "FORECLOSED." DANA enters and CHLOE follows behind. DANA approaches the door, sees the lockbox, and realizes what has happened. Music fades away as the dialogue begins.

DANA:

What a bummer, Chloe, I think they changed the locks on us.

CHLOE:

Who's "they"?

DANA:

The bank.

CHLOE:

But why, Mom? Why would they do that?

DANA:

Oh, probably because...I couldn't make the mortgage payments, honey.

CHLOE:

Why, why didn't you tell me, Mom?

DANA:

It's been a while, *but* I didn't think they would do it so suddenly. Especially at Christmas time....What is the *matter* with them?

CHLOE:

Mom what will we do? Where will we go?

DANA:

We'll go to Aunt Ruth's house up in the North Valley. She has room for us.

CHLOE:

Does she know we're coming?

DANA:

Yeah, she has an inkling....Besides, she'll be happy to have some company.

CHLOE:

Will the bus come and get me for school all the way up there?

DANA:

That's 20-some miles from here. The bus won't come that far, sweetie. You'll be going to a new school, a better school, up there where Aunt Ruth lives.

CHLOE:

But what about my friends here—I can't just leave them, Mom. Please!

DANA:

Just send them a text, tell them you're going away but you'll see them soon. (*Whiny dog noises come from other side of door.*)

CHLOE:

Oh no, Peppy! How will we get her out of there before the bank takes her too?

DANA:

Don't worry Chloe, I left a window in the garage open a little....We can get in there and get Peppy and a few other things too....Let's go!

They run off stage in the direction of the house. Lights dim and sound cue plays.

SCENE TWO

The school playground, recess, February 13, 2012

CHLOE, BETH, and the PLAYGROUND GIRLS and BOYS are on the playground gathered around ALEX, who is showing them how to use a computer tablet.

BETH:

Alex, show us some of the really wild apps....What's your favorite one?

ALEX:

(Without looking up) Hmmm, that's a tough one, there's so many I like...

BETH:

OK, show us all the ones you like.

ALEX:

(Again, without looking up) That will take forever, I have so many favorites....There is this one game that allows me to control the power of a vortex.

BETH:

What on earth is a vortex?

ALEX:

A vortex is like a big giant whirlpool that sends off powerful energy. It creates an alternate reality that you can see and feel.

BETH:

Oh yeah, my mom was talking about going to a vortex....They have a bunch of them up in Sedona.

ALEX:

That's because those huge iron-rich red rocks up there influence the earth's magnetic field.

BETH:

Whatever, it all sounds really weird to me.

ALEX:

I also like this app for how to navigate your way through a wormhole...

BETH:

A wormhole? Ewwwww.

THE PLAYGROUND GIRLS:

(Ad-lib) A wormhole! Ewwwww, yuck, that's gross.

ALEX:

Not a worm's hole but a wormhole, a cosmic tunnel formed by dark matter that allows travel through time and space.

CHLOE:

Yes! Alex, show us that one! (*BETH and others excitedly nod yes.*)

ALEX:

OK, here we go, we'll play the wormhole game. The first thing you have to do is choose what portal you want to enter.

BETH:

Well how would *we* know *that*?

CHLOE:

What choices do we have?

ALEX:

It depends on why you want to enter the wormhole. Do you want to time travel? Visit another galaxy? Or do you want to peer into a black hole to spy on another universe?

CHLOE:

(*Looking around*) How about if we look into a black hole?

BETH:

Sounds great, that's what I was thinking too!

ALEX:

All right, but if we get too close we'll either be burned to a crisp in a firewall, or squished into ultra-dense pebbles by the singularity.

BETH:

That does NOT sound good.

ALEX:

(*Moving his hands on the tablet and rocking it side to side*) I'll do my best to navigate safely. We're now entering the portal to take us to Sagittarius A, the supermassive black hole at the center of the Milky Way Galaxy....Should we approach cautiously from the side or head for the center, where we can see better?

BETH:

Let's be bold and go right to the center! (*Kids are excited, nod, and ad-lib yes.*)

ALEX:

Well, all right, but we are more likely to disappear there....Uh-oh...

CHLOE:

What happened?

ALEX:

(Continuing to move and touch the tablet) Oh no! We got too close, we are being sucked into Sagittarius A's powerful gravitational field.... There is something weird coming after us....We are disappearing into the black hole... *(The kids around him are watching and gasping.)*

During this action, JIMMY, PAUL, and JOEY enter, laughing and jostling each other. They are jealous of ALEX getting the girls' attention. JIMMY gets an idea and whispers something to PAUL and JOEY, and they all laugh and encourage him.

JIMMY:

Hey, Chloe!

CHLOE:

(Turning toward him) What?

JIMMY:

C'mere for a second....I want to tell you something.

CHLOE:

(Curious, friendly, she walks toward him) What?

JIMMY:

You are weird looking, Chloe. *(PLAYGROUND GIRLS and PLAYGROUND BOYS laugh, and Jimmy is encouraged.)* You don't belong here in Arizona. You should go back to where the rest of the weird-looking people like you live.

CHLOE:

Shut up, Jimmy. You are a jerk.

JIMMY:

You're ugly, Chloe, and you don't belong here. Your real parents didn't want you, and we don't either!

ALEX:

(Overhears what's going on, stands) I want Chloe to stay, she's a nice girl....I like Chloe.

JIMMY:

Oh, great, Chloe, a retard is the only one who wants you to stay here because he has a crush on you....Alex likes Chloe, Alex likes Chloe! (*PLAYGROUND BOYS* chime in with the taunting and laugh.)

CHLOE:

Jimmy, you are so stupid, you don't know what you are talking about.

The bell rings to signal the end of recess. JIMMY and his friends exit. CHLOE follows BETH and the PLAYGROUND GIRLS as they exit as well. Visibly upset, ALEX stands and motions to CHLOE, mouthing "I'm sorry," but he says nothing. Lights dim and sound cue plays.

SCENE THREE

Aunt Ruth's house, after school on the same day

Lights up on RUTH at a desk working, surrounded by books and papers. The room is simply furnished with two chairs and natural items such as rocks and plants. PEPPY is sleeping at her feet and then wakes up and whines.

RUTH:

Peppy, is Chloe coming home *already*?... Hi Chloe, welcome home!

CHLOE:

(Enters the house, dejected, throws her backpack down on the floor, sits down.) Where's Mom?

RUTH:

(Looking intently at CHLOE, smiling) They called her in to work for someone who went home sick. Isn't that great? Hopefully she'll make lots of tips.

CHLOE:

Tips. Big deal. We already lost our home.

RUTH:

Chloe, you lost your house, not your home. There's a big difference, you know. Home is where the heart is.

CHLOE:

Yeah, right. Tell me how you feel after someone takes your house away from you.

RUTH:

I'm sorry that happened, Chloe. I'm sure I'd feel just as you do. Tell me, how did things go at school today?

(PEPPY slowly walks over and curls up at CHLOE's feet.)

CHLOE:

Horrible. I hate this school, I hate it! I'd give anything to go back to my old school, with my real friends.

RUTH:

OK, you hate this school. Why do you hate it?

CHLOE:

The kids are so mean. I miss my friends so. I hate this school.

RUTH:

How about if you tell me what happened at school today to upset you?

CHLOE:

I'm not upset. I'm mad. There's a difference, you know.

RUTH:

OK, you're mad. Why are you mad?

CHLOE:

This jerk named Jimmy told me I'm ugly.

RUTH:

You know that's not true. Why let such stupidity bother you?

CHLOE:

(Quietly upset) That wasn't all he said...

RUTH:

What else did that little monster say?

CHLOE:

(Standing up and walking downstage) He said that I'm ugly, that my real parents didn't want me, and the people in Arizona don't want me either.

RUTH:

Oh, sweetie, that is horrible. Come here, let me give you a hug.

(RUTH crosses to CHLOE)

CHLOE:

(Ignoring Ruth's outspread arms, crossing away from her) The worst part is, he was right about something. I don't look like other people here....I don't belong here in Arizona.

RUTH:

(Standing up, walking over to face her) That is nonsense, you belong here as much as anyone else.

CHLOE:

Am I ugly? Is that why my parents didn't want me?

RUTH:

(Walking to try to embrace CHLOE again) Chloe, you are beautiful. Come here and give me a hug. *CHLOE turns and hugs RUTH, crying. After the hug, CHLOE stops crying, walks over to the window and looks out.)* How about some chocolate chip cookies and milk?

CHLOE:

No thanks. I want to find a new place to live. I hate it here. No offense, Aunt Ruth.

RUTH:

(Walking back to her chair at her desk) None taken. I'd probably feel the same way if I were you. Hey, I've got an idea....How about if you take Peppy out for a walk and get some fresh air? The desert is beautiful this time of day. *(PEPPY hears her name, perks up.)*

CHLOE:

OK Peppy, c'mon. Maybe I'll get lucky and disappear. *(CHLOE and PEPPY begin walking toward the door.)*

RUTH:

(Resuming her work, she speaks without looking up.) Whatever you do, stay off the path that leads north, there's a vortex up there, and you just might disappear.

CHLOE:

Yeah, right, I wish.

RUTH:

And don't forget the leash, Chloe....There are coyotes and bobcats out there that eat dogs like Peppy for a living.

CHLOE:

All right, all right, c'mon, Peppy.

CHLOE begins to reach for leash but then changes her mind, makes a face at Ruth, and leaves without it. RUTH looks up when she hears the door shut, walks over, and sees the leash. She picks it up and smiles wisely. Lights dim and sound cue plays.

SCENE FOUR

The desert wilderness north of Aunt Ruth's house, the same day

Lights up on DESERT PLANTS and ANIMALS on stage to suggest the desert. The desert set moves downstage to fill the stage. During the music, CHLOE and PEPPY enter and are walking along, PEPPY sees RABBIT. A comical chase ensues, with PEPPY and RABBIT going on and off stage, and CHLOE in pursuit. The DESERT PLANTS and ANIMALS join in on the movement.

CHLOE:

(After losing PEPPY in the chase) Now I'm lost, and Peppy is going to get eaten by coyotes. Why, oh why didn't I listen to Aunt Ruth and put Peppy on that leash?...What do I do now?...
(As the chase music shifts to sounds of the vortex, the lights become more colorful and brighter. DESERT PLANTS and ANIMALS leave stage, and the SUN spirals around stage with CHLOE watching) What the heck?...What is going on here? Where am I? Help!...Help!...H---E-
--L---P!

(Vortex and ambient desert sounds continue throughout the scene. A few DESERT PLANTS and animals come on stage to interact with the environment.)

MASHATH:

(Appearing mysteriously and approaching CHLOE) Hello, Chloe, I am here to help you, what is it you need?

CHLOE:

(Frightened) I'm lost, I can't find my way home....But who are you?

MASHATH:

I am Mashath.

CHLOE:

(Pulling back) Ma WHAT?

MASHATH:

Mashath. My name is Mashath. I've been sent to help you find your way.

CHLOE:

Sent...sent by whom?

MASHATH:

The Great Keeper. The one who watches over the vortex.

CHLOE:

(Walking in a circle, looking around in wonder) The vortex...is that where I am? What's up with these strange lights and noises?

MASHATH:

Things look and sound different in the vortex....It's a whole different type of reality.

CHLOE:

OK, if you say so...but what kind of name is Mashath anyway?

MASHATH:

Mashath means "moon" in the language of my people.

CHLOE:

Who are your people?

MASHATH:

They are known as the Hohokam.

CHLOE:

I've never heard of them.

MASHATH:

We used to live here many moons ago, right here where you are standing, and all over this area between Black Mountain and the Continental Mountains.

CHLOE:

Where are the others, the rest of your people?

MASHATH:

They are gone, long gone.

CHLOE:

Do you live here in the vortex all by yourself?

MASHATH:

No, I'm not here alone. There are other guides like me, and I'm always meeting new people who are lost, like you.

CHLOE:

So how did you get picked?...Why were you sent to me?

MASHATH:

Because we are soul sisters, you and me. We both got lost in the desert, in the very same place.

CHLOE:

Amazing! I got my wish!

MASHATH:

What wish?

CHLOE:

(Excitedly) I wished that I would disappear...so now I can come live with you, because we are soul sisters, and once I learn my way around the vortex, I'll help others who are lost too. I can be your helper, your assistant!

MASHATH:

Chloe, you will not escape the bullies by disappearing.

CHLOE:

Oh, you know about that....How did you know?

MASHATH:

The Great Keeper wants me to teach you how to feel at home in the desert so you can be strong way down deep inside and face your challenges back home.

CHLOE:

I'd rather live with you in the vortex. How did you get to live here anyway?

MASHATH:

(Crossing to center and acting out the experience as she tells the story. Lights dim and sound __ plays. The DESERT PLANTS and ANIMALS move as she tells the story) It came about in a strange way. I was out looking for food and got lost in the desert just like you did. When night fell, clouds covered the sky so I couldn't find my way home by the stars as my papa taught me to do. Coyotes howled in the distance, and I heard things moving in the bushes.

CHLOE:

Oh no, that's the worst....Weren't you afraid?

MASHATH:

I was so lonely and hungry and scared, I wished with all my heart that I could just die. Then I remembered that my mama said my name means "moon." I looked up and just then, the full moon appeared out of the clouds and lit up the desert. I gave thanks to the Great Keeper for the moonlight. Suddenly I felt at home in the desert, and I wasn't afraid or hungry anymore. Next thing I knew, I was in the vortex being greeted by my guide, Albert.

Lights restore.

CHLOE:

So when did all this happen?

MASHATH:

My people disappeared about 800 years ago, so some time before that.

You...you died?

CHLOE:

Not that I remember.

MASHATH:

Don't you miss your family?

CHLOE:

MASHATH:

No, because we're all from the same tribe. Everyone I meet is part of my family now. Albert explained to me how everything in the universe is connected in invisible ways. People, plants and animals, rocks and rain, sun and moon are all part of our family.

CHLOE:

But it doesn't look that way to me. How do you really know these connections are there if you can't see them?

MASHATH:

I can feel it now, this connection to all life and the whole universe....It is a WONDERFUL feeling! Can you feel it, Chloe?

CHLOE:

(Walking around, breathing deeply, opening her arms, smiling at the plants and animals) I feel light as a feather from head to toe and strong way down deep inside. Is that what you mean?

MASHATH:

Yes!

CHLOE:

I wish I could stay here with you, Mashath.

MASHATH:

It is not my decision to make, Chloe. Would you like to ask my guide, Albert? He is very wise. He will know if there's a way for you to stay.

CHLOE:

Yes, I want to ask him! Where is he?

MASHATH:

We'll have to enter a wormhole to find him. Come with me this way, Chloe.*(Holding her hand out to CHLOE)*

CHLOE:

(Shocked) You mean there's a wormhole here in the vortex?...We can travel through time?

MASHATH:

Yes....Are you ready?

CHLOE:

Will we be burned to a crisp in a firewall, or squished into ultra-dense pebbles by the singularity?

MASHATH:

No, you can trust me, Chloe. Take my hand. I'll lead you there and bring you back safely.

MASHATH and CHLOE hold hands and cross upstage. MASHATH closes her eyes and smiles as sound cue plays and lights shift.

SCENE FIVE

In the wormhole

All DESERT PLANTS and ANIMALS enter to transition to the wormhole. They move through space as the lights shift around them to convey travel through time and space. As the music ends, ALBERT enters, crosses downstage, and sits down on a rock with his eyes closed. He holds a cantaloupe-sized rock in his hands and feels its contours. MASHATH and CHLOE cross downstage to meet ALBERT.

MASHATH:

Hello, Albert, I've come to introduce you to my friend Chloe.

ALBERT:

Well, hello, Mashath and Chloe.

CHLOE:

Mashath, this is your guide? Albert Einstein?!

MASHATH:

(Confused) Chloe, how is it you know him?

CHLOE:

We learned about him at school! But Albert, shouldn't you be dead?

ALBERT:

(Standing up to shake hands) Ah, Chloe, from Greek mythology. Your name means "green herb" in Greek. Your visit has brought me back to life.

CHLOE:

Albert, what were you doing to that rock when we first showed up?

ALBERT:

I was listening to the amazing story of this billion-year old rock....What a long, strange trip it has been! Ice ages, hot spells, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions....It used to be the biggest rock in the desert, but all these disasters turned most of it into rubble.

CHLOE:

The rock told you all that?!

ALBERT:

Yes. Because of spooky action at a distance, the rock is forever entangled with all of its former parts and wanted to share its story with me.

MASHATH:

Albert, Chloe wants to live with me in the vortex.

ALBERT:

Chloe, my friend, that is not possible. The Great Keeper has important work for you to do back home.

CHLOE:

But maybe a big shot like YOU, Albert, can get the Great Keeper to reconsider this decision?

ALBERT:

Chloe, I'm a nobody here....Besides, The Great Keeper knows what's best for you and the whooooooole universe. I assure you that soon you will be verrrry happy that you returned home.

CHLOE:

(Upset, with attitude, turning away) Well you can tell the Great Keeper to forget it. If I can't do my important work here, I'm not going to do it at all. *(Beat, turning to ALBERT)* So Albert, how did YOU get to live here? Is it because you are so RICH and FAMOUS?

MASHATH:

(Shocked) Albert, you never told me this.

ALBERT:

I am smart and famous, not rich and famous. There's a difference, you know.

CHLOE:

How can you be that famous and not be rich?

ALBERT:

(Wisely smiling) Money never seemed as interesting to me as important things like nature or the speed of light.

MASHATH:

Albert, why are you so famous?

ALBERT:

I'm sorry, Mashath, but I cannot tell you. *(To the universe)* The Great Keeper has forbidden me to speak of such things. But it is OK if Chloe tells you...*(obviously wanting the attention)*.

CHLOE:

Well, let's see....We learned a lot about Albert in science class. Albert was one of the smartest people who ever lived. People say "so and so is no Albert Einstein" to call someone stupid.

ALBERT:

(Upset) Oy vey, what a mean thing to say! Everyone is a one-of-a-kind genius at being human.

CHLOE:

(With disbelief) How come I don't ever feel like a genius at being human?

ALBERT:

(Crossing over to SAGUARO and GILA WOODPECKER) Each of us has a unique brain with special abilities. We can't be valued for who we are by using the wrong standard. What if we judged this saguaro by how fast it moves, or this gila woodpecker by how well it swims?

SAGUARO and GILA WOODPECKER

Thanks Albert! You're the bomb.

ALBERT:

(Shaking his finger at them) Now you guys know better than to use the word "bomb" around me.

MASHATH:

Why don't you like the word "bomb," Albert?"

ALBERT:

Because my work was used to make atom bombs and kill people, and I feel bad about that.

CHLOE:

The saguaro and gila woodpecker spoke! How can that be?

ALBERT:

The whole universe speaks if you listen to the music of the spheres. *(Crossing away from the girls)* Speaking of speaking, did you know that I couldn't speak until I was 4 years old?...My parents thought I was a dimwit.

CHLOE:

Really, Albert? If you were a kid today, you would probably be considered autistic.

ALBERT:

Autistic, from the Greek word "autos," meaning self....Why, yes, I think you're right, Chloe. I was in my own little world my whole life.

CHLOE:

(Pacing around, thinking) What else...oh, yes! Albert came up with this amazing theory, the theory of relativity.

MASHATH:

(Speaking to Chloe) What does it mean, Chloe?

CHLOE:

Relativity means everything is related somehow. (*Picking up Albert's rock*) Stuff you can touch and see, like this rock, contains a huge amount of stuff you can't touch or see, called energy. It's the energy, that stuff you can't see, that connects everything.

MASHATH:

How do you know the energy is really there if you can't touch it or see it?

CHLOE:

Energy is like the wind, you can't see it, but you can feel it and see its effects.

MASHATH:

Now I understand. There are many things like this energy, such as love. You can't see it, but you can feel it way down deep inside and see its effects all around you.

ALBERT:

(*Crossing to CHLOE*) Chloe, you are a brilliant girl. You make the complex easy to understand, much better than I ever did. You will become a famous hero of science one day, mark my words!

MASHATH:

Albert, why was a genius like you sent to guide a simple girl like me?

ALBERT:

Well, Mashath, my friend, the truth of the matter is I was sent to be your student and learn from you.

MASHATH:

What can *I* teach *you*?

ALBERT:

Throughout my life, I was more interested in the relationships between atoms than people. But it's love that makes the universe go round. So I missed a few important lessons about how to love and care for other people.

MASHATH:

And that is what *you* are to learn from *me*?

ALBERT:

(*With admiration*) Yes, my friend, you are a genius of the heart. Kindness and friendship are what really matter, and that's what I'm learning from you. (*Crossing away, talking to himself*) Be nice, it's the relationships, stupid!

MASHATH:

Albert, you have been a great friend to me.

CHLOE:

Me too. I think you are doing a great job, Albert.

ALBERT:

(Looking around) I hope the Great Keeper heard that. *(Bowing playfully)* Thank you, my kind friends. So, Chloe, you cannot stay here, but we are going to send you home with a special gift. Mashath, are you ready to help Chloe learn how to feel at home in the desert?

MASHATH:

Yes, we're going to go back in time right now and learn the desert's story....*(To ALBERT)* Do you want to come with us?

ALBERT:

Why not? I could use a refresher. Let's climb on the back of a light beam and have some fun.

(CHLOE, MASATH, and ALBERT begin to cross slowly to an out-of-the-way place on stage left.)

CHLOE:

How old is the desert?

MASHATH:

Seven million years, but we'll go back 5 billion years and begin the story when the sun was born, because the sun is at home in the desert more than anyone else.

CHLOE:

That's crazy! How long will it take us to go back that far?

MASHATH

Not long.

Sound cue plays, and the lights shift to reflect travel through space and time. DESERT PLANTS and ANIMALS enter in character. Once in place, lights brighten to reveal the desert and sound cue __ begins. ALBERT, MASATH, and CHLOE sit down and watch the as the DESERT INHABITANTS tell the desert's story with movement. Each PLANT or ANIMAL crosses downstage when it is their turn to sing.

Song of the Desert (can be sung to music or read as a rap)

SUN: The earth and moon go round my girth
 Day and night are what I'm worth
 Every cell in your body knows my ways
 You wake to the tune of my rays
 I'm five billion years old yet still going strong
 All day long

I am sun
I am sun!

SAGUARO: The Sonoran Desert is my only home
From south to north I like to roam
I weigh two tons and grow 50 feet tall
Yet my sturdy roots don't let me fall
Droughts and floods do not bring doom
I am a mansion with many rooms
I am saguaro
I am saguaro!

GILA WOODPECKER: (*Beginning with an awk-awk-awk*)
I am the desert's native son too
And there's one thing only I can do
My neck and beak give me the power
To tear a hole in saguaro's tower
And make a safe cool nest
That many others use for rest
My cranky call is known by all
I am gila woodpecker
I am gila woodpecker!

RATTLESNAKE: (*Beginning with a hiss*)
Gila woodpecker, step aside
For you cannot match my pride
No one dreads to hear your call
But my rattle strikes fear in the heart of all
I love the heat, for my blood is cold
I'll do anything to live and grow old
I will eat my young before they can flee
Stay away, don't tread on me
I am rattlesnake
I am rattlesnake!

JAVELINAS: (*Two or more begin snorting like pigs*)
Whatever you do, don't call us pigs
Because our teeth are really big
We are related to horses and rats
We only eat plants so we never grow fat
Keep up with the herd, that's how we roll
We travel together to the watering hole
If you hear us snort you may see us cavort
We are javelina
We are javelina!

DESERT INHABITANTS *together*:

We are the desert's children
So we are at home in the desert
We will serve the desert family
And guard the circle of life
Until the appointed time
When the Great Keeper says
Our work here is done
We are at home in the desert!

DESERT PLANTS and ANIMALS exit in character. Lights restore back to the look of the wormhole.

CHLOE:

I never imagined the desert was so full of life! They all seem to know each other and feel strong way down deep inside, even though they have their problems.

MASHATH:

That's why we can feel at home in the desert, too. Droughts, floods, predators, bullies, bombs: nothing stops life. The Great Keeper sees to it that the sacred circle of life is never broken.

ALBERT:

We are all loved, and we are never alone. Love is stronger than death and faster than the speed of light! (*Gesturing*) Mashath, you have become an excellent guide, I am sooooo proud of you. We must go now.

MASHATH:

Goodbye, Chloe. Remember, we are all part of the same great tribe of life. You always belong to the sacred circle of life, so you are never alone way down deep inside.

MASHATH and ALBERT begin to back offstage as they say their goodbyes. Lights shift to reflect time and space travel, and sound cue ___ plays.

ALBERT:

Farewell, my friend Chloe....Just remember, your relationships with living things are the energy *and* the matter of life....Your relationships are all that matter.

CHLOE:

(*Looking around*) Wait, Mashath, Albert, don't go, I want to go with you! Don't leave me here!

(*Lights transition back to the desert look from CHLOE's walk.*) Wow, I'm right back where I entered the vortex, it's a miracle! Let's see...the sun is setting in the west, and I took the

trail to the north, so Aunt Ruth's house is to the south....I hope I run into Peppy on the way home....*(calling)* Peppy!

CHLOE runs offstage confidently, as if she knows the way home. Sound cue plays and lights dim.

SCENE SIX

Aunt Ruth's house, that evening

The desert set has been returned upstage, and RUTH's house reappears. RUTH is at her desk working in the living room with PEPPY at her feet, reprising scene 2. PEPPY stirs, gets up and whines. RUTH looks up from her book.

RUTH:

Peppy, is Chloe *finally* coming home? (*RUTH hides PEPPY behind her desk.*)

CHLOE:

(*Enters the house with an upset look*) Hi, Aunt Ruth.

RUTH:

Well, hello, Chloe—where have *you* been?

CHLOE:

Something terrible has happened. I didn't take the leash and Peppy got lost. She has probably been eaten by coyotes. (*Sobbing*) I killed her. If only I had taken the leash!. Oh, Peppy, I'm so sorry...(*Hearing her name, PEPPY whines. CHLOE runs to her.*) Oh, Peppy, I was so worried about you, and here you are safe and sound. Oh, thank goodness!

RUTH:

I hope you learned your lesson!

CHLOE:

Weren't *you* worried about *me*?

RUTH:

No, I wasn't. About 15 minutes after you left, Peppy came home, so I figured if Peppy could figure out the way home you could, too. (*Looking intently at CHLOE*) You went up to the vortex, didn't you? I figured you'd ignore my advice about that too.

CHLOE:

I ignored you about the leash and the path to the north because I was mad, but I just stumbled into the vortex when I got lost.

RUTH:

You met her, didn't you?

CHLOE:

(*Shocked*) Yes, yes, I did,...When did you meet her?

RUTH:

Many years ago, not long after I moved here. I was walking the dog without a leash. He started chasing a rabbit, I got lost and ended up in the vortex, and she appeared to me.

CHLOE:

That's crazy! That's exactly what happened to me! Did you see Mashath again?

RUTH:

I wanted to, but I never did. I looked for her many times, but she was never there.

CHLOE:

Mashath must have died, but she didn't think she was dead.

RUTH:

(Playfully) I don't think she is dead either, but we're gonna die if we don't eat some dinner. How's about if you get started on your homework so we can surprise your mom?. She'll never expect in a MILLION years that your homework will be done when she gets home.

CHLOE:

Not in a million years...not even in a BILLION years!

CHLOE, AUNT RUTH and PEPPY begin to exit toward the kitchen. Lights dim, sound cue ___ plays as the setting changes to Chloe's bedroom. CHLOE is in bed with PEPPY at her feet. DANA, dressed in a waitress uniform, enters the room and sits by her side on the bed. Lights come up.

DANA:

Chloe honey, I'm sorry I wasn't home this afternoon, after you had such a rough time at school. No one deserves to be bullied, especially a sweetie pie like you.

CHLOE:

That's OK, Mom, I forgot all about that. Aunt Ruth and I had lots of fun. *(Pause)* Mom, a kid at school said my real parents didn't want me....Is that true?

DANA:

Chloe, I never met them, but my understanding is that they loved you and wanted you, they just didn't have the money to feed you and give you a good home, and they wanted you to have that.

CHLOE:

How come they had so little money?

DANA:

Honey, the world is full of people who don't have much money. I don't know what was up with your folks....Maybe they lost everything they had in a war or an earthquake or some other disaster.

CHLOE:

I guess I'm lucky that you didn't give me away when you ran out of money...when our house was foreclosed.

DANA:

You silly, I would never do that in a billion years. When I first laid eyes on you, I realized this is why I'm here, to love this beautiful little girl and make her feel at home in this crazy world.

CHLOE:

(Smiling) How old was I?

DANA:

Three days old and as cute as a button. I just knew we were meant to be together. We must have been together in a prior life, and gotten separated somehow.

CHLOE:

(Wisely) We're all from the same family, if you go back far enough.

DANA:

That's how I've always felt too. We are all part of one big family.

CHLOE:

Mom I'm glad how things worked out. I'm glad you adopted me, and I'm glad we moved out here to live in the desert with Aunt Ruth.

DANA:

(Musing) When I lost my job, I never dreamed it would turn out like this. But I like being a waitress, seeing people smile when they eat good food and leave a tip. Every loss seems to have a gain, if you hang in there long enough. *(Hugging CHLOE)* Goodnight, sleep tight, don't let the...

CHLOE:

(Giggling) ...scorpions bite!!

DANA:

Sweet dreams, my angel. I love you.

CHLOE:

I love you too. Goodnight, Mom.

DANA exits, lights shift as CHLOE goes right to sleep with PEPPY sleeping at the foot of the bed. Sound cue ___ plays and NEURONS enter.

Dance of the Neurons:

This segment suggests Chloe's brain activity while dreaming, with NEURONS dancing around CHLOE as she dreams.

When the song ends, Sound cue plays, and lights dim.

SCENE SEVEN

The school playground, recess, the next day

Lights come up on a reprisal of the opening of scene 2. CHLOE, BETH, the PLAYGROUND GIRLS, and two PLAYGROUND BOYS are on the playground gathered around ALEX, who is showing them something on the computer tablet. JIMMY, PAUL, and JOEY come on stage, laughing and jostling each other. JIMMY boldly calls out to CHLOE.

JIMMY:

Hey, Chloe!

CHLOE:

(Turning toward him politely, with a smile) Yes, Jimmy?

JIMMY:

C'mere for a second....I want to tell you something.

CHLOE:

(Turning away from him) No thanks, Jimmy.

JIMMY:

You are so ugly, Chloe, it's illegal. You have to leave Arizona right this instant. *(PAUL and the PLAYGROUND BOYS laugh, PLAYGROUND GIRLS look indignant.)*

ALEX:

(Stands hesitantly to defend CHLOE) Jimmy, leave Chloe alone, she's a nice girl. I want her to stay here.

JIMMY:

A retard wants you here, Chloe. That doesn't even count.

JOEY:

Hey, Jimmy, c'mon. Alex is a good guy, don't mess with him. Let's go shoot some hoops and have some fun.

CHLOE:

(Walks over and faces him, speaking calmly) Jimmy, I belong here as much as anyone else. I feel at home here in the desert. And until a saguaro or a gila woodpecker throws me out, I'm staying put.

JIMMY:

(Surprised, confused) Huh? Uhhhh...hmmmm...

BETH:

(Walks over, stands next to CHLOE) Jimmy, Alex is way smarter than you are. He showed us how to play the wormhole game. We want Chloe here too. Buzz off and grow up. We're all different in some way. *You sure are different.* (PLAYGROUND GIRLS *giggle, and BETH crosses back to them*)

PAUL:

(Sizing up the situation quickly) Hey, c'mon, guys, let's go shoot some hoops. Only sissies pick on girls anyway! *(PAUL leads JOEY and the PLAYGROUND BOYS off stage, triumphant as the new leader of the pack; JIMMY is at the back of the group. ALEX begins to walk off in a different direction.)*

CHLOE:

Alex, wait a minute.... Thank you...I think you're nice too....You are so brilliant, you're like our own Albert Einstein. Jimmy is just jealous of you. *(ALEX stops, turns partly toward her, and smiles awkwardly without looking at her, then runs off stage.)*

BETH:

(BETH crosses to CHLOE) Chloe, you were something else today. You were calm but tough as nails!

CHLOE:

You were so brave, sticking up for Alex and me.

BETH:

I was brave because of you! What happened? Why were you so confident today?

CHLOE:

I had some CRAZY dreams last night...but I guess the difference is that yesterday after school, I learned how to feel at home in the desert.

BETH:

What does *that* mean?

CHLOE:

Even though we have problems, we can still feel connected and strong way down deep inside, and that helps us find our way no matter what. That's how things are in the desert.

BETH:

We want to feel at home in the desert too....C'mon, teach us how! *(PLAYGROUND GIRLS cross to BETH and CHLOE, nodding their heads, giggling excitedly.)*

CHLOE:

Well the first thing is, I started to listen to dead people.

BETH and the PLAYGROUND GIRLS:

(Shrieking) Vampires? Zombies?

CHLOE:

No, I don't mean vampires or zombies, I mean *real* dead people.

BETH and the PLAYGROUND GIRLS:

Like who?

CHLOE:

Albert Einstein.

BETH and the PLAYGROUND GIRLS:

(Shrieking) Albert Einstein?!

CHLOE:

Yep, I got lost in the desert above my aunt's house, and stumbled into a vortex...*(picking up or pointing to a rock to suggest she will tell them about relativity. The PLAYGROUND GIRLS and BETH circle around CHLOE.)*

Wide-eyed, Chloe talks to them as if telling a campfire ghost story, and the girls are enthralled. Lights shift, sound cue __ begins. MASHATH, ALBERT, and DESERT INHABITANTS, DANA, AUNT RUTH, PLAYGROUND BOYS, JIMMY, and JOEY walk onstage and form a large circle, walking around the girls as they sing or say:

We are the desert's children
So we are at home in the desert
We will serve the desert family
And guard the circle of life
Until the appointed time
When the Great Keeper says
Our work here is done
We are at home in the desert!
We are at home in the desert!

Lights dim and Sound cue plays as everyone gathers in a line for their bows.

THE END

10. Director's Script

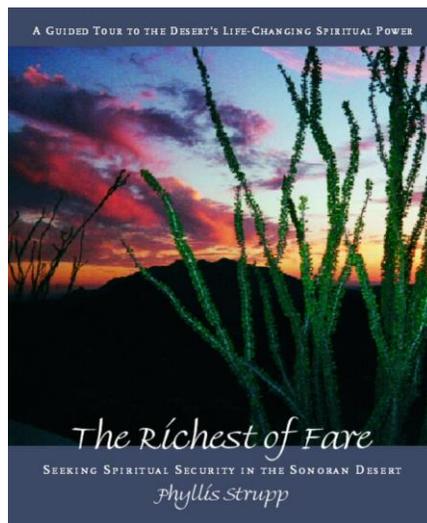


AT HOME IN THE DESERT

DIRECTOR'S SCRIPT

A one-act play

by
Phyllis Strupp



This original play is inspired by the nonfiction book *The Richest of Fare: Seeking Spiritual Security in the Sonoran Desert* by Phyllis Strupp, winner of the Independent Publishing award for the best mind-body-spirit book in 2005. Both of these works are grounded in respect for the dignity of every human being and the natural world whence we evolved, particularly as we experience it in the magnificent Sonoran Desert. The play, an official Arizona Centennial Legacy Project, takes place around the time of the Arizona Centennial.

AT HOME IN THE DESERT

Plot Summary

When their home in Scottsdale is foreclosed on just before Christmas, Dana and her adopted 12-year-old daughter, Chloe, are forced to relocate to Aunt Ruth's house at the northern edge of the Valley of the Sun. Chloe is upset about leaving her friends and going to a new school. One afternoon during recess on the playground, Alex, a teenager with autism, is teaching Chloe, Beth, the Playground Girls and two Playground Boys how to play a game on a computer tablet. Jimmy begins to bully Chloe to impress his friends. When Alex defends her, he is also ridiculed.

Chloe comes home from school and tells Aunt Ruth what happened at school that day, expressing her anger over being bullied. She takes her old dog, Peppy, out for a walk in the desert, disobeying Aunt Ruth's advice to use a leash and avoid the path that leads north. A rabbit appears, and Peppy runs off in hot pursuit despite her advanced age. As coyotes howl in the distance, Chloe runs after Peppy but can't keep up and gets lost.

She comes upon a strange place and cries for help. Mashath, a Native American girl the same age as Chloe, appears and explains that they are in a vortex; Mashath has been sent by the Great Keeper to help Chloe return home. Chloe, hoping to stay with Mashath in the vortex, agrees to enter a wormhole in the vortex to travel in time and meet Mashath's guide, Albert. After teaching Chloe the secret of how to feel at home in the desert, Mashath and Albert say goodbye and disappear.

Chloe finds herself right where she entered the vortex and safely navigates her way home. She confesses to Aunt Ruth that she has lost Peppy by not putting her on a leash and that Peppy disappeared and may have been killed. Peppy comes from another room to greet her, unscathed. Aunt Ruth reveals that she once met Mashath after becoming lost and entering the vortex. Dana comes home from work. As she tucks Chloe into bed, they talk about what happened at school that day, and what Chloe's birth parents were like. During the night, Chloe dreams about the events of the day.

The next day on the playground, Jimmy once again begins to bully Chloe, emboldened by his success the day before. She gently but firmly stands up to him, and Alex and Beth stand up for her too. The tables turn on Jimmy as Paul leads the Playground Boys away for a game of basketball. Chloe thanks Alex for defending her and tries to connect with him. Beth asks Chloe why she was so brave and insists she share the secret of feeling "at home in the desert."

AT HOME IN THE DESERT

Time

Around the time of the Arizona Centennial (February 14, 2012)

Place

Valley of the Sun, Arizona

Scenes

- Scene 1** Dana's house in Scottsdale, December 2011
- Scene 2** The school playground, recess, February 13, 2012
- Scene 3** Aunt Ruth's house, after school on the same day
- Scene 4** The desert wilderness north of Aunt Ruth's house, the same day
- Scene 5** In the wormhole
- Scene 6** Aunt Ruth's house, that evening
- Scene 7** The school playground, recess, the next day

Characters

Named Characters: 10

Chloe, a 12-year old girl

Chloe has grown up in Arizona after being adopted from outside the United States as an infant by Dana. She has grown up without siblings. A good student with exotic looks (perhaps Asian), she was happy at school until home foreclosure forced Chloe and Dana to move suddenly to another area. This move has separated Chloe from her friends, shaking her confidence. Because of this and her distinctive appearance, Chloe is an easy target for a bully. She has a coming-of-age experience in the desert that helps her put her problems in perspective and continue on her way to becoming the great scientist that Albert predicts she will be.

Dana, Chloe's mother

Dana is an outgoing, energetic, warm-hearted, and free-spirited person who has a tendency to be more optimistic than realistic. After two divorces, she decided to adopt a child as a single parent. She had a good job as a marketing assistant, but she was laid off in the economic crash of 2008. She took a job as a waitress instead, but that didn't pay enough to cover the mortgage on their house. She showed up unannounced with Chloe on Ruth's doorstep, afraid that Ruth would have said "I told you so" if she had known they were coming.

Jimmy, a 12-year old boy

Jimmy is the likeable, tough-guy leader of the Playground Boys. Having grown up with an emotionally abusive father, he is plagued by insecurity and uses the bullying tactics he has learned at home to try to gain attention and power on the playground.

Paul, a 12-year old boy

Paul is Jimmy's best friend and part of the Playground Boys group. He is good-natured and easy-going. As a younger sibling in a large family, he knows how to go along and get along, but he is also jealous of Jimmy. At the end of the story, when he gets a chance to be the leader of the Playground Boys, he is quick to recognize and seize the opportunity.

Alex, a 14-year old boy

Alex is an intelligent, sensitive boy with autism. He looks like a geek. He is socially awkward and blunt and does not make eye contact when he speaks to people. He enjoys using technology and playing games, and doesn't mind showing others how to use them. He does not belong to the Playground Boys but sometimes follows them while keeping his distance. He has been bullied many times, and is stirred by Chloe's plight.

Joey, a 12-year old boy

Joey is clearly a follower of Jimmy and Paul. He wants to please them and be accepted by the Playground Boys. But he is also aware of what it is like to be scorned and bullied for being different. He also has a friend who is very active in helping his autistic brother cope with school through the Best Buddies program, so Joey has a more tolerant view of individuals with autism such as Alex.

Beth, a 12-year old girl

Beth is the leader of the Playground Girls. The oldest in a medium-sized family, she likes to have fun and hang out with her friends. She is popular and has significant influence on boys and girls alike. She eventually sticks up for Chloe and Alex because she remembers what it is like to be an outsider from the time when her father's job took her family abroad for three years.

Ruth, Dana's older sister

Ruth is smart, practical woman who is very interested in spiritual matters. After being widowed in her early forties, she left her job as a financial analyst on Wall Street, moved to Carefree, Arizona, and began studying the world's religions to gain insight into the deeper questions of life. She is a writer and a thinker. She enjoys being alone. Her advice to Dana about money and life has fallen on deaf ears.

Mashath, a 12-year old Hohokam girl

Mashath (pronounced MA-shath, emphasis on first syllable) is a Native American girl who lives in the vortex. Her name means "moon" in the Hohokam language. It is not clear whether she is alive or a ghost. Mashath has been given special powers of intuition and empathy by the Great Keeper, who trusts her to use her powers only to help the lost, like Chloe. Since Mashath also got lost in the desert once, she feels drawn to Chloe as a soul sister.

Albert, a 76-year old man

Albert lives in the wormhole and also helps people who are lost. The audience discovers along with Chloe that he is Albert Einstein. The Great Keeper has given Albert a second chance to learn an important lesson about human relationships that he never learned while

he was alive. Although Mashath thinks Albert is her guide, he reveals to her that he is really her student. He is a kind, wise, humorous and helpful companion for Mashath and Chloe.

Desert inhabitants with speaking parts: 6

Sun
Saguaro
Gila woodpecker
Rattlesnake
Javelinas—at least 2

Other Characters: at least 17

The number of plants and animals can be increased as desired.

Neurons, nonspeaking characters who provide comic relief throughout the play—at least 2¹
Playground Girls, friends of Chloe—at least 2
Playground Boys, other friends of Jimmy—at least 2²
Peppy, Chloe's dog
Rabbit
Ocotillo
Palo Verde
Gambel's quail family (at least 4, 2 adults and 2 chicks) ³
Hawk
Packrat
Rock

¹ Neurons were double-cast as desert plants or animals and were chosen for their dance skills.

² Because of the number who auditioned, the original cast had only two playground girls and no additional playground boys.

³ The original cast had one older child and three younger children playing the Quail family.

SCENE ONE

Dana's home in Scottsdale, December, 2011

Introduction music (Sound cue ____) starts as the lights fade up on our scene. The front door of a house has a large sign that says "FORECLOSED." DANA enters and CHLOE follows behind. DANA approaches the door, sees the lockbox, and realizes what has happened. Music fades away as the dialogue begins.

DANA:

What a bummer, Chloe, I think they changed the locks on us.

CHLOE:

Who's "they"?

DANA:

The bank.

CHLOE:

But why, Mom? Why would they do that?

DANA:

Chloe honey, do you remember a while back when I lost my job? After that, I couldn't make the mortgage payments.

CHLOE:

Why, why didn't you tell me, Mom?

DANA:

It's been a while, *but* I didn't think they would do it so suddenly. Especially at Christmas time....What is the *matter* with them?

CHLOE:

Mom what will we do? Where will we go?

DANA:

We'll go to Aunt Ruth's house up in the North Valley. She has room for us.

CHLOE:

Does she know we're coming?

DANA:

Yeah, she has an inkling....Besides, she'll be happy to have some company.

CHLOE:

Will the bus come and get me for school all the way up there?

DANA:

That's 20-some miles from here. The bus won't come that far, sweetie. You'll be going to a new school, a better school, up there where Aunt Ruth lives..

CHLOE:

But what about my friends here—I can't just leave them, Mom. Please!

DANA:

Just send them a text, tell them you're going away but you'll see them soon. (*Whiny dog noises come from other side of door.*)

CHLOE:

Oh no, Peppy! How will we get her out of there before the bank takes her too?

DANA:

Don't worry Chloe, I left a window in the garage open a little....We can get in there and get Peppy and a few other things too....Let's go!

They run off stage in the direction of the house. Lights dim and sound cue ___ plays.⁴

⁴ Scene-change tracks were designed to be variable in length to accommodate varying requirements of set changes and cover possible mishaps during a live production.

SCENE TWO

The school playground, recess, February 13, 2012

CHLOE, BETH, and the PLAYGROUND GIRLS and BOYS are on the playground gathered around ALEX, who is showing them how to use a computer tablet.

BETH:

Alex, show us some of the really wild apps....What's your favorite one?

ALEX:

(Without looking up) Hmmmm that's a tough one, there's so many I like...

BETH:

OK show us all the ones you like.

ALEX:

(Again, without looking up) That will take forever, I have so many favorites....There is this one game that allows me to control the power of a vortex.

BETH:

What on earth is a vortex?

ALEX:

A vortex is like a big giant whirlpool that sends off powerful energy. It creates an alternate reality that you can see and feel.

BETH:

Oh yeah, my mom was talking about going to a vortex....They have a bunch of them up in Sedona.

ALEX:

That's because those huge iron-rich red rocks up there influence the earth's magnetic field.

BETH:

Whatever, it all sounds really weird to me.

ALEX:

I also like this app for how to navigate your way through a wormhole...

BETH:

A wormhole?...Ewwwww.

THE PLAYGROUND GIRLS:

(Ad-lib) A wormhole!...Ewwww, yuck, that's gross.

ALEX:

Not a worm's hole but a wormhole, a cosmic tunnel formed by dark matter that allows travel through time and space.

CHLOE:

Yes! Alex show us that one! *(BETH and others excitedly nod yes.)*

ALEX:

OK, here we go, we'll play the wormhole game. The first thing you have to do is choose what portal you want to enter.

BETH:

Well, how would *we* know *that*?

CHLOE:

What choices do we have?

ALEX:

It depends on why you want to enter the wormhole. Do you want to time travel? Visit another galaxy? Or do you want to peer into a black hole to spy on another universe?

CHLOE:

(Looking around) How about if we look into a black hole?

BETH:

Sounds great, that's what I was thinking too!

ALEX:

All right, but if we get too close we'll either be burned to a crisp in a firewall, or squished into ultra-dense pebbles by the singularity.

BETH:

That does NOT sound good.

ALEX:

(Moving his hands on the tablet and rocking it side to side) I'll do my best to navigate safely. We're now entering the portal to take us to Sagittarius A, the supermassive black hole at the center of the Milky Way Galaxy....Should we approach cautiously from the side or head for the center where we can see better?

BETH:

Let's be bold and go right to the center! *(Kids are excited, nod, and ad-lib yes.)*

ALEX:

Well, all right, but we are more likely to disappear there....Uh-oh...

CHLOE:

What happened?

ALEX:

(Continuing to move and touch the tablet) Oh no! We got too close, we are being sucked into Sagittarius A's powerful gravitational field....There is something weird coming after us....We are disappearing into the black hole... *(The kids around him are watching and gasping)*

During this action, JIMMY, PAUL, and JOEY enter, laughing and jostling each other. They are jealous of ALEX getting the girls' attention. JIMMY gets an idea and whispers something to PAUL and JOEY, and they all laugh and encourage him.

JIMMY:

Hey Chloe!

CHLOE:

(Turning toward him) What?

JIMMY:

C'mere for a second....I want to tell you something.

CHLOE:

(Curious, friendly, she walks toward him) What?

JIMMY:

You are weird looking, Chloe. *(PLAYGROUND GIRLS and PLAYGROUND BOYS laugh, and Jimmy is encouraged.)* You don't belong here in Arizona. You should go back to where the rest of the weird-looking people like you live.

CHLOE:

Shut up, Jimmy. You are a jerk.

JIMMY:

You're ugly, Chloe, and you don't belong here. Your real parents didn't want you, and we don't either!

ALEX:

(Overhears what's going on, stands) I want Chloe to stay, she's a nice girl....I like Chloe.

JIMMY:

Oh great, Chloe, a retard is the only one who wants you to stay here because he has a crush on you....Alex likes Chloe, Alex likes Chloe! (*PLAYGROUND BOYS* chime in with the taunting and laugh.)

CHLOE:

Jimmy, you are so stupid, you don't know what you are talking about.

The bell rings to signal the end of recess. JIMMY and his friends exit. CHLOE follows BETH and the PLAYGROUND GIRLS as they exit as well. Visibly upset, ALEX stands and motions to CHLOE, mouthing "I'm sorry," but he says nothing. Lights dim and sound cue __ plays.

SCENE THREE

Aunt Ruth's house, after school on the same day

Lights up on RUTH at a desk working, surrounded by books and papers. The room is simply furnished with two chairs and natural items such as rocks and plants. PEPPY is sleeping at her feet and then wakes up and whines.

RUTH:

Peppy, is Chloe coming home *already*?... Hi Chloe, welcome home!

CHLOE:

(Enters the house, dejected, throws her backpack down on the floor, sits down.) Where's Mom?

RUTH:

(Looking intently at CHLOE, smiling) They called her in to work for someone who went home sick. Isn't that great? Hopefully she'll make lots of tips.

CHLOE:

Tips. Big deal. We already lost our home.

RUTH:

Chloe, you lost your house, not your home. There's a big difference, you know. Home is where the heart is.

CHLOE:

Yeah, right. Tell me how you feel after someone takes your house away from you.

RUTH:

I'm sorry that happened, Chloe. I'm sure I'd feel just as you do. Tell me, how did things go at school today?

(PEPPY slowly walks over and curls up at CHLOE's feet.)

CHLOE:

Horrible. I hate this school, I hate it! I'd give anything to go back to my old school, with my real friends.

RUTH:

OK, you hate this school. Why do you hate it?

CHLOE:

The kids are so mean. I miss my friends. I hate this school.

RUTH:

How about if you tell me what happened at school today to upset you?

CHLOE:

I'm not upset. I'm mad. There's a difference, you know.

RUTH:

OK, you're mad. Why are you mad?

CHLOE:

This jerk named Jimmy told me I'm ugly.

RUTH:

You know that's not true. Why let such stupidity bother you?

CHLOE:

(Quietly upset) That wasn't all he said...

RUTH:

What else did that little monster say?

CHLOE:

(Standing up and walking downstage) He said that I'm ugly, that my real parents didn't want me, and the people in Arizona don't want me either.

RUTH:

Oh, sweetie, that is horrible. Come here, let me give you a hug.

(RUTH crosses to CHLOE)

CHLOE:

(Ignoring Ruth's outspread arms, crossing away from her) The worst part is, he was right about something. I don't look like other people here....I don't belong here in Arizona.

RUTH:

That is nonsense, you belong here as much as anyone else.

CHLOE:

Am I ugly? Is that why my parents didn't want me?

RUTH:

(Walking to try to embrace CHLOE again) Chloe, you are beautiful. Come here and give me a hug. *(CHLOE turns and hugs RUTH, crying. After the hug, CHLOE stops crying, walks over to the window and looks out.)* How about some chocolate chip cookies and milk?

CHLOE:

No thanks. I want to find a new place to live. I hate it here. No offense, Aunt Ruth.

RUTH:

(Walking back to her chair at her desk) None taken. I'd probably feel the same way if I were you. Hey, I've got an idea....How about if you take Peppy out for a walk and get some fresh air? The desert is beautiful this time of day. *(PEPPY hears her name, perks up.)*

CHLOE:

OK Peppy, c'mon. Maybe I'll get lucky and disappear. *(CHLOE and PEPPY begin walking toward the door.)*

RUTH:

(Resuming her work, she speaks without looking up.) Whatever you do, stay off the path that leads north, there's a vortex up there, and you just might disappear.

CHLOE:

Yeah, right, I wish.

RUTH:

And don't forget the leash, Chloe...There are coyotes and bobcats out there that eat dogs like Peppy for a living.

CHLOE:

All right, all right, c'mon, Peppy.

CHLOE begins to reach for leash but then changes her mind, makes a face at Ruth, and leaves without it. RUTH looks up when she hears the door shut, walks over, and sees the leash. She picks it up and smiles wisely. Lights dim and sound cue __ plays.⁵

⁵ This sound cue does not fade out as the other scene-change cues do. This music shifts from scene change to sound effects for the chase scene and then to vortex music. It fades out on its own after Chloe arrives in the vortex.

SCENE FOUR

The desert wilderness north of Aunt Ruth's house, the same day

*Lights up on DESERT PLANTS and ANIMALS on stage to suggest the desert. The desert set moves downstage to fill the stage. During the music, CHLOE and PEPPY enter and are walking along, PEPPY sees RABBIT. A comical chase ensues, with PEPPY and RABBIT going on and off stage, and CHLOE in pursuit. The DESERT PLANTS and ANIMALS join in on the movement.*⁶

CHLOE:

(After losing PEPPY in the chase) Now I'm lost, and Peppy is going to get eaten by coyotes. Why, oh why didn't I listen to Aunt Ruth and put Peppy on that leash?...What do I do now?...
(As the chase music shifts to sounds of the vortex, the lights become more colorful and brighter. DESERT PLANTS and ANIMALS leave stage, and the SUN spirals around stage with CHLOE watching) What the heck?...What is going on here? Where am I? Help!...Help!...H---E---L---P!

(Vortex and ambient desert sounds continue throughout the scene. A few DESERT PLANTS and animals come on stage to interact with the environment.)

MASHATH:

(Appearing mysteriously and approaching CHLOE) Hello, Chloe, I am here to help you, what is it you need?

CHLOE:

(Frightened) I'm lost, I can't find my way home....But who are you?

MASHATH:

I am Mashath.

CHLOE:

(Pulling back) Ma WHAT?

MASHATH:

Mashath. My name is Mashath. I've been sent to help you find your way.

CHLOE:

Sent...sent by whom?

⁶ Consider using a path for movement, along the lines of *Lion King*, using different levels in space and different timing and tempos of movement for the various characters. [[Can you assume readers will be familiar with the *Lion King* production mentioned here?]]

MASHATH:

The Great Keeper. The one who watches over the vortex.

CHLOE:

(Walking in a circle, looking around in wonder) The vortex...is that where I am? What's up with these strange lights and noises?

MASHATH:

Things look and sound different in the vortex....It's a whole different type of reality.

CHLOE:

OK, if you say so...but what kind of name is Mashath anyway?

MASHATH:

Mashath means "moon" in the language of my people.

CHLOE:

Who are your people?

MASHATH:

They are known as the Hohokam.

CHLOE:

I've never heard of them.

MASHATH:

We used to live here many moons ago, right here where you are standing, and all over this area between Black Mountain and the Continental Mountains.

CHLOE:

Where are the others, the rest of your people?

MASHATH:

They are gone, long gone.

CHLOE:

Do you live here in the vortex all by yourself?

MASHATH:

No, I'm not here alone. There are other guides like me, and I'm always meeting new people who are lost, like you.

CHLOE:

So how did you get picked?...Why were you sent to me?

MASHATH:

Because we are soul sisters, you and me. We both got lost in the desert, in the very same place.

CHLOE:

Amazing! I got my wish!

MASHATH:

What wish?

CHLOE:

(Excitedly) I wished that I would disappear...so now I can come live with you, because we are soul sisters, and once I learn my way around the vortex, I'll help others who are lost too. I can be your helper, your assistant!

MASHATH:

Chloe, you will not escape the bullies by disappearing.

CHLOE:

Oh, you know about that....How did you know?

MASHATH:

The Great Keeper wants me to teach you how to feel at home in the desert so you can be strong way down deep inside and face your challenges back home.

CHLOE:

I'd rather live with you in the vortex. How did you get to live here anyway?

MASHATH:

(Crossing to center and acting out the experience as she tells the story. Lights dim and sound __ plays. The DESERT PLANTS and ANIMALS move as she tells the story) It came about in a strange way. I was out looking for food and got lost in the desert just like you did. When night fell, clouds covered the sky so I couldn't find my way home by the stars as my papa taught me to do. Coyotes howled in the distance, and I heard things moving in the bushes.

CHLOE:

Oh no, that's the worst....Weren't you afraid?

MASHATH:

I was so lonely and hungry and scared, I wished with all my heart that I could just die. Then I remembered that my mama said my name means "moon." I looked up and just then, the full moon appeared out of the clouds and lit up the desert. I gave thanks to the Great Keeper for the moonlight. Suddenly I felt at home in the desert, and I wasn't afraid or hungry anymore. Next thing I knew, I was in the vortex being greeted by my guide, Albert.

Lights restore.

CHLOE:

So when did all this happen?

MASHATH:

My people disappeared about 800 years ago, so some time before that.

CHLOE:

You...you died?

MASHATH:

Not that I remember.

CHLOE:

Don't you miss your family?

MASHATH:

No, because we're all from the same tribe. Everyone I meet is part of my family now. My guide Albert explained to me how everything in the universe is connected in invisible ways. People, plants and animals, rocks and rain, sun and moon are all part of our family.

CHLOE:

But it doesn't look that way to me. How do you really know these connections are there if you can't see them?

MASHATH:

I can feel it now, this connection to all life and the whole universe....It is a WONDERFUL feeling! Can you feel it, Chloe?

CHLOE:

(Walking around, breathing deeply, opening her arms, smiling at the plants and animals) I feel light as a feather from head to toe and strong way down deep inside. Is that what you mean?

MASHATH:

Yes!

CHLOE:

I wish I could stay here with you, Mashath.

MASHATH:

It is not my decision to make, Chloe. Would you like to ask my guide, Albert? He is very wise. He will know if there's a way for you to stay.

CHLOE:

Yes, I want to ask him! Where is he?

MASHATH:

We'll have to enter a wormhole to find him. Come with me this way, Chloe. *(Holding her*

hand out to CHLOE)

CHLOE:

(Shocked) You mean there's a wormhole here in the vortex?...We can travel through time?

MASHATH:

Yes...Are you ready?

CHLOE:

Will we be burned to a crisp in a firewall, or squished into ultra-dense pebbles by the singularity?

MASHATH:

No, you can trust me, Chloe. Take my hand. I'll lead you there and bring you back safely.

MASHATH and CHLOE hold hands and cross upstage. MASHATH closes her eyes and smiles as sound cue ___ plays⁷ and lights shift.

⁷ As with the last track, this track does not fade out. It plays during the wormhole dialogue that follows and should play to the end of the track.

SCENE FIVE

In the wormhole

All DESERT PLANTS and ANIMALS enter to transition to the wormhole. They move through space⁸ as the lights shift around them to convey travel through time and space. As the music ends, ALBERT enters, crosses downstage, and sits down on a rock with his eyes closed. He holds a cantaloupe-sized rock in his hands and feels its contours. MASHATH and CHLOE cross downstage to meet ALBERT.

MASHATH:

Hello, Albert, I've come to introduce you to my friend Chloe.

ALBERT:

Well, hello, Mashath and Chloe.

CHLOE:

Mashath, this is your guide? Albert Einstein?!

MASHATH:

(Confused) Chloe, how is it you know him?

CHLOE:

We learned about him at school! But Albert, shouldn't you be dead?

ALBERT:

(Standing up to shake hands) Ah, Chloe, from Greek mythology. Your name means "green herb" in Greek. Your visit has brought me back to life.

CHLOE:

Albert, what were you doing to that rock when we first showed up?

ALBERT:

I was listening to the amazing story of this billion-year old rock....What a long, strange trip it has been! Ice ages, hot spells, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions....It used to be the biggest rock in the desert, but all these disasters turned most of it into rubble.

CHLOE:

⁸ Consider working with a feeling of grounded movements. Use earthy but simple phrases that can easily be performed by both untrained movers.

The rock told you all that?!

ALBERT:

Yes. Because of spooky action at a distance, the rock is forever entangled with all of its former parts and wanted to share its story with me.

MASHATH:

Albert, Chloe wants to live with me in the vortex.

ALBERT:

Chloe, my friend, that is not possible. The Great Keeper has important work for you to do back home.

CHLOE:

But maybe a big shot like YOU, Albert, can get the Great Keeper to reconsider this decision?

ALBERT:

Chloe, I'm a nobody here....Besides, The Great Keeper knows what's best for you and the whooooooole universe. I assure you that soon you will be verrrry happy that you returned home.

CHLOE:

(Upset, with attitude, turning away) Well you can tell the Great Keeper to forget it. If I can't do my important work here, I'm not going to do it at all. *(Beat, turning to ALBERT)* So Albert, how did YOU get to live here? Is it because you are so RICH and FAMOUS?

MASHATH:

(Shocked) Albert, you never told me this.

ALBERT:

I am smart and famous, not rich and famous. There's a difference, you know.

CHLOE:

How can you be that smart and not be rich?

ALBERT:

(Wisely smiling) Money never seemed as interesting to me as important things like nature or the speed of light.

MASHATH:

Albert, why are you so famous?

ALBERT:

I'm sorry Mashath, but I cannot tell you. *(To the universe)* The Great Keeper has forbidden me to speak of such things. But it is OK if Chloe tells you...*(obviously wanting the attention)*.

CHLOE:

Well, let's see....We learned a lot about Albert in science class. Albert was one of the smartest people who ever lived. People say "so and so is no Albert Einstein" to call someone stupid.

ALBERT:

(Upset) Oy vey, what a mean thing to say! Everyone is a one-of-a-kind genius at being human.

CHLOE:

(With disbelief) How come I don't ever feel like a genius at being human?

ALBERT:

(Crossing over to SAGUARO and GILA WOODPECKER) Each of us has a unique brain with special abilities. We can't be valued for who we are by using the wrong standard. What if we judged this saguaro by how fast it moves, or this gila woodpecker by how well it swims?

SAGUARO and GILA WOODPECKER

Thanks Albert! You're the bomb.

ALBERT:

(Shaking his finger at them) Now, you guys know better than to use the word "bomb" around me.

MASHATH:

Why don't you like the word "bomb," Albert?"

ALBERT:

Because my work was used to make atom bombs and kill people, and I feel bad about that.

CHLOE:

The saguaro and gila woodpecker spoke! How can that be?

ALBERT:

The whole universe speaks if you listen to the music of the spheres. *(Crossing away from the girls)* Speaking of speaking, did you know that I couldn't speak until I was 4 years old?...My parents thought I was a dimwit.

CHLOE:

Really, Albert? If you were a kid today, you would probably be considered autistic.

ALBERT:

Autistic, from the Greek word "autos," meaning self....Why, yes, I think you're right, Chloe, I was in my own little world my whole life.

CHLOE:

(Pacing around, thinking) What else...oh, yes! Albert came up with this amazing theory, the theory of relativity.

MASHATH:

(Speaking to Chloe) What does it mean, Chloe?

CHLOE:

Relativity means everything is related somehow. *(Picking up Albert's rock)* Stuff you can touch and see, like this rock, contains a huge amount of stuff you can't touch or see, called energy. It's the energy, that stuff you can't see, that connects everything.

MASHATH:

How do you know the energy is really there if you can't touch it or see it?

CHLOE:

Energy is like the wind, you can't see it, but you can feel it and see its effects.

MASHATH:

Now I understand. There are many things like this energy, such as love. You can't see it, but you can feel it way down deep inside and see its effects all around you.

ALBERT:

(Crossing to CHLOE) Chloe, you are a brilliant girl. You make the complex easy to understand, much better than I ever did. You will become a famous hero of science one day, mark my words!

MASHATH:

Albert, why was a genius like you sent to guide a simple girl like me?

ALBERT:

Well, Mashath, my friend, the truth of the matter is I was sent to be your student and learn from you.

MASHATH:

What can *I* teach *you*?

ALBERT:

Throughout my life, I was more interested in the relationships between atoms than people. But it's love that makes the universe go round. So I missed a few important lessons about how to love and care for other people.

MASHATH:

And that is what *you* are to learn from *me*?

ALBERT:

(With admiration) Yes, my friend, you are a genius of the heart. Kindness and friendship are

what really matter, and that's what I'm learning from you. (*Crossing away, talking to himself*) Be nice, it's the relationships, stupid!

MASHATH:

Albert, you have been a great friend to me.

CHLOE:

Me too. I think you are doing a great job, Albert.

ALBERT:

(*Looking around*) I hope the Great Keeper heard that. (*Bowing playfully*) Thank you, my kind friends. So, Chloe, you cannot stay here, but we are going to send you home with a special gift. (*Crossing to MASHATH*) Mashath, are you ready to help Chloe learn how to feel at home in the desert?

MASHATH:

Yes, we're going to go back in time right now and learn the desert's story....(*To ALBERT*) Do you want to come with us?

ALBERT:

Why not? I could use a refresher. Let's climb on the back of a light beam and have some fun.

(*CHLOE, MASATH, and ALBERT begin to cross slowly to an out-of-the-way place on stage left.*)

CHLOE:

How old is the desert?

MASHATH:

Seven million years, but we'll go back 5 billion years and begin the story when the sun was born, because the sun is at home in the desert more than anyone else.

CHLOE:

That's crazy! How long will it take us to go back that far?

MASHATH

Not long.

Sound cue __ plays, and the lights shift to reflect travel through space and time. DESERT PLANTS and ANIMALS enter in character. Once in place, lights brighten to reveal the desert and sound cue __ begins. ALBERT, MASATH, and CHLOE sit down and watch the as the DESERT INHABITANTS tell the desert's story with movement.⁹ Each PLANT or ANIMAL

⁹ Consider giving the characters some leeway to improvise movement in a way that is consistent with their roles. For example, some performers might stand upright but also crawl, hop, fly, and leap, using tempos appropriate to each character's nature and environment (such as air, water, or sand). The rattlesnake, for

crosses downstage when it is their turn to sing.

Song of the Desert (can be sung to music or read as a rap)¹⁰

SUN: The earth and moon go round my girth
Day and night are what I'm worth
Every cell in your body knows my ways
You wake to the tune of my rays
I'm five billion years old yet still going strong
All day long
I am sun
I am sun!

SAGUARO: The Sonoran Desert is my only home
From south to north I like to roam
I weigh two tons and grow 50 feet tall
Yet my sturdy roots don't let me fall
Droughts and floods do not bring doom
I am a mansion with many rooms
I am saguaro
I am saguaro!

GILA WOODPECKER: (*Beginning with an awk-awk-awk*)
I am the desert's native son too
And there's one thing only I can do
My neck and beak give me the power
To tear a hole in saguaro's tower
And make a safe cool nest
That many others use for rest
My cranky call is known by all
I am gila woodpecker
I am gila woodpecker!

RATTLESNAKE: (*Beginning with a hiss*)
Gila woodpecker, step aside
For you cannot match my pride
No one dreads to hear your call
But my rattle strikes fear in the heart of all
I love the heat, for my blood is cold
I'll do anything to live and grow old
I will eat my young before they can flee

example, might move slowly and with purpose both standing on two feet and moving on the floor, using the whole spine through to her crown.

¹⁰ Depending on the performers' aptitudes and preferences, the songs can be either sung or spoken/rapped. The songs are performed rapidly, so careful enunciation of consonants is important.

Stay away, don't tread on me
I am rattlesnake
I am rattlesnake!

JAVELINAS: (*Two or more begin snorting like pigs*)
Whatever you do, don't call us pigs
Because our teeth are really big
We are related to horses and rats
We only eat plants so we never grow fat
Keep up with the herd, that's how we roll
We travel together to the watering hole
If you hear us snort you may see us cavort
We are javelina
We are javelina!

DESERT INHABITANTS *together*:
We are the desert's children
So we are at home in the desert
We will serve the desert family
And guard the circle of life
Until the appointed time
When the Great Keeper says
Our work here is done
We are at home in the desert!

DESERT PLANTS and ANIMALS exit in character. Lights restore back to the look of the wormhole.

CHLOE:
I never imagined the desert was so full of life! They all seem to know each other and feel strong way down deep inside, even though they have their problems.

MASHATH:
That's why we can feel at home in the desert, too. Droughts, floods, predators, bullies, bombs: nothing stops life. The Great Keeper sees to it that the sacred circle of life is never broken.

ALBERT:
We are all loved, and we are never alone. Love is stronger than death and faster than the speed of light! (*Gesturing*) Mashath, you have become an excellent guide, I am sooooo proud of you. We must go now.

MASHATH:

Goodbye, Chloe. Remember, we are all part of the same great tribe of life. You always belong to the sacred circle of life, so you are never alone way down deep inside.

MASHATH and ALBERT begin to back offstage as they say their goodbyes. Lights shift to reflect time and space travel, and sound cue ___ plays.

ALBERT:

Farewell, my friend Chloe....Just remember, your relationships with living things are the energy *and* the matter of life....Your relationships are all that matter.

CHLOE:

(Looking around) Wait, Mashath, Albert don't go, I want to go with you! Don't leave me here!

(Lights transition back to the desert look from CHLOE's walk.) Wow, I'm right back where I entered the vortex, it's a miracle! Let's see...the sun is setting in the west, and I took the trail to the north, so Aunt Ruth's house is to the south....I hope I run into Peppy on the way home...*(calling)* Peppy!

CHLOE runs offstage confidently, as if she knows the way home. Sound cue ___ plays and lights dim.

SCENE SIX

Aunt Ruth's house, that evening

The desert set has been returned upstage, and RUTH's house reappears. RUTH is at her desk working in the living room with PEPPY at her feet, reprising scene 2. PEPPY stirs, gets up and whines. RUTH looks up from her book.

RUTH:

Peppy, is Chloe *finally* coming home? (*RUTH hides PEPPY behind her desk.*)

CHLOE:

(*Enters the house with an upset look*) Hi, Aunt Ruth.

RUTH:

Well, hello, Chloe—where have *you* been?

CHLOE:

Something terrible has happened. I didn't take the leash and Peppy got lost. She has probably been eaten by coyotes. (*Sobbing*) I killed her. If only I had taken the leash! Oh, Peppy, I'm so sorry...(*Hearing her name, PEPPY whines. CHLOE runs to her.*) Oh, Peppy, I was so worried about you, and here you are safe and sound. Oh, thank goodness!

RUTH:

I hope you learned your lesson!

CHLOE:

Weren't *you* worried about *me*?

RUTH:

No I wasn't. About 15 minutes after you left Peppy came home, so I figured if Peppy could figure out the way home you could too. (*Looking intently at CHLOE*) You went up to the vortex didn't you. I figured you'd ignore my advice about that too.

CHLOE:

I ignored you about the leash and the path to the north because I was mad, but I just stumbled into the vortex when I got lost.

RUTH:

You met her, didn't you.

CHLOE:

(*Shocked*) Yes, yes I did....When did you meet her?

RUTH:

Many years ago, not long after I moved here. I was walking the dog without a leash. He started chasing a rabbit, I got lost and ended up in the vortex, and she appeared to me.

CHLOE:

That's crazy! That's exactly what happened to me! Did you see Mashath again?

RUTH:

I wanted to, but I never did. I looked for her many times, but she was never there.

CHLOE:

Mashath must have died, but she didn't think she was dead.

RUTH:

(Playfully) I don't think she is dead either, but we're gonna die if we don't eat some dinner. How's about if you get started on your homework so we can surprise your mom. She'd never expect in a MILLION years that your homework would be done when she got home.

CHLOE:

Not in a million years...not even in a BILLION years!

CHLOE, AUNT RUTH and PEPPY begin to exit toward the kitchen. Lights dim, sound cue ___ plays as the setting changes to Chloe's bedroom. CHLOE is in bed with PEPPY at her feet. DANA, dressed in a waitress uniform, enters the room and sits by her side on the bed. Lights come up.

DANA:

Chloe honey, I'm sorry I wasn't home this afternoon, after you had such a rough time at school. No one deserves to be bullied, especially a sweetie pie like you.

CHLOE:

That's OK Mom, I forgot all about that. Aunt Ruth and I had lots of fun. *(Pause)* Mom, a kid at school said my real parents didn't want me....Is that true?

DANA:

Chloe, I never met them, but my understanding is that they loved you and wanted you, they just didn't have the money to feed you and give you a good home, and they wanted you to have that.

CHLOE:

How come they had so little money?

DANA:

Honey, the world is full of people who don't have much money. I don't know what was up with your folks....Maybe they lost everything they had in a war or an earthquake or some other disaster.

CHLOE:

I guess I'm lucky that you didn't give me away when you ran out of money...when our house was foreclosed.

DANA:

You silly, I would never do that in a billion years. When I first laid eyes on you, I realized this is why I'm here, to love this beautiful little girl and make her feel at home in this crazy world.

CHLOE:

(Smiling) How old was I?

DANA:

Three days old and as cute as a button. I just knew we were meant to be together. We must have been together in a prior life, and gotten separated somehow.

CHLOE:

(Wisely) We're all from the same family, if you go back far enough.

DANA:

That's how I've always felt too. We are all part of one big family.

CHLOE:

Mom I'm glad how things worked out. I'm glad you adopted me, and I'm glad we moved out here to live in the desert with Aunt Ruth.

DANA:

(Musing) When I lost my job, I never dreamed it would turn out like this. But I like being a waitress, seeing people smile when they eat good food and leave a tip. Every loss seems to have a gain, if you hang in there long enough. *(Hugging CHLOE)* Goodnight, sleep tight, don't let the...

CHLOE:

(Giggling) ...scorpions bite!!

DANA:

Sweet dreams, my angel. I love you.

CHLOE:

I love you too. Goodnight, Mom.

DANA exits, lights shift as CHLOE goes right to sleep with PEPPY sleeping at the foot of the bed. Sound cue ___ plays and NEURONS enter.

Dance of the Neurons:

This segment suggests Chloe's brain activity while dreaming, with NEURONS dancing around CHLOE as she dreams. ¹¹¹²

When the song ends, Sound cue __ plays, and lights dim.

¹¹ Movement choices here consist of high and low levels and mid, fast, and slow tempos.

¹² The original production had a darkened stage, and the neurons' costumes were wrapped in purple LED wire to reflect the neuron movement in the brain. This LED wire is simple to find to create the same effect. However, another option is to have the NEURONS just dressed in black and for them to "toss" ALBERT, MASHATH, and other DESERT INHABITANTS around the stage, keeping the lights dim but bright enough to see by. This staging would also suggest that CHLOE is dreaming.

SCENE SEVEN

The school playground, recess, the next day

Lights come up on a reprisal of the opening of scene 2. CHLOE, BETH, the PLAYGROUND GIRLS, and two PLAYGROUND BOYS are on the playground gathered around ALEX, who is showing them something on the computer tablet. JIMMY, PAUL, and JOEY come on stage, laughing and jostling each other. JIMMY boldly calls out to CHLOE.

JIMMY:

Hey, Chloe!

CHLOE:

(Turning toward him politely, with a smile) Yes, Jimmy?

JIMMY:

C'mere for a second....I want to tell you something.

CHLOE:

(Turning away from him) No thanks, Jimmy.

JIMMY:

You are so ugly, Chloe, it's illegal. You have to leave Arizona right this instant. *(PAUL and the PLAYGROUND BOYS laugh, PLAYGROUND GIRLS look indignant.)*

ALEX:

(Stands hesitantly to defend CHLOE) Jimmy, leave Chloe alone, she's a nice girl. I want her to stay here.

JIMMY:

A retard wants you here, Chloe. That doesn't even count.

JOEY:

Hey, Jimmy, c'mon. Alex is a good guy, don't mess with him. Let's go shoot some hoops and have some fun.

CHLOE:

(Walks over and faces him, speaking calmly) Jimmy, I belong here as much as anyone else. I feel at home here in the desert. And until a saguaro or a gila woodpecker throws me out, I'm staying put.

JIMMY:

(Surprised, confused) Huh? Uhhhh...hmmmm...

BETH:

(Walks over, stands next to CHLOE) Jimmy, Alex is way smarter than you are. He showed us how to play the wormhole game. We want Chloe here too. Buzz off and grow up. We're all different in some way. *You* sure are different. *(PLAYGROUND GIRLS giggle, and BETH crosses back to them)*

PAUL:

(Sizing up the situation quickly) Hey c'mon guys, let's go shoot some hoops. Only sissies pick on girls anyway! *(PAUL leads JOEY and the PLAYGROUND BOYS off stage, triumphant as the new leader of the pack; JIMMY is at the back of the group. ALEX begins to walk off in a different direction.)*

CHLOE:

Alex, wait a minute.... Thank you....I think you're nice too....You are so brilliant, you're like our own Albert Einstein. Jimmy is just jealous of you. *(ALEX stops, turns partly toward her, and smiles awkwardly without looking at her, then runs off stage.)*

BETH:

(BETH crosses to CHLOE) Chloe, you were something else today. You were calm but tough as nails!

CHLOE:

You were so brave, sticking up for Alex and me.

BETH:

I was brave because of you! What happened? why were you so confident today?

CHLOE:

I had some CRAZY dreams last night...but I guess the difference is that yesterday after school, I learned how to feel at home in the desert.

BETH:

What does *that* mean?

CHLOE:

Even though we have problems, we can still feel connected and strong way down deep inside, and that helps us find our way no matter what. That's how things are in the desert.

BETH:

We want to feel at home in the desert too....C'mon, teach us how! *(PLAYGROUND GIRLS cross to BETH and CHLOE, nodding their heads, giggling excitedly.)*

CHLOE:

Well the first thing is, I started to listen to dead people.

BETH and the PLAYGROUND GIRLS:
(*Shrieking*) Vampires? Zombies?

CHLOE:
No, I don't mean vampires or zombies, I mean *real* dead people.

BETH and the PLAYGROUND GIRLS:
Like who?

CHLOE:
Albert Einstein.

BETH and the PLAYGROUND GIRLS:
(*Shrieking*) Albert Einstein?!

CHLOE:
Yep, I got lost in the desert above my aunt's house, and stumbled into a vortex....(*picking up or pointing to a rock to suggest she will tell them about relativity. The PLAYGROUND GIRLS and BETH circle around CHLOE*)

Wide-eyed, Chloe talks to them as if telling a campfire ghost story, and the girls are enthralled. Lights shift, sound cue ___ begins. MASHATH, ALBERT, and DESERT INHABITANTS, DANA, AUNT RUTH, PLAYGROUND BOYS, JIMMY, and JOEY walk onstage and form a large circle, walking around the girls as they sing or say:¹³

We are the desert's children
So we are at home in the desert
We will serve the desert family
And guard the circle of life
Until the appointed time
When the Great Keeper says
Our work here is done
We are at home in the desert!
We are at home in the desert!

Lights dim and Sound cue ___ plays as everyone gathers in a line for their bows.

THE END

¹³ This song begins after 8 measures of music, on the off-beat. Again, it can be sung or spoken/rapped depending on the abilities and preferences of the cast.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES
by Aubrey Grace Watkins, Director

The Concept for the Original Production

To develop the concept for this play, the director read *The Richest of Fare: Seeking Spiritual Security in the Sonoran Desert* by the playwright, Phyllis Strupp. Then she went on to research the Hohokam people, their history, interests, and especially their art. The director also researched native desert plants and animals, especially those featured in the script. However, as an Arizona native, she didn't have much trouble understanding and familiarizing herself with the material and references.

The original team consisted of a director, stage manager, choreographer, music director/vocal coach, set designer, set builder, lighting designer, mask designer and builder, and a sound designer. The director acted as costume designer as well as props designer, since costumes consist primarily of masks and street clothes, and few props are required. (A props list and costume notes appear at the end of this script.)

This script is designed to make the production simple, using a small team of nonprofessionals in theatre—or a single director. The soundtrack, which is available on request from the Foothills Community Foundation, includes the original music written for the play. Designs and instructions from the mask designer are provided here. The original set can be replicated or minimized for a simpler production. Below, the director provides thoughts on auditions, casting, blocking (the placement and movement of characters in each scene), as well as movement notes from the choreographer.

It may be a good idea to enlist the help of a music director, choir teacher, or vocal coach to train young performers to project their voices without yelling. However, if no music director is available, the musical parts of the script can be spoken instead of sung.

Auditions

Auditions for the original production were held by appointment about two weeks before rehearsals started. Actors were assigned to groups of four and given a 20-minute audition slot. Before the audition, the director asked them to give their names and ages and describe any previous acting experience. Then pairs of actors were assigned a side (one page from a scene in the play) to read. Parts were allocated by the director. The pairs were given a few minutes to practice and then they were asked to read the side in front of the director, choreographer, and playwright.

Callbacks lasting two hours were held about two days after the first auditions. The actors were divided up into two groups—those who were asked to read for a part and those who were asked to demonstrate their movement skills. During the first hour of callbacks, the readers were placed in a group in a room with the director and playwright to read another

side, and movement actors were put in with the choreographer. In the second hour, the readers worked with the choreographer.

During callbacks, the readers were paired up with selected partners and were asked to read parts for which the director thought they were well suited. Some were asked to read the same side with different partners. For example, a girl who might make a good Chloe was asked to read side number 4 (found below) with different candidates for the role of Aunt Ruth until the director felt comfortable with the combination of actors.

Dancers and movers were asked to do a few warm-up movements with the choreographer to determine their experience and comfort level. Then they were asked to improvise the movements of different animals, such as a snake or a gila woodpecker. It was important that the actors felt free and uninhibited in their movement and were able to have fun and show off the particular traits of their characters.

Sides used in auditions

1. Alex and Beth, page 8 of this script: one young male, one young female
2. Albert and Chloe, page 21 of this script: one adult male, one young female
3. Jimmy and Chloe, pages 10–11 of this script: one young male, one young female
4. Ruth and Chloe, page 12-13 of this script: one adult female, one young female
5. Mashath and Chloe, page 15-16 of this script: two young females

Casting

Before the auditions, the director, choreographer, and music director (if any) should agree on the type of talent wanted for certain roles. For the original production, it was decided that the strongest dancers would be cast as neurons and the desert ensemble, and the strongest actors would be cast in the large speaking roles (such as Chloe and Mashath).

The easiest approach is to cast the most prominent speaking roles first, starting with Chloe, Mashath, and Ruth, choosing good, strong speakers for these parts. After casting the named characters, cast the speaking and nonspeaking desert parts, keeping in mind that every single part is important.

Desert plants and animals should be strong movers, either kids or adults, who are free in their movement and have fun improvising dance. Children who are not comfortable moving but still want to participate in the production can be cast as playground girls or boys.

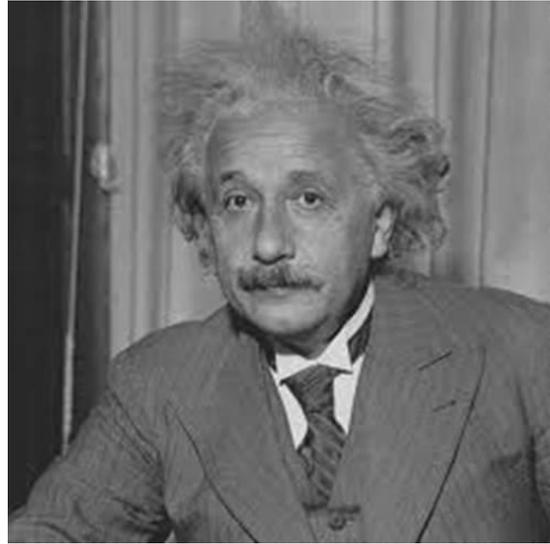
Characters

Albert Einstein

Albert is the only character in the play who is based on a real person. Here are some quotes from Albert Einstein to inspire the actor in the role:

"If I were to start taking care of my grooming, I would no longer be my own self... so the hell with it.... I will continue to be unconcerned about it, which surely has the advantage that I'm left in peace by many a fop who would otherwise come to see me."

"If most of us are ashamed of shabby clothes and shoddy furniture, let us be more ashamed of shabby ideas and shoddy philosophies."



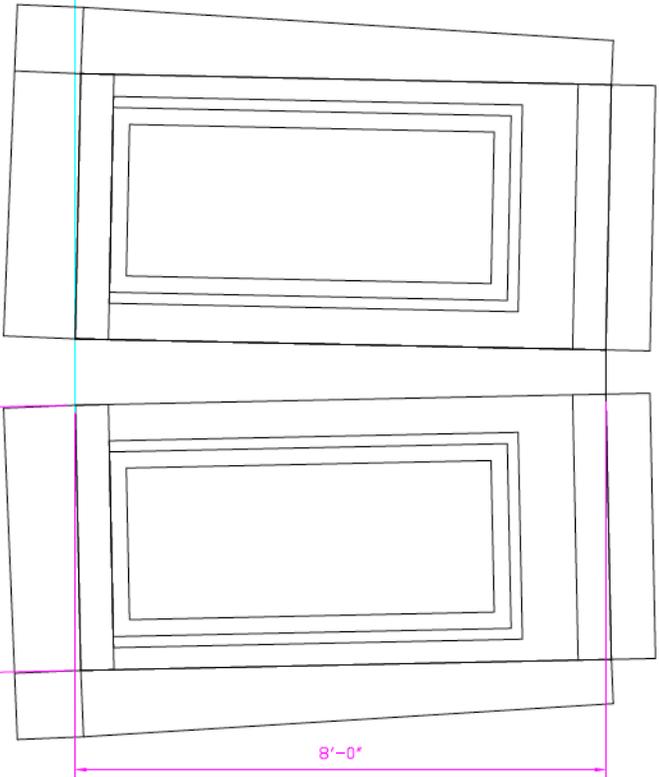
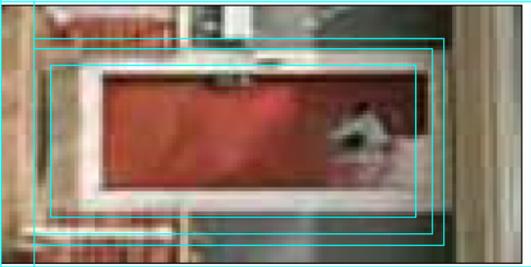
Set Design and Construction

The director wanted to keep the feeling of the show very natural and realistic. Although Chloe enters fantasy worlds, the mood remains grounded in a version of reality in which our ancestors and great teachers still live, and our natural surroundings (rocks, plants, and animals) can engage us as any human can. Thus, in the fantasy scenes, the set remains essentially the same but is enhanced with light and sound effects.

The surrounding desert set was built to look realistic. Constructing it in separate pieces allowed it to be easily moved and arranged in a confined space. Pieces of the desert were extended out into the audience space to bring the audience closer to the action. More details about the original set are given below.

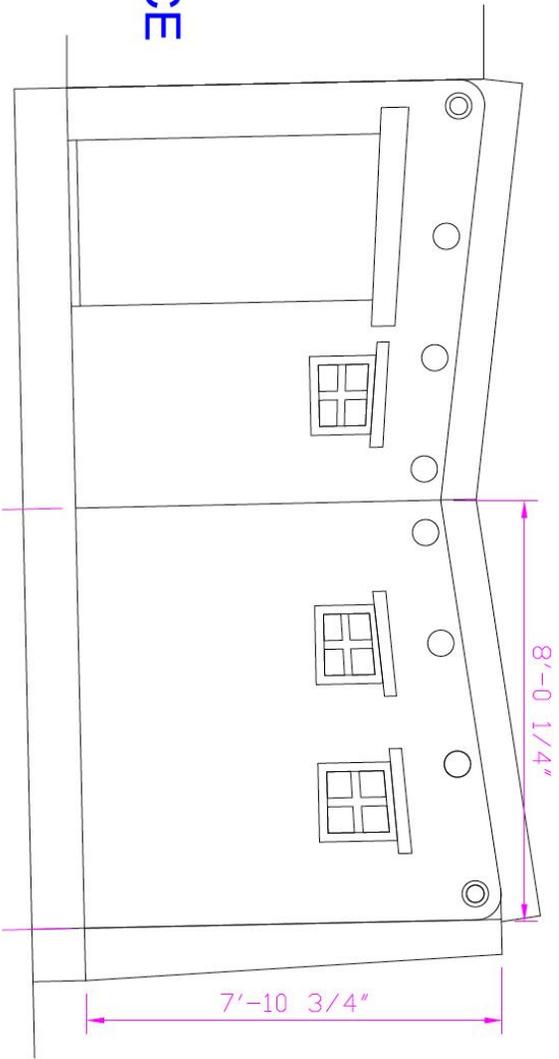
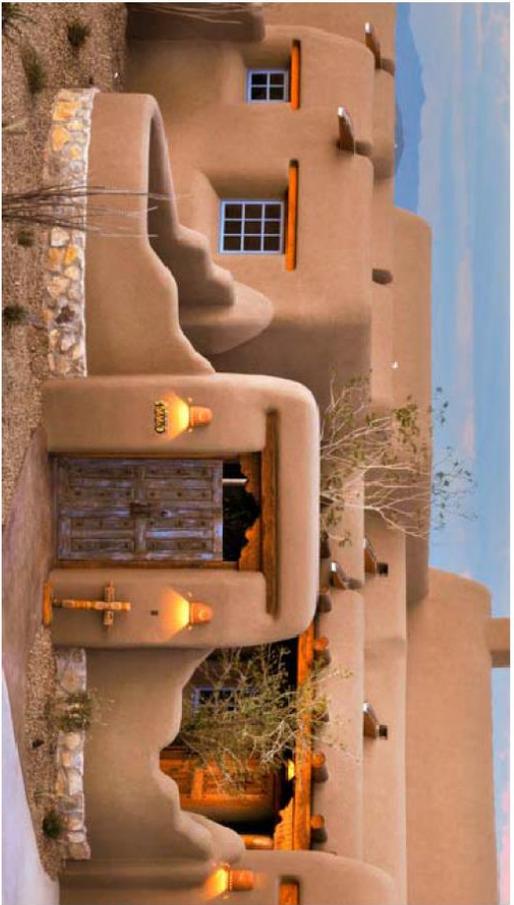
The playground and desert scenes were created with natural, amber light. For the vortex scene, bright, sunset lighting was used to show that the characters are still in the Arizona desert but have entered a different plane. Desert sunsets can be truly magical at just the right time, and so their colors help evoke the power of the vortex. For the wormhole scene, black, white, and red hues were chosen to reflect the colors used in Hohokam art and evoke the sense of a rich and remote past. The final scene again used sunset colors to reflect Chloe's journey.

Below are scaled layouts of the original set pieces with dimensions and color ideas:



DOOR SET PIECE

SCALE: 1/2"=1'-0"



AUNTS HOUSE PIECE
SCALE: 1/2"=1'-0"

Costumes and Masks

The costumes were inspired by Julie Taymor's masks from a stage production of *The Lion King*. The director and mask designer wanted the actors' faces to be visible and to make it easy for them to project their voices. Taymor's masks, which are placed on top of the actors' heads, provided a solution to this problem and a creative way to vary the heights of the characters. For the original production, masks were created by students in an after-school enrichment workshop. Detailed instructions on mask construction appear in section 11 of the teacher's guide.

To highlight the masks for the desert plants and animals and to ensure the actors' comfort, the costumes were kept very simple. Clean lines were important.

Desert inhabitants were dressed in black, long-sleeved leotards, stretchy black pants, and black jazz shoes.

Playground Girls and Boys wore regular school clothes, such as jeans or long pants. Some wore scarves or jackets to reflect February in Arizona. Different characters should wear different colors.

Jimmy wore red so that he stood out.

Chloe wore a delicate pink to blend well with the desert and sunset colors of her surroundings in other scenes.

Aunt Ruth wore comfortable and casual clothes appropriate for home.

Dana was dressed in a coat and jeans for scene 1. For the transition to scene 7, she removed her jacket and put on a simple apron around her waist to represent a waitress uniform.

Albert was dressed in a mismatched suit, a Hawaiian shirt, and comfortable slippers with socks. Because Einstein was known for his wild hair, the actor was asked to grow his hair out and wear it "big."

Mashath wore black stretchy pants like the desert actors around her and a colorful afghan with yellows, blues, and greens. She wore her hair in a loose side braid.

The photographs below were shared with the production team early in the process to help illustrate the director's concept.

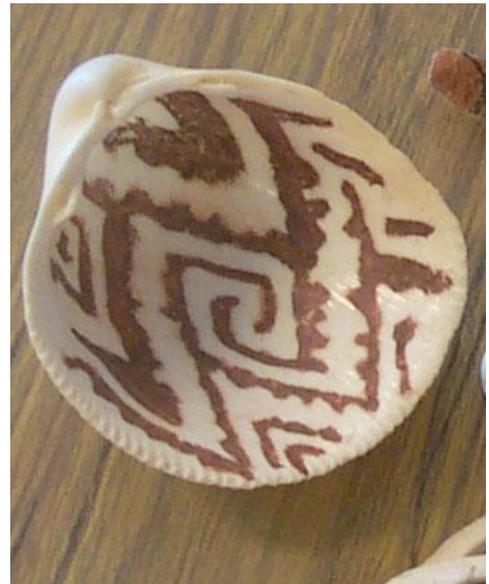
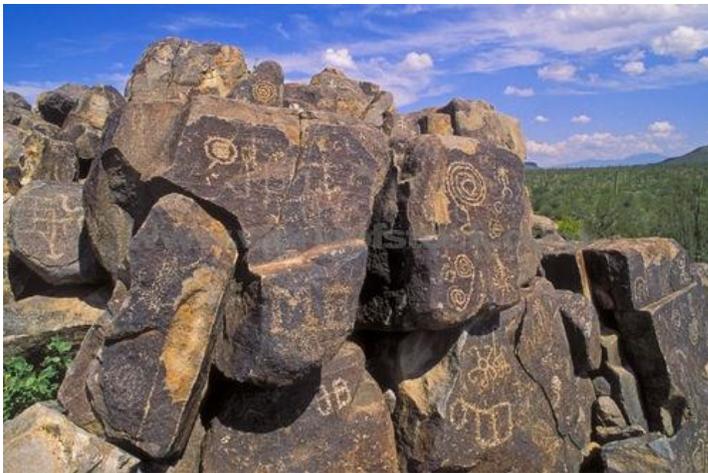
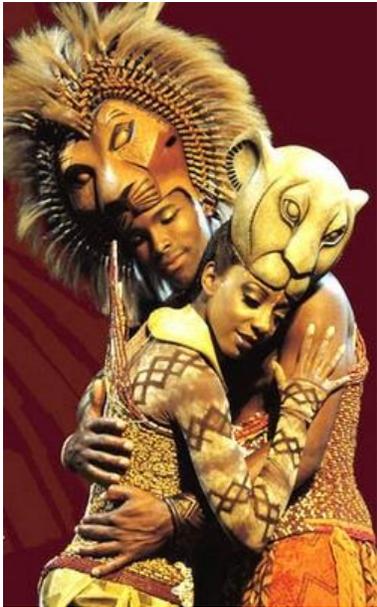
Concept photos

Top left: Masks from stage production of *The Lion King*

Top right: Desert sunset colors

Bottom left: Hohokam petroglyphs

Bottom right: Hohokam shell etching



Props List

These are the props used in the original production. They can be modified as necessary.

Props List	Scene Number
iPad or tablet in a case	2
Dog leash	3
Books for Ruth's desk	3 & 6
Office chairs (2)	3 & 6
Medium sized Native American blanket (used in lieu of a bed for Chloe's room)	6
Throw pillows for Chloe's room	6
Chloe's backpack	1 & 3
Dana's purse	1
Cantaloupe-sized rock held by Albert	5
Bench for the playground	2 & 7
Basketball for Jimmy	2 & 7

11. Instructions for a Mask-Making Workshop

Making masks for a production of *At Home in the Desert* can be a valuable group activity, developing students' creativity and dexterity while also inviting them to think about the nature of the desert plants and animals they are representing and the practical challenges of producing wearable, expressive costumes for a play.

For the original production, the masks were created in an after-school enrichment program, which consisted of ten 90-minute sessions. Six elementary-school students, working with the help of three high-school student volunteers, made 16 masks. Volunteers were acknowledged with a certificate of participation. Each participant in the workshop got a mask to take home.

The masks are made of papier-mâché and mounted on adjustable baseball caps.

Material and Equipment List

General

Name tags
Hand soap
Hand towel(s)
Drop cloths or old sheets or tablecloths to cover work surfaces

Designing the Masks

Reference images for animals and plants
Plain white copy paper
Pencils

Making the Masks

One baseball hat for each mask, with adjustable headband (readily available in thrift stores)
Large and small paper plates
Heavy stapler
Big scissors
Big hot-glue gun, glue sticks, and extension cord
Masking tape (not duct tape)
Newspaper
White flour and water for making paste
Large bucket for mixing paste
Small containers for working with paste (take-out food containers are suitable)

Making the Armature and Tie for Securing the Masks

Needle-nose pliers
Black twill fabric
Needle and thread, or sewing machine
Hole punch or awl
Plastic needle and heavy string

Painting and Finishing the Mask

1- to 2-inch brush for each student
Clean tin cans for water to keep brushes in, one can per two students (always keep brush in water until cleaned with soap and water)
Kilz primer sealer
Brushes in various sizes
Flat latex house paint: dark warm beige for javelina; buff off-white for quail; light ochre for sun, snake, and dog; sage green for saguaro; ivory white for wood pecker and rabbit.
Paint stores may be willing to provide free or inexpensive samples or unwanted colors.
Paper plates for paint mixing
Can of black spray paint
Chalk
Self-adhesive black felt for lining hat brims (available at craft stores)
Polyfill stuffing (for padding hats if needed)

Preparing the Work Area and Clothing

Protect work surfaces by covering with cloth or newspaper.
Students should wear overalls or long work shirts to protect their clothing. They should also tie back long hair and remove rings and other jewelry.
Provide soap and a towel for hand washing. If the work area has no sink, provide a bucket of water.

Workshop Schedule

Day 1: Introductions, mask design, building armature

Introduce students and instructors; make and wear name tags. Show the students photographs or sketches of the plants and animals for which they will make the masks. Let the students choose which characters they will start with. Have them make sketches of the main shapes of the mask on white copy paper.

Build an armature on a baseball hat by cutting the bottom part of large paper plate flat. Staple the paper plate to the hat. Once the main form is attached, the features are built by constructing and attaching the facial or structural parts with smaller paper plates. Connect

pieces with the stapler and follow up with the hot-glue gun. The hot glue also helps to hold the armature onto the hat.

Day 2: Making papier-mâché and beginning the mask construction

Make paste by mixing flour and water in a bucket.

Tear the newspaper into strips of various sizes, beginning with the longer ones. To form the masks, dip strips of newspaper into the paste and wipe off excess paste by hand. Beginning with longer strips, place newspaper over the armature, top to bottom and side to side. Allow the papier-mâché to dry.

Day 3: Mask construction

Rip off loose flaps of paper and smooth any rough surfaces. Strengthen weak areas. Fine-tune the features. To build up parts of the mask, crumple a bit of dry newspaper and lightly patch it with smaller strips of papier-mâché. Reinforce edges and attachment points for features such as ears, beaks, and wings. Let the masks dry.

Day 4: Completing the mask

Remove the armature from the hat. To minimize weight, pull out, paper plates and tape, and trim any bulky or thick areas. Needle-nose pliers can be useful for this task. Use more papier-mâché to reinforce any weak areas, especially where the mask is attached to the hat and for projections like ears, wings, or beaks. Let the masks dry.

Day 5: Fitting and adjusting masks

Try on the masks and adjust for height and balance. A saw works well for removing excess papier-mâché. A mask that is too tight can be widened by cutting the shell and adding to it; one that is too big can be adjusted with headband of the hat. Use more papier-mâché to reinforce the bottom of the shell, which will be pierced with holes and tied to the hat. Let the masks dry.

Day 6: Attaching chin ties and fitting headdress to hat

Tear a strip of black twill fabric about 2 inches wide. Sew the center of the strip over the crown of the hat securely from one side to the other using a large, heavy metal needle and strong thread. The strip hangs down outside the hat on either side. Sew it as close to the bottom of the hat as possible. The strip acts as a chin tie that helps hold the mask in place.

Sew the papier-mâché to the hat by punching holes through the hat and the base of the papier-mâché with an awl, ice pick, or small Phillips screwdriver and using the plastic needle and doubled string to stitch them together.

Day 7: Preparing the masks for painting

To protect the hat ties, roll them up and secure them in a small plastic bag with a twist tie. Prime and seal the papier-mâché with Kilz sealer on both front and back. While it is drying,

discuss craft vocabulary and suitable colors for the masks.

Day 8: Painting the masks

For masks that have a back side, like the dog, rabbit, javelina, and saguaro, spray the back with black spray paint. While these are drying, set up the painting area, grouping similar-colored masks together. Pair up students to begin painting the masks. Use a dark, warm beige for the javelina; a creamy buff for the quail; light ochre for the sun, dog, and rattlesnake; sage green for the two saguaro; ivory white for the rabbit and woodpecker. Use tints and shades to add accents; add white to the color to accentuate raised areas, and darken recessed areas by adding brown or purple. For stage costumes, high contrast is important.

Day 9: Adding details

Using chalk, draw in the main shapes of features like noses, snouts, insides of ears, wings, and beaks. Using a smaller brush, fill in these shapes with a stronger color. Next paint the eyes: paint a layer of white first, let it dry, and then paint a round shape over the white for the iris. When the iris is dry, add a layer of black for the pupil, then use a smaller brush to paint eyelids, and lastly add a dot of red for the tear duct, which will make the eye pop.

Day 10: Finishing

Add details of feathers, scales, and cactus ribs and needles: use lighter and darker shades to emphasize highlights and shadows. Use dry-brush techniques. Lastly, adjust the masks for comfort: cut strips of the self-adhesive felt to line the inside brim of the hat. Polyfill stuffing can also be used as padding.

Vocabulary List

Saguaro

Gila woodpecker

Diamondback rattlesnake

Javelina

Quail

Mask

Headdress

Teamwork

Palette

Papier-mâché

Armature

Primer sealer

Drop cloth

Latex house paint

Needle

Thread

Dry brush

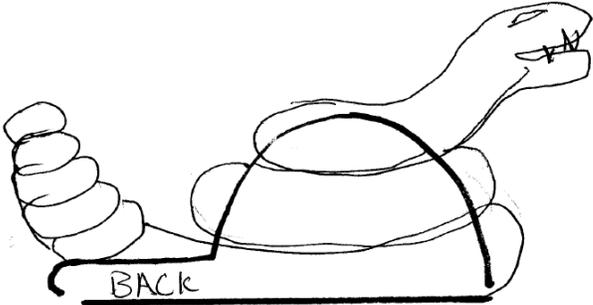
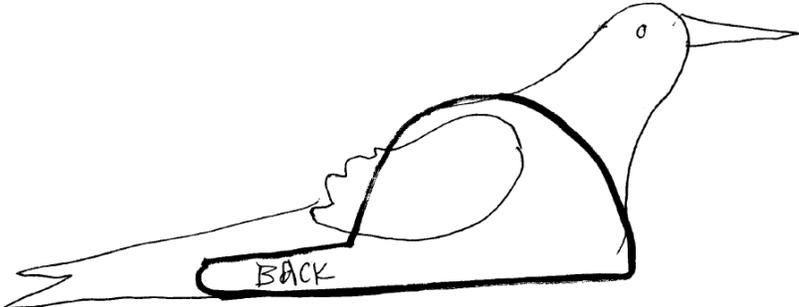
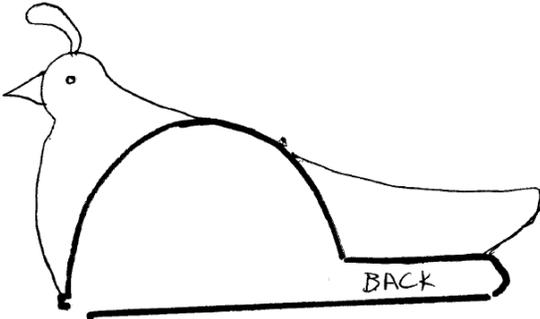
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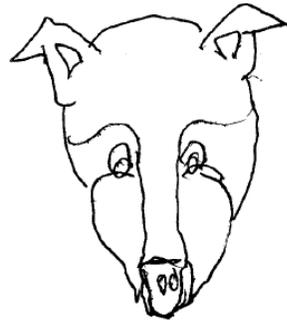
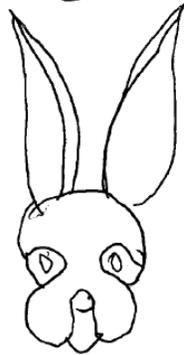
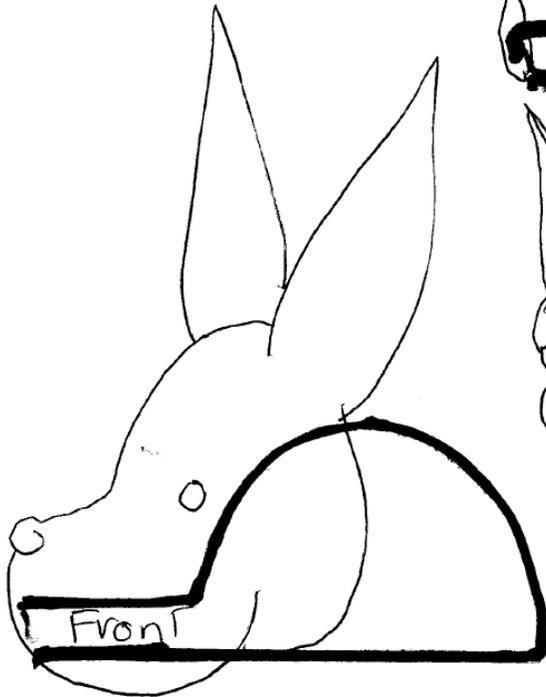
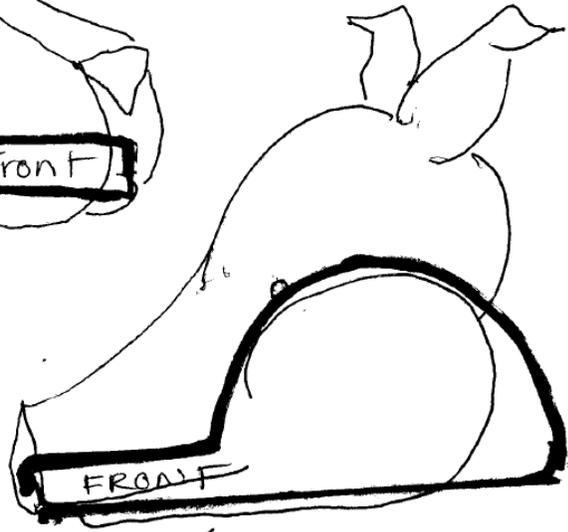
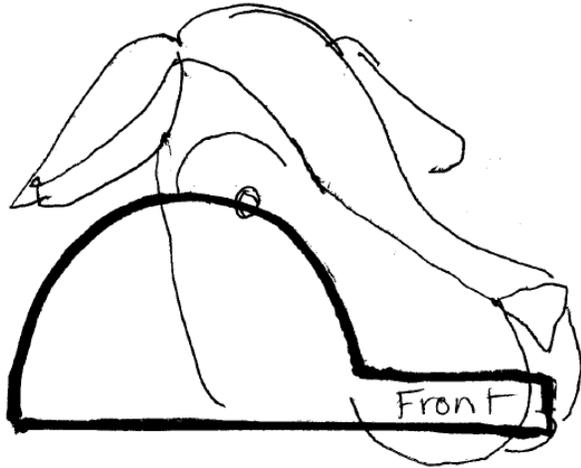
Tint

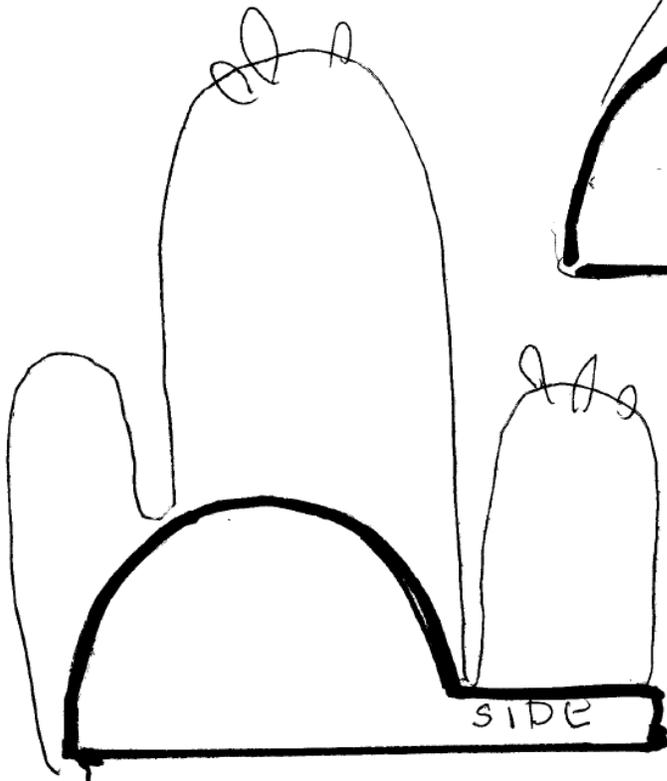
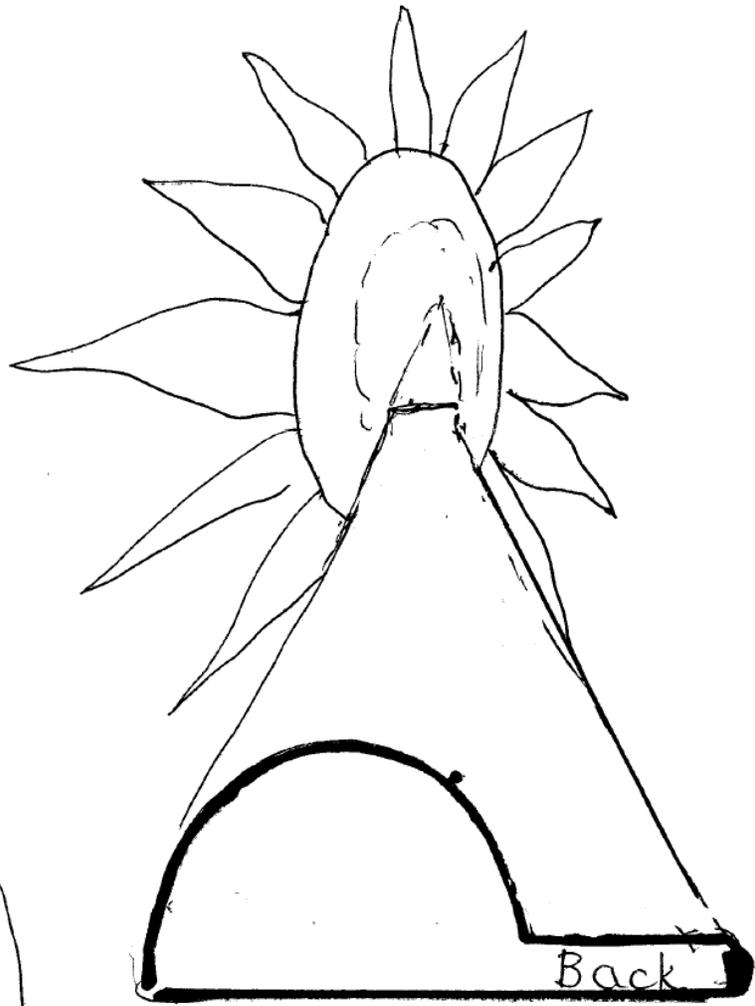
Shade

Dramatic

Original Sketches of the Masks







12. Resources

1. The Sonoran Desert

A Desert Scrapbook: Dawn to Dusk in the Sonoran Desert, by Virginia Wright-Frierson

The author describes many of the plants and animals native to the Sonoran Desert.

This book includes sketches of the animals as well as the surrounding landscapes.

Creatures of the Desert World, by Barbara Gibson and Jennifer C. Urquhart

An interactive book for younger readers that introduces them to some of the wildlife and unique denizens of the Sonoran Desert.

One Day in the Desert, by Jean Craighead George

George addresses how animal and human inhabitants of the Sonoran Desert adapt to the desert's heat, including the mountain lion, roadrunner, coyote, and tortoise, and the Papago Native American tribe.

A Living Desert, by Guy Spencer

Another introduction to the plants and animals of the Sonoran Desert.

Cactus Hotel, by Brenda Z. Guiberson

This book for younger readers addresses the role the giant saguaro cactus plays as a home for other desert dwellers.

Desert Giant: The world of the Saguaro Cactus, by Barbara Bash

This book describes the life cycle of the saguaro cactus and its role in the ecosystem of the desert.

The Seed and the Giant Saguaro, by Jennifer Ward

This book for younger readers introduces a variety of desert animals in a fun, alliterative rhyme. Perfect for reading aloud.

101 Questions about Desert Life, by Alice Jablonsky

This question-and-answer book looks at some of the plants and animals that make their homes in the desert.

2. Bullying

Oliver Button Is a Sissy, by Tomie DePaola

A little boy must come to terms with being teased and ostracized because he would rather read, paint, and dance than participate in sports. Offers a good balance between simple text and expressive illustrations for younger readers.

Chrysanthemum, by Kevin Henkes

This picture book is perfect for children just beginning school who may be encountering bullying for the first time.

Super Emma, by Sally Warner

Emma surprises everyone—even herself—when she stands up to the class bully, Jared.

Jake Drake, Bully Buster, by Andrew Clements

Fourth-grader Jake is a bully magnet. He knows a lot about bullies, including what to do and what not to do. The book tells how Jake manages to tame a bully when he is paired with one for a social studies project.

The Dodgeball Chronicles, by Frank Cammuso

Artie just wants to ease into middle school without drawing too much attention. He's got new friends, and the science teacher is pretty cool. But big, bad Joe and the Horde are a bunch of brawny bullies who rule the school, and Artie gets pulled into a high-stakes dodgeball game to determine his future at the school.

Letters to a Bullied Girl: Messages of Healing and Hope, by Olivia Gardner, Emily Buder, and Sarah Buder

Olivia Gardner was subjected to merciless bullying after suffering an epileptic seizure at her Northern California middle school. The situation escalated with the creation of an "Olivia's haters" page on a popular teen networking site. Sisters Emily and Sarah Buder organized their friends to write encouraging letters to Olivia to help combat the effects of cyberbullying.

How to Handle Bullies, Teasers, and Other Meanies: A Book That Takes the Nuisance out of Name-Calling by Kate Cohen-Posey and Betsy A. Lampe

This how-to guide offers kids some useful strategies for responding to bullying.

3. Autism

A Kid's Guide to Autism, by Cameron Davis

Cameron Davis writes about his experiences with his autistic younger brother.

The Asperkid's (Secret) Book of Social Rules: The Handbook of Not-So-Obvious Social

Guidelines for Tweens and Teens with Asperger Syndrome, by Jennifer Cook O'Toole
Writing for kids between the ages of 10 and 17, O'Toole draws heavily from her own experience to write a book "for Aspies by an Aspie."

The Survival Guide for Kids with Autism Spectrum Disorders (and Their Parents), by Elizabeth Verdick

Despite its title, this book is not just a survival guide for those with Asperger's syndrome or other autism spectrum disorders. It's a powerful resource for the entire team of helpers, including parents, teachers, and friends.

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