

competes aggressively with other plants for water, and usually wins, accounting for its prevalence in many arid locations of the southwest.

**Mesquite Pod:** Honey mesquite pods were once a primary food of the residents of the Southwest North American deserts. Pods are quite sweet, easy to collect and store and, unlike most beans, are edible without cooking. Mesquite pods are still used as a food and beverage in Mexico and could prove useful for production of flour, wine, and tofu products. It could be that, one day, the mesquite pod will become as important as corn, rice, or wheat to the world food system.

**Mesquite Tree:** Mesquite is the most common shrub/small tree of the Desert Southwest. Like many members of the Legume Family, mesquite restores nitrogen to the soil. There are 3 common species of mesquite: **Honey Mesquite, Screwbean, and Velvet Mesquite.** All 3 are deciduous and have characteristic bean pods that have long been used by humans, wildlife and livestock as a food source. It is estimated that over 75% of a Coyote's diet in late summer is mesquite beans.

**Rocky Gorge:** A narrow passage through land. A narrow steep-walled canyon or part of a canyon.

**Canyon:** A deep narrow valley with steep sides and often with a stream flowing through it.

**Foothills:** A hilly region at the base of a mountain range.

**Washes:** The dry beds of streams -- called also dry washes.

**Flatlands:** A region in which the land is predominantly flat, usually used in plural.

**Fan Palm:** There are 2,500 species of palms worldwide, with 11 native to North America. The largest of these, and the only palm tree native to western North America, is the California Fan Palm. It is also known as the Desert Palm and the California Washingtonia.

**Ironwood Tree:** Ironwood is one of the largest and longest-lived Sonoran Desert plants, reaching 45 feet in height and persisting as long as 1,500 years. It is a single or multi-trunked evergreen tree, and displays lavender to pink flowers in May. By early summer, the pods mature. Each 2-inch pod contains one to four shiny brown seeds that are relished by many Sonoran animals, from small mammals and birds

to humans. Its iron-like wood is renowned as one of the world's densest woods.

**Cottonwood Tree:** The Rio Grande Cottonwood, a welcome sight to pioneer desert caravans because it often signalled water, typically reaches 50 to 60 feet in height, with a trunk of three feet in diameter. It was often called "The Water Tree". Some of the grand old cottonwoods in the Rio Grande Valley have reached 90 feet in height, with trunks five feet across. The wood is moderately light and soft.

**READER NOTES:**

**CAST:  
7 READING PARTS**

1 NARRATOR  
6 SOLO READERS

**NARRATOR:** Once upon a time there was a girl who lived with her mother. They lived high in the mountains, overlooking a Rain Shadow Desert below.

**CHILD 1:** They were very poor.

**NARRATOR:** The girl and her mother made their home in a little shack nestled among the rocks, cactus, and creosote bushes.

**CHILD 2:** One day they woke to find they had nothing to eat.

**CHILD 3:** So the girl left the shack and went searching for some mesquite pods.

**CHILD 4:** She found a tall mesquite tree and began to pick green pods from its branches.

**NARRATOR:** All of a sudden the girl noticed something out of the corner of her eye. When she turned, she saw a little old lady coming toward her.

**CHILD 5:** The little old lady had a wrinkled face.

**CHILD 6:** She walked with a crooked walking stick.

- CHILD 1:** She wore a long black cape.
- NARRATOR:** The little old lady came closer and closer until she stopped just beside the mesquite tree. Then the little old lady said,
- 3/OLD LADY:** "Tell me, my dear, what is a girl like you doing out here in the wilderness all by herself?"
- 1/GIRL:** "I-I-I'm picking mesquite pods so my mother and I will not starve. We are poor and have nothing left to eat.
- NARRATOR:** Then the little old lady did something unexpected. She reached inside her long black cape and pulled out a cooking pot. Now, it wasn't a new cooking pot. No, it was old and black, and had a crooked handle. The little old lady said,
- 3/OLD LADY:** "Then I have a gift for you. This is a magical cooking pot. This pot will cook sweet mesquite porridge whenever you want. Just say these magic words:
- Cook your porridge, little pot.  
Cook your porridge sweet and hot!"
- CHILD 2:** Well, it was true! At the sound of the magic words, the pot began to hiss.
- CHILD 4:** Then the pot began to whistle.
- NARRATOR:** And finally, the pot began to bubble!

- ALL:** BUBBLE-UP, BUBBLE-UP, BUBBLE-UP UP UP,  
BUBBLE-UP, BUBBLE-UP, BUBBLE-UP UP UP!
- NARRATOR:** The pot bubbled and bubbled and filled itself to the top with sweet mesquite porridge.
- CHILD 5:** But the old lady wasn't finished, and she spoke again.
- 3/OLD LADY:** "There is something else to remember, so listen carefully my dear. This pot will not stop cooking porridge until you say some more magic words. They are:  
  
Stop little pot, your cooking is done.  
There's quite enough porridge for everyone!"
- CHILD 6:** And it was true. At the sound of those magic words, the pot stopped cooking porridge.
- CHILD 2:** The girl was very happy. She thanked the old lady, took the pot, and ran all the way home.
- NARRATOR:** Well, as you can imagine, from that day forward, neither the girl nor her mother were ever hungry again. Anytime they wanted to eat, they just said the magic words and filled themselves with sweet mesquite porridge.
- CHILD 3:** But that's not the end of the story!
- CHILD 4:** One day the girl went off to visit a friend who lived on the other side of the mountain ridge.

**CHILD 5:** She said goodbye to her mother, and away she went!

**1/GIRL:** "Goodbye Mom!"

**CHILD 6:** Mother was left all alone and, after a little while, she got hungry. She said to herself,

**2/MOTHER:** "I'm hungry. I think I will cook up some nice sweet mesquite porridge. Now where in the world did I put that pot?"

**CHILD 3:** The mother found the pot and placed it on the kitchen table. Then she got set to say the magic words. She cleared her throat.

**2/MOTHER:** "Cook your porridge little pot.  
Cook you porridge sweet and hot."

**CHILD 4:** At the sound of the magic words, the pot began to hiss.

**CHILD 5:** Then the pot began to whistle.

**NARRATOR:** And finally, the pot began to bubble!

**ALL:** BUBBLE-UP, BUBBLE-UP, BUBBLE-UP UP UP,  
BUBBLE-UP, BUBBLE-UP, BUBBLE-UP UP UP!

**NARRATOR:** The pot bubbled and bubbled and filled itself to the top with sweet mesquite porridge.

**CHILD 6:** Well, the mother ate

**CHILD 1:** and ate

**CHILD 3:** and ate

**CHILD 4:** until she could eat no more!

**NARRATOR:** But the poor mother had forgotten to memorize the magic words to make the pot stop bubbling. Finally she cried out,

**2/MOTHER:** "You can stop now pot -- I'm full!"

**NARRATOR:** But the pot kept bubbling.

**ALL:** BUBBLE-UP, BUBBLE-UP, BUBBLE-UP UP UP,  
BUBBLE-UP, BUBBLE-UP, BUBBLE-UP UP UP!

**CHILD 5:** The mother didn't know what to do. She ran around the table. She thought,

**2/MOTHER:** "Now, let me see! The magic words were like a poem or a rhyme. Maybe they were:

Stop cooking little pot,  
Or all your porridge is going to rot!"

**CHILD 6:** But that didn't work and the pot kept bubbling.

**ALL:** BUBBLE-UP, BUBBLE-UP, BUBBLE-UP UP UP,  
BUBBLE-UP, BUBBLE-UP, BUBBLE-UP UP UP!

**NARRATOR:** The mother could do nothing as the porridge bubbled over the top of the pot and oozed down the sides of the pot. The mother could do nothing as the porridge oozed across the table and down the leg of the table. The