

**Arizona: Way Out West and Wacky****Conrad J. Storad****Lynda Exley****Michael Hagelberg, Illustrator**

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It's a fact. Two of Arizona's creepiest creatures, the Gila monster and the tarantula, are shy: the largest lizard in the state is venomous but spends most of its life burrowing underground during the day and coming out at night to eat; the gentle tarantula would rather hide in sandy soil and only releases tiny poisonous hairs when it is threatened.

In *Arizona: Way Out West & Wacky*, award-winning educators Conrad J. Storad and Lynda Exley, together with illustrator and designer Michael Hagelberg, use stories, crossword puzzles, word-games, and craft exercises to teach history. They also tell ghost stories and tales of Western moviemakers, and give instructions for making a cornhusk doll. And the book includes recipes for local food: biscuits, cobbler, and cornbread baked in a Dutch oven, as well as enchiladas, salsa, and rice pudding. Especially intriguing to children are lessons the book offers about Arizona's nightmare creatures, plus its roadrunners, snakes, jackrabbits, ants, and bees.

Johnny Ringo, J. R. for short, is a Ringtail Cat. He is honored as Arizona's official state mammal, and he and his sister Jayne guide the reader through this adventurous history book often using humor as a teaching tool. "Eye on the Capital" is about a delegate who loses his glass eye. Being too vain to appear before the legislature, he lost his vote for the town of Prescott and "Phoenix captured the capital by one vote!"

Using various styles and fonts, accompanied by accurate drawings ready for coloring, the easy-to-read pages are filled with information. Puzzles, quizzes, and word-games offer fun facts on the climate, the state's physical features, Native Americans, mining, tourism, farming, and legends of the Wild West. There is also a Glossary defining words found in the book.

Recommended by the official Arizona State Historian, Marshall Trimble, the book is appropriate for ages nine to twelve; yet because there are pages to color, children as young as five will enjoy it. The creators live up to their promise of changing the minds of youngsters who think history is boring with their use of wise—and, indeed, sometimes wacky—facts concerning one of our fastest-growing western states. On the inside back cover are instructions to obtain guides and copies of the pages for educational purposes.

MARY POPHAM (January 6, 2012)

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