It had to be sunrise. And it had to be that first sudden moment. That's when all the power of life is in the sky... just watch it. That's part of the magic. That's the way to start a day. *The Way to Start a Day, 1978* ✷ **You can tell what's worth a celebration** because your heart will POUND and you'll feel like you're standing on top of a mountain and you'll catch your breath like you were breathing some new kind of air. *I'm in Charge of Celebrations, 1986* ✷ **That's why every desert thing knows** when the time comes to celebrate. Suddenly... All together. It happens. Cactus blooms yellow and pink and purple... Every plant joins in. Even the dry earth makes a sound of joy when the rain touches. Hawks call across the canyons. Children laugh for nothing. Coyotes dance in the moonlight. Where else would Desert People want to be? *The Desert is Theirs, 1975* ✷ **Every morning of his life when he was young** he climbed a cottonwood and sat there listening... And he said he doesn't know of anything he ever did as important as sitting in that tree... you have to learn it from the hills and ants and lizards and weeds... *They* do the teaching around here... Start with one seed pod or one dry weed or one horned toad or one handful of dirt or one sandy wash... you have to respect that tree or hill or whatever it is you're with... If you think you're *better* than a horned toad you'll never hear its voice... Don't be ashamed to learn from bugs or sand or anything. *The Other Way to Listen, 1978*

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Pack Rat—I am a gatherer of treasure... a feather that falls from the sky, a pale blue turquoise bead, a button... of leaves and berries ...mesquite beans, sweet red summer cactus fruit... a piece of a clear glass bottle turned purple by the sun... I stay close to home, close to the trails I know, close to the rocks where I was born, close to the cholla cactus I climb so easily. Everything I want is here. ✷ **Rattlesnake**—I understand the way sun clings to rocks after the sun is gone... I understand the shedding of old skin and the tenderness of my new soft shining self flowing smooth as water over sand. ✷ **Lizard**—Sand and sun are mother enough for lizards... Now the hotter the sun, the better I like it... When I rest, looking out over the world from a rock, I show the bright blue shining color of my underside. I seem to be made of earth and sky. ✷ **Desert Tortoise**—I am the ***old*** one here. Mice and snakes and deer and butterflies and badgers come and go. Centipedes and eagles come and go. But tortoises grow old and ***stay***. Our lives stretch out... I know the slow sure way my world repeats itself. I know how I fit in... I trust that shell. I move at my own speed. This is a good place for an old tortoise to walk. ✷ *Desert Voices, 1981.*

Rain is a blessing counted drop by drop. Each plant finds its own way to hold that sudden water. They don't waste it on floppy green leaves. They have thorns and stickers and points instead... And Saguaro is fat after rain—fat with the water it's saving inside its great stem. Give it one summer storm. It can last a year if it has to. Sometimes it has to... The desert's children learn to be patient... Ask how they live in a place so harsh and dry. They'll say they ***like*** the land they live on so they treat it well—the way you'd treat an old friend. They sing it songs. They never hurt it. And the land knows. *The Desert is Theirs, 1975* ✷ **There are desert hillsides where ancient Indian pottery still lies**... that were once somebody's bowl or mug or cooking pot or dipper... treat it with respect. It is so old... every piece of clay is a piece of someone's life. *When Clay Sings, 1972* ✷ **There aren't many things that feel as good as a rock**—if the rock is perfect... I've seen a lizard pick one rock out of a desert full of rocks and go sit there alone... You have to make up your own mind. You'll ***know***. *Everybody Needs a Rock, 1974* ✷ **When a cactus blooms, you should be there to watch it** because it might be a color you won't see again any other day of your life. How much would you say that color is worth? "Fifty cents?" my brother asks. But they decide on another five thousand. So now I write *forty thousand dollars.* *The Table Where Rich People Sit, 1994*

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Coyote—I'm going to make it—no matter what. I'll eat anything, sleep anywhere, run any distance, dig for water... because I am going to ***survive*** in this dry rocky land...and while I'm doing it, I'm going to sing about it. I sing about... new soft pups in a sandy den, and rabbit hunts, and the smell of rain. ✷ **Desert Person**—Like any desert creature, I build my own safe shelter with what the desert gives... I shape the earth into a house. But when I say, "This is my home," another desert person always knows that I don't mean the ***house***. I mean the farthest mountain I can see. I mean the sunsets that fill the whole sky and the colors of the cliffs and all their silences and shadows. I mean the desert is my home. *Desert Voices, 1981.* ✷ **Packrats and people both know** to save some for tomorrow—or later. The desert gives what it can to each of its children... They're more at ease in a desert place... They don't shove a horned toad out of the path. They know the land belongs to spider and ant the same as it does to people. They never say, "This is my land to do with as I please." They say, "We share...we only share..." They share the feeling... of being desert creatures together. *The Desert is Theirs, 1975* ✷

Listening to the rocks and hills and sand is so important, it should be taught in every school. But you can't learn it in a classroom. You have to be turned loose to wander around alone in open country, the wilder the better. All you have to do is be there at the right moment. And of course, ***the teacher is the earth.*** *—The Other Way to Listen, 1978*

Desert Dwellers Know

A Celebration of Byrd's Words

This tribute poster honors well-loved children's book writer and Caldecott Honor Award-winning author, Byrd Baylor. Her poetic Sonoran Desert wisdom has inspired desert dwellers for over six decades.

Byrd Baylor, photo by Wade Sherbrooke

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