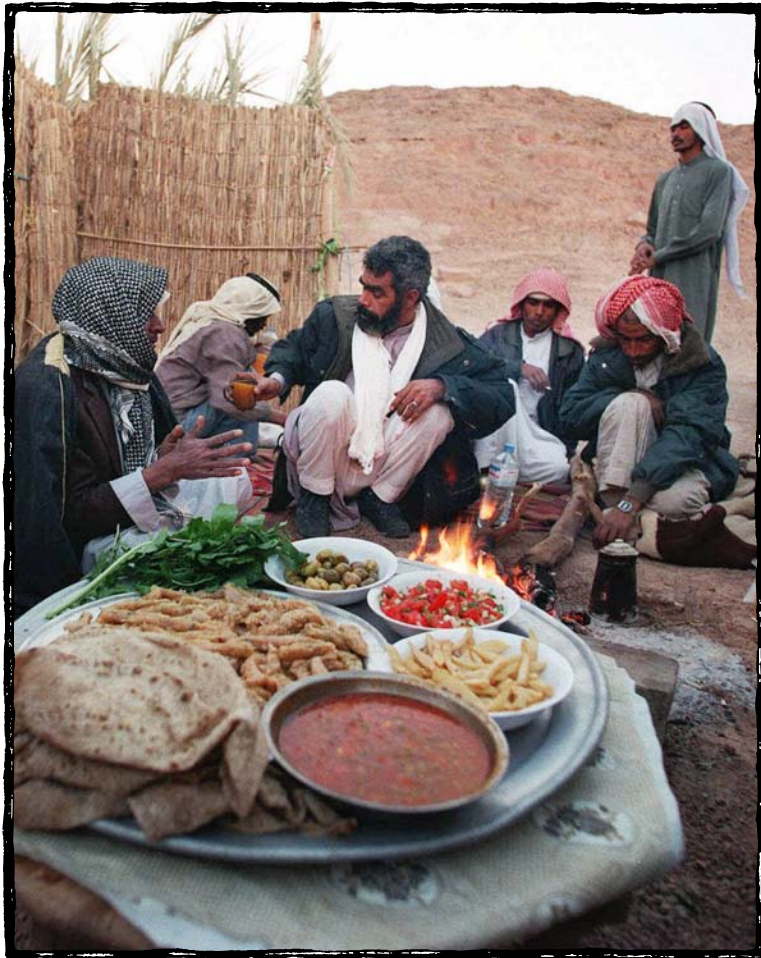


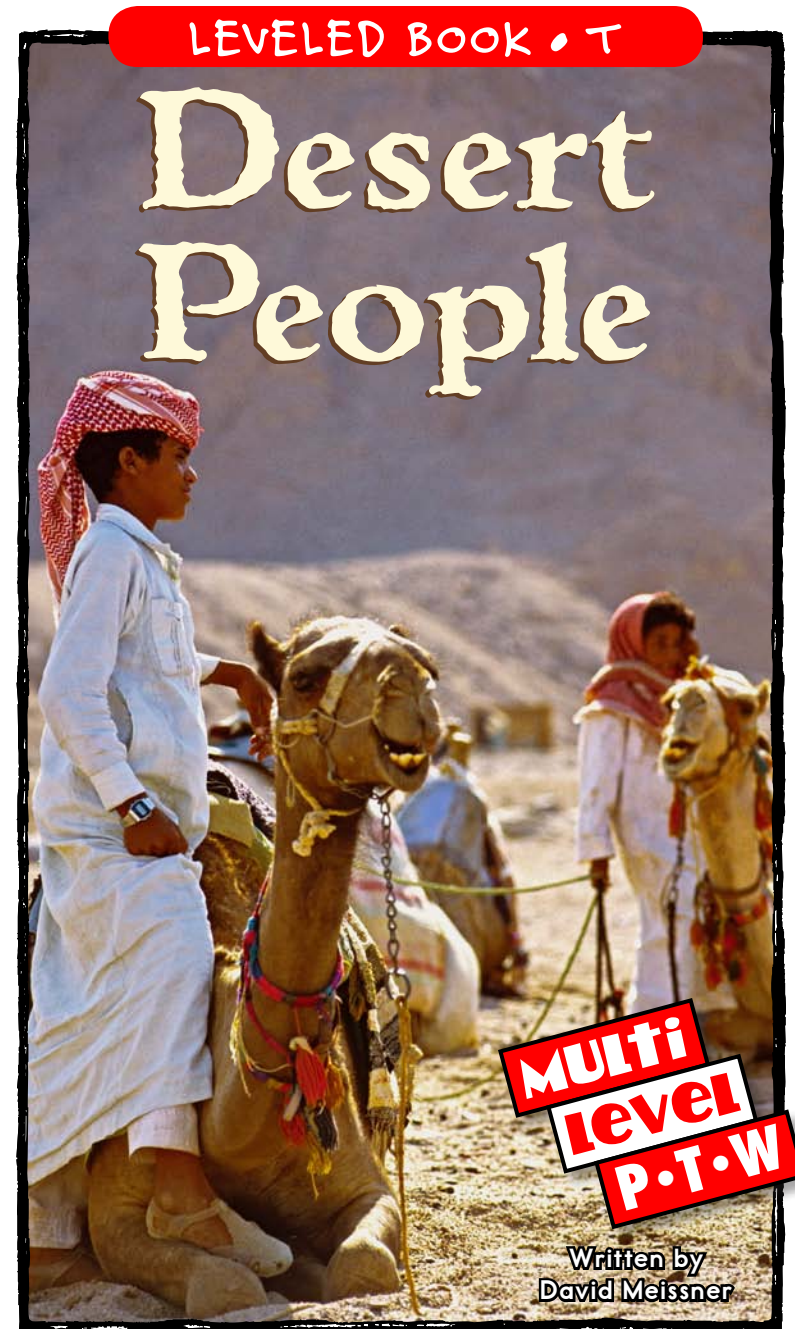
# Desert People

A Reading A-Z Level T Leveled Book  
Word Count: 1,669



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# Desert People



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## PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

Bedouin: (BED-oo-in)

Tohono O'odham: (toe-HOE-noh OH-eh-dom)

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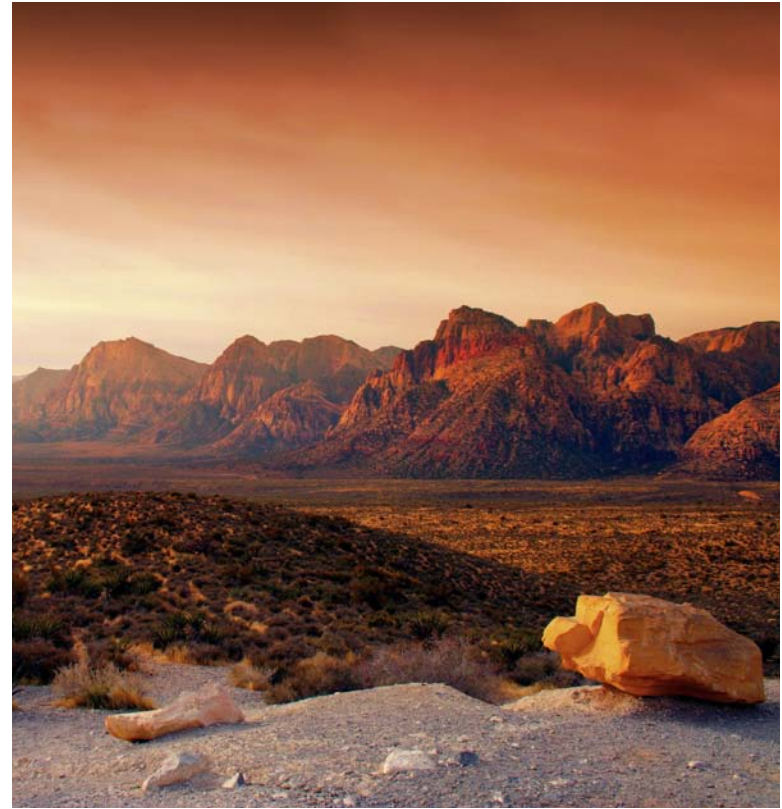
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Sunrise in the desert

## Demanding Deserts

Imagine that you are standing alone in the desert before dawn. There is total silence except for the soft call of a dove. The fresh breeze feels good on your face. The Sun begins to rise over the mountains, which slowly change from black to light purple. Then the Sun's rays peek out and turn the morning into day.



Finding shade in the desert can be challenging.

Look around you. Imagine that your family and friends also live here. What are your lives like? Imagine, as was true a few hundred years ago, that there are no cars, bicycles, or paved roads in this desert. How do you travel from place to place?

Imagine that you feel hungry in this desert. There are no stores or supermarkets. Can you feel the thirst in the back of your throat? Where can you find water to drink? You look around. There are no drinking fountains and no flowing rivers. There is not a single cloud in the light blue sky.

## What Exactly Is a Desert?

Would you know a desert if you saw one? Would there be camels walking on sand dunes? Would there be rattlesnakes, saguaro (suh-WAHR-oh) cacti, and tall mountains? Or would the land be rocky, with only a few shrubs and trees?

All three of these descriptions can apply to deserts. Many types of deserts exist. Deserts may have rocky mountains, graveled plateaus, or rolling sand dunes. Some desert areas even have streams and rivers.

Scientists disagree on the exact definition of the word *desert*. But they do agree that deserts share some common traits. Compared to the rest of the world, deserts are dry places. They usually receive less than 25.4 centimeters (10 in) of **precipitation** each year. Deserts tend to have dry soil and not much **vegetation**. Although some deserts can get pretty cold, most deserts are sunny and hot.

### Word Wise

*Why cacti?*

The plural of *cactus* is *cactuses* or *cacti* (KAK-tie).



The Sonoran Desert is home to many kinds of life.

### Desert Survival

If deserts are such hot, dry places, how have people survived in them? Where did they find food to eat and water to drink? What did they use to build their homes?

For thousands of years, desert people have found answers to these questions. Desert people have found ways to **adapt** by using local **resources** for food, water, and shelter. Each desert presents different challenges, and each desert has its own answers.

In this book, you will learn about two interesting groups of desert people: the Tohono O’odham and the Bedouin. You will also read about sand dunes, wild foods, villages, hunting, and more. You will even read about dogs that ride on camels!

World Deserts Comparison Table				
	Sonoran	Sahara	Gobi	Atacama
CLIMATE	Good rainfall for the desert	Very hot and very dry	Cold and windy	Driest desert in the world
CONTINENT	North America	Africa	Asia	South America
SIZE	310,100 (sq km)	9,064,960 (sq km)	1,036,000 (sq km)	139,860 (sq km)
TERRAIN	Flat basins, mountains	Gravel plains, mountains, sand dunes	Stony, sandy soil, grasslands	Sand, salt basins, lava
EXAMPLE OF DESERT PEOPLE	Tohono O’odham	Bedouin	Mongols	Atacama Indians

Compare these four deserts. Notice that they are all different.

## The Tohono O'odham

*Tohono O'odham* means "desert people." The Tohono O'odham are Native Americans who still live in the Sonoran Desert.

For years, they have watched the Sun rise over Baboquivari (bah-boh-KEE-vah-ree), their sacred mountain. They believe that Baboquivari is where Elder Brother created them from the clay of the Earth. Elder Brother gave the desert to the O'odham and taught them how to use its plants.

The O'odham lived in villages. They slept in round homes with flat roofs. These homes were made of dried mud, branches, and grass. Each home had one main room with a fire pit in the middle. Families slept on woven grass mats. Fires provided light and heat during cold winter nights.



For many years, they were called the Papago. Today, Tohono O'odham is the official name of the tribe.

## The Sonoran Supermarket

Like other deserts, the Sonoran Desert can be a difficult place to live. It is hot and dry. Months may pass without any rain. Summer days can reach 49° Celsius (120°F). Winter nights can dip below freezing.

But compared to many other deserts, the Sonoran is **lush** and **hospitable**. Historically, the Tohono O'odham lived in an area where 30.5 centimeters



Cactus fruits are an important desert food.

(12 in) of rain fell each year. The rainfall supported many forms of life. Shady trees, big cacti, and even summer flowers all grew there. Insects, birds, rabbits, and coyotes lived there, too.

Some of the O'odham lived near big mountains. In the mountains, they found resources that the desert below did not have. Different plants and animals lived up in the cooler **climate** on the mountain slopes. The O'odham gathered food and hunted bigger animals there. They also collected water from springs and streams.



The desert is filled with resources, if you know where to look.

### **A Different Kind of Shopping**

The desert served as a kind of supermarket for the Tohono O'odham. When they needed vegetables, they planted seeds. When they needed water, they went to a spring. When they needed meat, they hunted animals. And if they needed pine nuts, they walked up into the mountains to find pine trees.

#### *Fruits and Vegetables*

In the early summer, O'odham men dug small holes in the ground with sharp sticks. Women dropped seeds in the holes and covered them up. The dry fields flooded when the summer rains came. The O'odham grew corn, beans, and squash in this way. They also grew wheat, peas, and melons in the winter.



A desert jackrabbit

#### *Meat*

The Tohono O'odham hunted rattlesnakes, rabbits, and birds in the desert. In the mountains, they killed deer, bighorn sheep, and even bears. To sneak up on deer, O'odham hunters dressed in deerskins and walked on all fours.

### *Organic Specialty Items*

The Tohono O'odham also gathered wild foods. In the desert, they found chile peppers, onions, mesquite beans, and saguaro fruit. In the mountains, they collected acorns, roots, and pine nuts. O'odham men even made four-day trips to the ocean to get salt!

Other Native American people wanted these **exotic** foods, too. So the O'odham traded their salt and saguaro syrup for corn, beans, wheat, and more. This extra food helped the O'odham during times of **drought**.

### *Drinking Water*

Some O'odham villages were lucky enough to live near springs and streams. Other villages dug wells in the ground. But many people lived far away from water sources. Young girls often hiked high up into mountain canyons to fetch water.



The Tohono O'odham grew tepary beans in the dry lands of the Sonoran Desert.



Bedouins camp for the night.

## **The Bedouin**

Think of all the things in your room. Can you imagine moving to a new place every week? Would you get tired of carrying so many things? How would you enjoy the traveling life?

Traditional Bedouin people were **nomadic**. They moved from place to place on camels in search of food, water, and grazing land. Bedouins had very few possessions. They believed their lifestyle was simple and pure. *Bedouin* means “people of the desert.”





A Bedouin boy tends a herd of goats.

Bedouins lived in low black tents. These tents protected them from the sun, wind, and blowing sand. In a matter of hours, the Bedouin could pack up their camps and move on to their next “home.” Today many Bedouins still roam the Syrian, Arabian, and Sahara deserts.



An oasis in the Sahara Desert

### **The Saharan Supermarket?**

The Sahara Desert is the largest desert in the world. It stretches across northern Africa for 9 million square kilometers (3.5 million sq mi). The Sahara is also extremely hot and dry. In some parts, it rains less than 25 millimeters (1 in) per year!

The Sahara Desert is less of a “supermarket” than the Sonoran Desert. Less rain falls in the Sahara. As a result, fewer plants and animals live there. The Bedouin had to travel the desert in search of food and water.

The Sahara is more than sand dunes. It also has rocky plateaus, tall mountains, and oasis valleys. An oasis is a fertile place in the desert where water supports many kinds of life.

## The Camel Convenience Store

Arabian camels were the Bedouin's close companions. These **sturdy** animals made nomadic life possible. Camels gave the Bedouin shelter, clothing, food, and rides.

The Bedouin wove camel hair into tents and clothing. They also drank camel milk and ate camel meat. They even burned camel **dung** to fuel their campfires!

Camels were well suited for the desert. They could go for long periods of time without water. Arabian camels could walk for 50 kilometers (30 mi) in a day and could carry up to 270 kilograms (600 lbs) on their backs.

Some families owned many camels. Having many camels was a sign of wealth. Camels were so prized that people fought over them. Some Bedouins went on raids to steal camels from others.



Arabian camels have one hump.

## Fruits and Vegetables

The nomadic Bedouins did not grow many crops. But in late summer, they camped out near oases because date palms grew in those places. These trees produced sweet, tasty fruits. The Bedouin ate some dates fresh and dried others to save for later.



People living around the Sahara Desert have been eating dates for at least 6,000 years.

## Meat

The Bedouin hunted wild herds of ostriches, wolves, foxes, and gazelles. They also trained falcons to hunt foxes and small birds for them. Sometimes dogs called *Salukis* rode with Bedouins to help them track animals. Can you imagine a dog riding on a camel?

## Drinking Water

The Bedouin knew where to find the desert's oases. They dug wells to pull water from the ground. They carried the water in bags made of camel skin.

## More Desert People

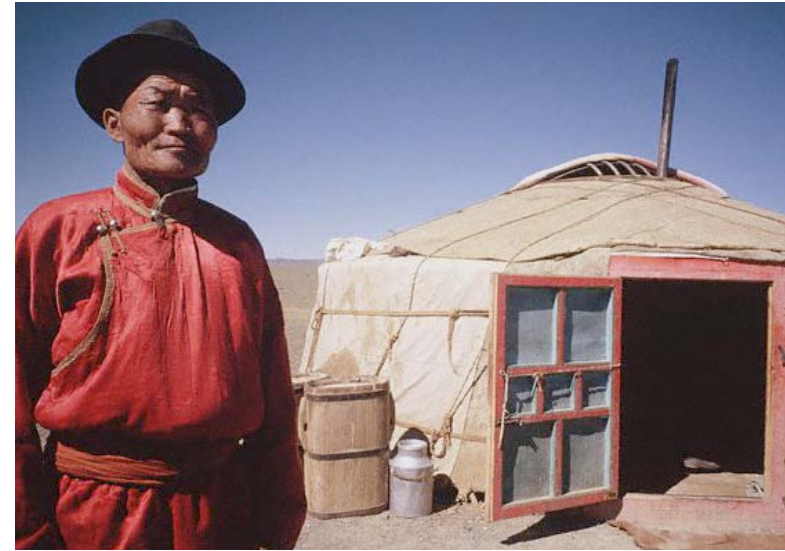
The Tohono O'odham and the Bedouin are just two of the world's traditional desert peoples. There are many other deserts, and there have been many other desert peoples.

The Australian Aborigines, for example, walked about their continent for **millennia**. Men hunted with spears and boomerangs. Women gathered food. The Aborigines wore very little clothing. They slept by the warmth of a campfire.



Australian Aboriginal children

The Atacama Indians lived in the dry Atacama Desert, where they raised guinea pigs and llamas. They also planted crops.



Gobi Desert nomad in Mongolia

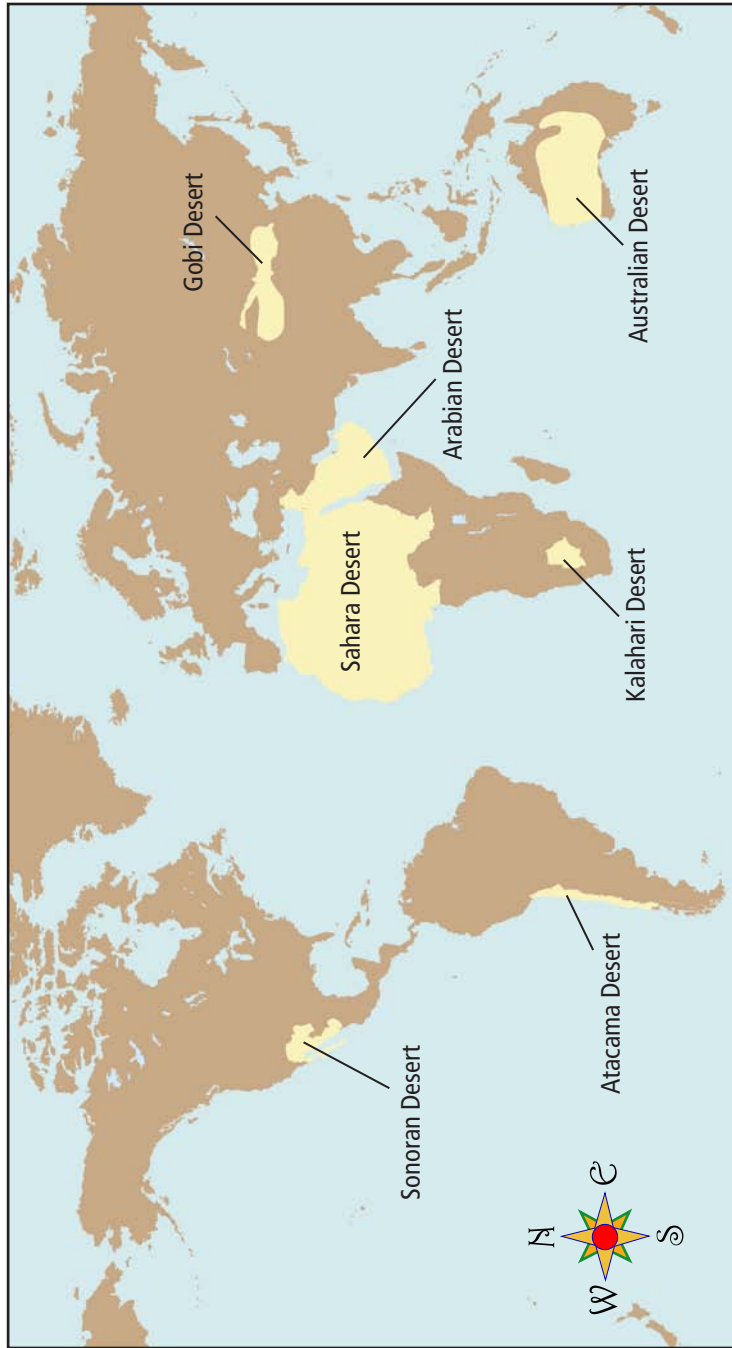
Nomads roamed the cold and windy Gobi Desert. They searched for vegetation for their sheep, goats, and cattle. They lived in round tents called *gers*.

Bushmen lived in the Kalahari Desert. Women gathered plants and roots. Men hunted animals with bows and arrows.



Kalahari Bushmen in southern Africa carry small bows.

Deserts cover roughly one-fifth of the Earth's surface. Can you find the Sonoran Desert? The Sahara Desert?



## A Way of Life

Imagine again that you are standing alone in the desert. The Sun is now shining over the mountains. The doves have found shade under a tree. You feel a bead of sweat on your forehead. What will you do on this day?

If you grew up in the desert, you would know exactly what to do. Your grandparents would have taught your parents, and your parents would have taught you. You would know how to grow vegetables. You would know which wild berries were safe to eat. You would know where to find the well or the closest spring.

For thousands of years, people have adapted to deserts. They have found food, water, shelter, and more. For these people, the desert is not just about survival. It is their way of life.



Dressed for the desert

## Try This

Do you think you could grow food like the Tohono O'odham?

You probably could! Ask a teacher, parent, or friend to help you. But be careful, you might plant a seed in their head, too!

### Grow Your Own Food

- 1 Find out what kinds of fruits, vegetables, and herbs grow in your area.
- 2 Decide what you want to grow, and buy the seeds.
- 3 Choose a sunny spot with soft soil. (You can also fill a pot with soil.)
- 4 Get help from someone who knows how to grow plants (or read the instructions on the seed packet).
- 5 Dig a shallow hole.
- 6 Place a seed in the hole and wait for the seed to grow!



## Glossary

<b>adapt</b> ( <i>v.</i> )	to adjust to new conditions (p. 7)
<b>climate</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	the weather conditions in an area over a long period of time (p. 10)
<b>drought</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a long period of time with very little rain (p. 13)
<b>dung</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	animal manure (p. 17)
<b>exotic</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	out of the ordinary, usually from a faraway place (p. 13)
<b>hospitable</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	friendly and welcoming (p. 10)
<b>lush</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	rich with vegetation (p. 10)
<b>millennia</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	thousands of years (p. 19)
<b>nomadic</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	traveling from place to place without a permanent home (p. 14)
<b>precipitation</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	rain, snow, sleet, or hail (p. 6)
<b>resources</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	supplies of valuable or very useful things (p. 7)
<b>sturdy</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	strong and solid (p. 17)
<b>vegetation</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	plants found in certain areas (p. 6)