



Ponding

Materials: Dip nets, white or light-coloured pans, dishes or other low-sided containers for observing post creatures, small plastic containers for “back flushing,” white plastic spoons, eye droppers, small jars with tops, identification book (optional)

Procedure: (Direct Experience) Divide the students into groups of two or three. Give each group one of each of the items listed under materials. Dip nets can be made from dollar store sieves, duck taped to a broomstick or branch. Assign each group an area of shore for collecting. Have the students of each group collect and observe aquatic creatures in the following manner:

1. Sweep the dip net through the water or along the bottom of the pond.
2. Bring the net out and hold it upside down over the observing pan.
3. Fill the smaller “backflushing” container with pond water and pour the water through the net to wash all the contents of the net into the observing pan.
4. Let the contents of the pan settle down so that the small aquatic creature may be seen against the light-coloured background.
5. Use the spoon or eyedropper for catching samples. specimens and put them into the jar for observation.
6. Return the remaining creature and the water in the observing pan to the pond.
7. Repeat the process and see what new creature can be found.

Often the discoveries in the observing pan are exciting. For instance, a cry of “I’ve caught a monster!” may indicate that a large predacious diving beetle larva has been found, and these are indeed impressive. You can use an identification book to help guide the observations of your students. And it can be fun to make a communal zoo with captured creatures. Fill a pail or large container with water and have the children add one creature. By limiting the zoo to one creature per students, they will carefully look at their own, to differentiate between the various kinds.

Hints, tips and tricks: If possible, visit the same freshwater area in different seasons. Note any differences in the make up of the animal population.

Finally, eventually letting the children get in the pond is a blast. Make sure that they are prepared with old clothes and have a second set ready to change into. Let them know that they will feel, the decaying leaf litter of the past 60 years on their feet and to move carefully. One of my all-time favourite memories of camp was working my way into a willow brake with a young female camper. We were lying on our bellies

in the muck, watching salamander larvae swim around us. It was gross, mucky and smelly, but my little companion turned to me and gasped, "This is awesome!"



