

Kitchen Table Experiment: Garbage Bag Watershed

Rain that falls onto the land either soaks into the ground or runs off. Water that runs off follows tiny channels, or streams. These little streams flow into bigger streams and rivers. Some flow into lakes or wetlands. All the land from which this water flows is called a **watershed**. Let's build one!

You'll need:

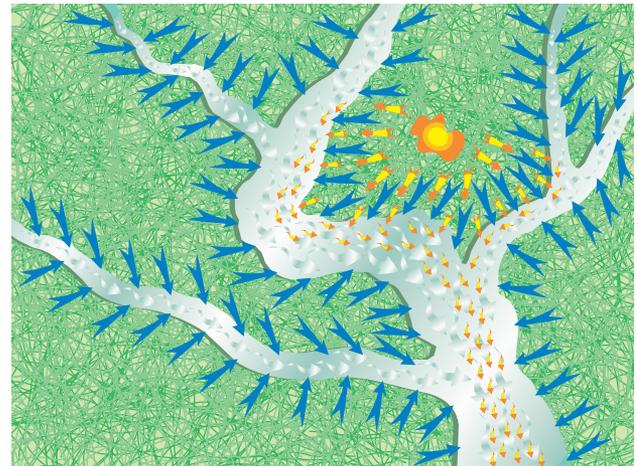
- old newspapers
- large white garbage bag
- spray bottle full of water
- food coloring, such as red and blue
 (add only a few drops to the water if you want)

Directions:

- 1.** Cover a table or the floor with several layers of newspaper or plastic drop cloth. Crumple some newspaper and lay it on top.
- 2.** Cut out the bottom of the garbage bag. Cut straight up one side of the garbage bag so that it opens into one large piece of plastic. Place it on top of the crumpled newspaper.
- 3.** Next, grab your spray bottle! Make it rain all over the watershed you just created.
 Watch how the water moves through your watershed. The water moves from high areas to low areas.
- 4.** Very carefully, high up in the watershed, add a tiny drop of a different color of food coloring. Now make it rain some more. What happens to that color?

That food coloring could represent pollution. Did it move through the rest of the watershed? How might that pollution affect the rest of the watershed? How would you feel if you lived downstream from that pollution? How would you feel if you lived upstream from that pollution?

You might be glad that the pollution didn't flow past you. But did you ever hear the saying, "We all live downstream"? Each of us lives in a watershed. Watersheds are connected. Things that we do to the water in one area affect the water many, many miles away.



 = runoff from rain  = pollution source

Questions:

- Do you see small streams coming together to make larger streams and rivers?
- Do you see any lakes?
- What happened to the rain that fell on the highest peaks or mountains? If it separated and flowed down the front *and* back of the mountain, did it create two different watersheds?
- How many watersheds do you see?

In the real world, many things change the water in our watersheds. Make a list of the natural and human things that shape the water habitats in the watershed.



illustration-Ted Walke