STEM ACTIVITY OF THE WEEK

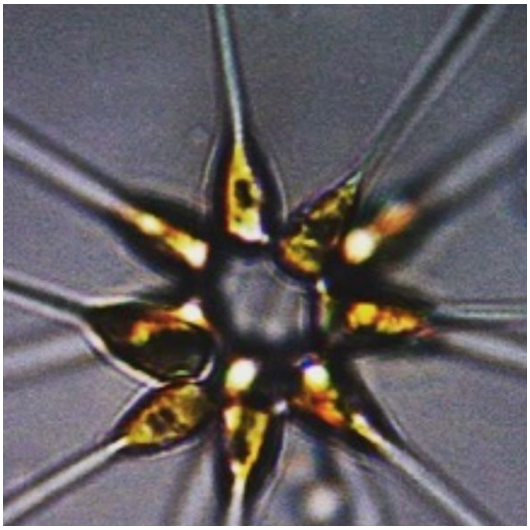
HUDSON RIVER PK

Build Your Own Plankton Answer Key

Part 1: Learning about Plankton

Below are two photographs taken of plankton found in the Hudson River. These photos had to be taken with a special microscope camera, because the actual size of these plankton is about as small as the period at the end of this sentence. Plankton are microscopic organisms that drift through the River.

A



This plankton is called a **diatom**.

B

This plankton is called a **copepod**.

1. Take a few minutes to observe plankton in the photographs above. What are 2 similarities between Photo A and Photo B? What are 2 differences?

Both of the plankton in the photos above have skinny long things coming out of them. This helps to increase their **surface area**, which allows them to float in the water. Both plankton also have parts that look see-through.

The plankton in Photo A looks like a star, or a flower, but the plankton in Photo B looks like a bug. The plankton in Photo A looks like the things coming out of it are sticks, but the things coming out of the plankton in Photo B look like antennae and legs.

2. Plankton can be categorized into two types: phytoplankton and zooplankton. **Phytoplankton** are **plants**, and **zooplankton** are **animals**. Identify each photo above as phytoplankton or zooplankton based on the observations you made in Question 1. Fill in the blanks and circle whether your identification is a plant or an animal.

   Photo **A** is a **phytoplankton**. This means that it is a(n) **plant**.

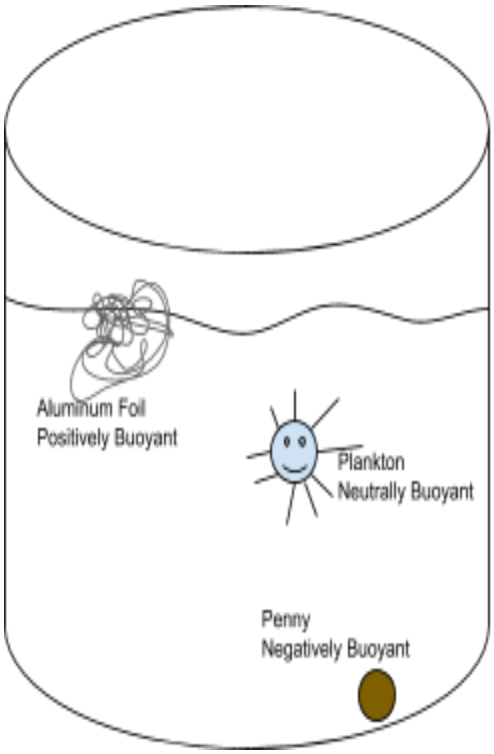
   Photo **B** is a **zooplankton**. This means that it is a(n) **animal**.

3. Plants and animals on land and underwater get their energy in similar ways to those in the Hudson River. Identify the energy sources for each in the lines below.
    a. What do plants need to grow? Sunlight, water, carbon dioxide
    b. What do animals need to grow? Food, water, oxygen

Part 2: Learning Where Plankton Live

Let's do a little experiment to explore **buoyancy**, which means an object's ability to float. This will help us understand where plankton live in the water.

1. Fill a medium sized mixing bowl with water.
2. Gently drop a small ball of aluminum foil into the bowl. Draw where it lands in the water on the image to the right.
3. Gently drop a penny into the bowl. Draw where it lands in the water on the image to the right.



Something that floats at the very surface of water is **Positively Buoyant.**
Something that sinks in water is **Negatively Buoyant.**

4. Label your drawings to indicate which item is positively buoyant and which is negatively buoyant.

Something that floats somewhere just under the surface of water is **Neutrally Buoyant**. That's what plankton are! Plankton must stay fully submerged in the water, but not sink too deep where there is no sunlight. If plankton float on the water's surface, the sunlight is too hot and they cannot survive.

5. Draw a little plankton in the image above, and label it neutrally buoyant. You can use the photos from Page 1 of this worksheet as a guide, or invent your own plankton.Feel free to also reference the Plankton Identification Guide.

The sweet spot where plankton float is called the **photic zone** (pronounced FOE-tick), which refers to the zone where sunlight can shine through. Just like plants on land, phytoplankton need sunlight to survive. Zooplankton can be found in the photic zone because they eat phytoplankton (and sometimes other zooplankton, too).

Part 3: Build Your Own Plankton

Your challenge is to create a plankton that is **neutrally buoyant**. It should float just under the surface of the water, without any bits popping out of the water, or sinking all the way to the bottom.

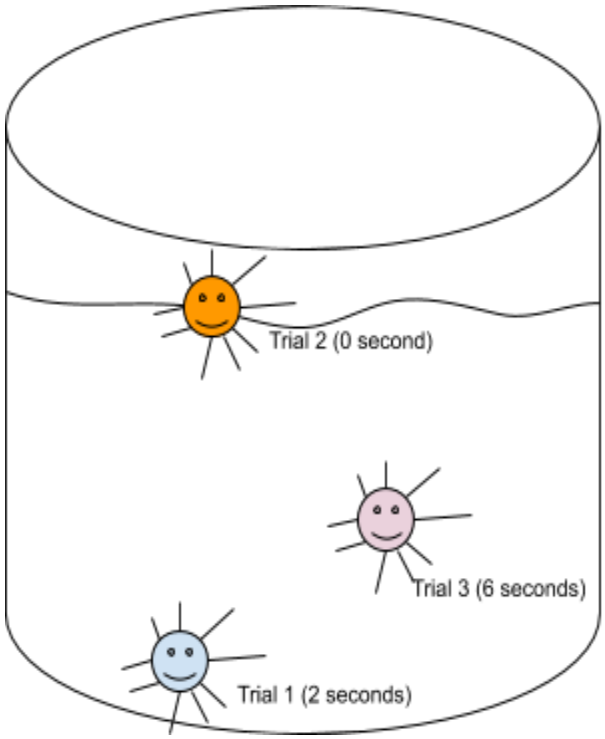
1. Build: gather your Plankton Build materials and bundle them together however you would like, using tape, foil, string, or whatever else you have handy. Think about your design as a phytoplankton or zooplankton. How will it resemble a plant or animal? Use the Plankton Identification Guide as a reference.

2. Predict: what do you think will happen when you place your plankton in your bowl of water? Why?

I predict that when I place my plankton in my bowl of water it will float right under the surface of the water because I combined the aluminum foil and the penny with a rubber band. The foil floats and the penny sinks, so together I think they will be somewhere in the middle.

3. Test: place your plankton in your bowl of water and observe what happens. Use the timer to record how long it floats in the photic zone.

4. Record: draw your results in the image below, and label it with “Trial 1” and the time.



5. Redesign: make any changes you think your plankton needs to stay floating in the photic zone longer and test again.

6. Record: draw your results in the image above, and label it with “Trial 2” and the time.

7. Repeat step 5.

8. Record: draw your results in the image above, and label it with “Trial 3” and the time.

Part 4: Reflect on Your Experiment

1. Which trial of your plankton design succeeded in buoyancy the longest? Explain.

My 3rd trial plankton design succeeded in maintaining neutral buoyancy for the longest. It still sunk to the bottom after 10 seconds, but it stayed in the middle for the most time. I think this was because after trying to make my plankton lighter in Trial 2, I only had to make a small change by taking off a little aluminum foil to make it sink down.

2. What features helped your design stay in the Photic zone?

Some things that helped my design stay in the photic zone, just under the surface of the water, were aluminum foil and toothpicks. Too much of these things made my plankton too light, but they were good for keeping my plankton floating because they are very light materials.

3. What features caused your design to sink?

Some things that helped my plankton design sink were pennies and pipe cleaners. The pennies were very heavy metal and the fuzzy part of the pipe cleaners absorbed water to help my plankton sink down.

4. What changes would you make to help your design stay in the Photic zone longer?

To help my plankton design stay in the photic zone longer, I would like to space out my pipe cleaners more and add one or two small paper clips to the ends. Spacing out my pipe cleaners can help increase the surface area of my plankton, which means there is more space for the water to push my plankton upward. The small paper clips could help balance out the weight of the water that gets absorbed into the pipe cleaners.