

Activity: Build a Watershed

Gather supplies as listed in the [supplies section](#). The following activity demonstrates what a watershed is. The activity can be done individually or in groups.

Ask each group or individual to:

1. Crumple a piece of butcher paper into a loose ball.
2. Open the paper, with the shiny side up, and place it on a desk. The paper should still be crumpled enough to have portions that resemble mountains and valleys.
3. Using a blue, water-based marker, have students mark “creeks” or rivers on their papers, and also have them mark where they think the water will collect as it runs downhill (this could represent a lake or stream). Students can add snow pack in the color of their choice on the mountain tops.
4. Have students outline ridges, mountain tops, etc. with the colored pencils.
5. Have students fluff up their paper to regain their mountain tops.
6. In a central area (outside or on a tiled floor or table), have students spray (or you can spray) a very light mist of water over their paper. If indoors, have paper towels under the butcher paper to collect the extra water.
7. Observe where water runs down and collects.

Lead the students in a discussion about where the water travels and what is downhill from their mountains. Tell the students that even out of the mountains the water is still part of a watershed. They live in a watershed that starts at the top of the mountains and flows through their town.

What is a watershed? Easy - if you are standing on ground right now, just look down. You're standing, and everyone is standing, in a watershed. A watershed is the area of land where all of the water that falls in it and drains off of it goes into the same place. Watersheds can be as small as a footprint or large enough to encompass all the land that drains water into rivers that drain into the Mississippi, where it enters the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean.