

**Chapter 18 Classification**

## Using and Constructing a Classification Key

You may want to refer students to Chapter 18 in the textbook for a discussion of the classification system used in biology. Time required: 45 minutes

### Introduction

All cultures have developed names for the living things found in their environments. When various everyday names are used for the same organism, confusion is possible. So, scientists have developed an international system for naming and classifying all organisms. Identification guides, called keys, have been developed to help all peoples recognize and identify organisms according to their scientific names.

Classification keys are usually dichotomous in arrangement. The word *dichotomous* comes from the word *dichotomy*, meaning “two opposite parts or categories.” A dichotomous key gives the reader a series of opposing descriptions of basic features of an organism. The reader studies the specimen and selects the descriptions that apply to it until reaching a statement that characterizes only one species and names it. In this investigation you will use a typical dichotomous key to identify the genus and species of several different salamanders. Then, you will create your own dichotomous key to categorize a diverse group of wildflowers.

### Problem

How is a dichotomous key used to distinguish among similar organisms?

**Pre-Lab Discussion** Students may work alone or with a partner, depending on your preference.

Read the entire investigation. Then, work with a partner to answer the following questions.

1. How many choices does a dichotomous key provide at each step?

There are two choices at each step.

2. What are some of the apparent differences among the salamanders illustrated?

The size, color, shape, numbers and patterns of spots, and the presence or absence of external gills are differences.

3. Based on the information in Figure 2, what is a distinguishing characteristic of the members of the genus *Ambystoma*?

They all have a body coloring pattern with a black background and variable white spots.

4. What might be a good strategy for beginning to create a classification key for the six types of wildflowers shown in the diagram?

Find a broad difference between them such as the number of petals in the flower or the number of divisions in the leaf.

5. If you were to use live flowers instead of diagrams, what other characteristics could you use to identify the flowers?

The color, scent, leaf size and flower size could be compared.

# Using And Constructing A Classification Key Answers

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