West Plains Elementary School
Fourth grades Spring 2006 Art Stream Project,
Artist Pat Hight.

My approach is directed toward study of the flora and fauna in the aquatic and riparian zones and developing the children's awareness of the importance of clean and unpolluted water for a healthy ecosystem.

LESSON ONE
I began by introducing the children to Nature Journaling by showing them transparencies of published nature journal pages and pages from my own nature journal. I talked to them about the importance of accurate observation and recording in their journals and the importance of pre-study before going into the field. I introduced the spotted salamander as an interesting object of study. Discussion revealed that several of the children have seen different salamander species.

I then introduced the children to the correct way to set up their journals (already constructed in a previous class) by beginning with name, date, location, time, weather, what is being observed, and anything else of note in the upper right or left hand of their page. I then gave them a drawing lesson in contour line drawing and blind contour drawing, and timed drawing. We used mounts, skulls, and live turtles for our subject matter. I talked to them about this kind of drawing being a kind of note taking and discussed the difference between scientific illustration and art drawing. I used MDC handouts to give the children further images and information about their assigned "critter".

COMPUTER CLASS WORK
The children had been assigned a "critter" to research in computer lab. They researched their critter's habitat needs, and place in the food web. They did drawings and wrote a poem about their "critter".

LESSON TWO
Lesson two was a field trip to the MDC Regional Headquarters where they drew from mounts on display and live specimens of snakes and turtles from the private collection of MDC educator Melanie Cardin-Jessen. The children also walked the nature trail and observed the two ponds and a woodland ecosystem.

LESSON THREE- CULMINATING PROJECT
Back in the classroom I briefly lectured to them about the food web, then asked them to participate in constructing a mural depicting their "critters" in relationship to one another in aquatic and riparian ecosystem. I asked them to make their best drawing of their assigned "critter" and to place it in its proper place in the ecosystem and connect it with what eats it and what it is eaten by. We used colored construction paper to create the mural by gluing trees, grass, water, sky, etc. onto a four foot by 8-foot piece of rolled paper, and used strips of paper to connect the "critters".

The children quickly noticed that certain niches were empty, in this case plants such as algae, microscopic plants, and smaller "critters" like tadpoles, small minnows. We discussed the implications of this lack and how it might happen in a real environment by pollution, drought or other disaster. The children spontaneously created images of the missing flora and fauna and added them to the mural to make a more complete food web. The children learned how complex the food web is and what it means to have it disrupted by pollution or other disaster.

MATERIALS USED
Transparencies of pages of nature journals.
Simple nature journals made in art class
Pencils, paper
Construction paper, glue, tape, yarn.

RESOURCES USED
MDC handouts on a variety of animals
MDC Education Specialists
Displays of mounts at MDC regional headquarters
Computer Lab at school