

MARINE BIOLOGY: CLAM DISSECTION

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INTRODUCTION:

The class of mollusks includes clams, snails, mussels, and scallops. They get their name from the word that refers to shells that make up their exoskeleton. Clams have a big hatchet-shaped foot for moving about and for burrowing in mud or sand. Filter-feeding mollusks draw water by way of two tubes called siphons. One siphon takes in water while the other expels water and wastes. Water taken in contains oxygen and food particles, consisting of detritus and plankton. As the water flows across the gills, oxygen and carbon dioxide are exchanged. Mucus on the gills traps microscopic food particles, and two funnels called cilia on the gills move the food toward the mouth. Lip-like structures called palps help sort the food and direct it into the mouth. Mollusks do not have a trachea. The food suspended in mucus moves through the digestive organs, which break it down and absorb it.

Before plastic came into use, the shells of bivalves were commonly used to make buttons. Bivalves such as clams are valuable as food, in fact they make up a major part of the marine invertebrate catch crop. Except for the shell, bivalves are like other animals. But when water in which they grow becomes polluted with chemicals or disease organisms, bivalves should not be eaten. At certain times of year, for example, microscopic organisms called dinoflagellates multiply rapidly in the surrounding waters of bays and estuaries. When they grow so thick that the pigment in their bodies makes the water look red, the phenomenon is called a red tide. Toxin substances produced by dinoflagellates (dinotoxins) can concentrate in the bivalves that use them as food. Although the bivalves are not harmed (their cellular physiology walls away the toxin until their baby tissues), the toxin affects the nervous system of humans who eat them. This "biological magnification" can be fatal to humans.

In this activity, we will observe the external and internal features of a bivalve and attempt to trace the water flow.

PROCEDURE:

1. Count the growth lines on the inside of the shell from the umbil to the edge of the valve.
2. Lay the clam on a dissecting pan with the umbil to the left. Insert a razor blade between the valves and move the blade dorsally along the valve margin to cut the adductor muscles.
3. Carefully lift the hinge segment of the umbil.
4. Hold the clam on its anterior end facing you and the umbil faced up.
5. Find the mantle and the gills on both sides of the soft body cavity.
6. Observe, sketch, and identify the structures shown in Fig. 1.
7. Expose the plantar interior anatomy by gently separating the mantle from the upper valve with a blunt pointer and then lifting the upper valve (see Fig. 2).

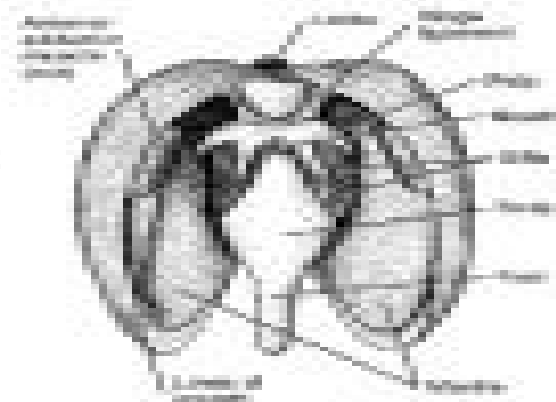


Figure 1.

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RM Cervero



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