Belly Up
Purpose To determine why dead fish float, belly side up, on the surface of the water.
Materials
Tap water
Plastic sandwich bag that zips closed
Drinking straw
Large bowl
Procedure
• Pour the water into the plastic bag.
• Place the end of the straw into the bag.
• Zip the bag closed up to the straw.
• Fill the bag with air by blowing through the straw.
• Slip the straw out and quickly seal the bag.
• Fill the bowl with water.
• Place the closed bag into the bowl of water.
Results The bag floats on top of the water, air-filled side up.
Why? Fish have microscopic living things called bacteria (single-celled microscopic organisms) inside their intestines to decompose food. These organisms continue doing their job even after the fish is dead. When the food is decomposed (broken into simpler parts), gas is produced that balloons out the fish’s intestines just as the plastic bag was inflated by your exhaled breath. Because the intestines of the fish are located on the underside, or belly, of the fish, the dead fish floats underside, or belly, up.