Pearls in the classroom
Freshwater pearl mussel
*Margaritifera margaritifera*
The Hitch Hiker

The Amazing Pearl Mussel’s Life Cycle

1. Eggs develop inside the female mussels
2. In summer the females release millions of baby mussels (larvae)
3. Most larvae are swept away downstream but some are sucked into a young salmon or trout and they stick onto its gills
4. They hitch-hike upstream and drop off the gills
5. If they are lucky they drop into gravel or sand where they can settle and grow. They are only 0.4mm big so if they land in silt or sludge they will suffocate and die.
6. It takes 12-15 years before the mussels are big enough (6.5 cm) to make new eggs.
Juvenile salmon and trout
Mussel larvae (glochidia)
Encysted glochidia on host gills

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Sand and gravel

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Juvenile freshwater pearl mussels
...pearl mussels have a lot of growing up to do
Adult freshwater pearl mussels
Pearl fishing kit
Illegally killed pearl mussels

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