

Microscope for children

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Get a good one! Stereo microscopes are easy to use, but to my mind nothing beats the discovery of pond organisms, pollen etc for which a compound monocular or binocular microscope is needed.. Buy nothing plastic, or in a pack with 'accessories'

My recommendations would be :

– Avoid new scopes unless from a specialist supplier, who will not sell junk. Some impressive looking instruments have lousy optics because of poor quality control. Nothing will put a kid off so much as a fuzzy image.

– Secondhand good quality scope with an established name, – Watson, Vickers, Russian (Zenith/ Biolam), and Swift are all good quality and good value. Built in illuminators, and a condenser preferred. Lots of knobs much liked by small boys.

You should be able to get a good scope for about \$100 in the secondhand market.

Do not discount vintage scopes such as the Watson Service – these were research grade in their day, and can be a remarkably good buy.

Quality counts – Nothing will put a kid off so much as a fuzzy image. x10 or x20, and x40 objectives are all that is needed.

– Binocular preferred, but monocular is fine. It will NOT REPEAT NOT cause eye damage, unless the mirror is pointed at the sun. I am a senior physician in the UK and can be quite categorical about this. Using both eyes for a monocular will reduce fatigue, and is easily learned, but you will not damage your eyes with a monocular microscope.

Don't forget to buy slides and coverslips, and a good book – long out of print, but still available is 'the Microscope Made Easy by A. Laurence Wells.

A few jars, eyedroppers, and water or scrapings from a local pond or even some moss shaken with water will provide hours of fun. Beware of small children and ponds, though!

The gift of a microscope may well be a life-changing experience, so do buy a good one!

Good does not necessarily mean expensive.

Best of luck, HJ

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