

IN THE NEWS

The ultimate gift

Next time you want to awaken the scientist in your kid, niece or nephew, head straight for the Discovery channel store, for it is offering the first ever DNA extraction and mapping kit for children!

Forget the kits that promised to ignite your passion for science by showing you how to generate electricity by sticking electrodes into a potato. 'Discovery Kids DNA Explorer', which made it into the 100 top technological innovations in 2003, according to *Popular Science* magazine, is a mini lab in itself. It contains a mini centrifuge, a magnetic mixer, an electrophoresis chamber, test vials and DNA dye. There are enough supplies for six experiments, and the "budding forensic scientists or secret agents", as the Discovery channel store tells us, can look forward to extracting DNA from vegetables, fruit or even chicken liver!

The budding scientist is taken through a series of familiar steps. First, the sample has to be mixed with isopropyl alcohol and salt to break up the cells. Next, "Dr. Frankenstein needs to add dish soap" (*Wired* magazine), mix the sample and centrifuge it. "After 15 seconds, Dr. F stirs in a pinch of enzymes, adds alcohol, and the DNA strands float to the surface, where they can be harvested with the 'DNA Hook'" (*Wired* magazine). The extracted DNA can be loaded onto a gel, which, after an hour or two (if the future scientist has not lost his or her interest by then), can be stained to reveal the DNA bands. Such hours of fun can be had for around US \$80 only. As *Wired* magazine says, "Watch your toothbrush: Frankenstein may figure out who Daddy really is (or isn't)".

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