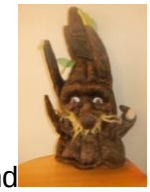
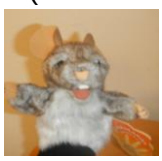
The HERP Project Puppet Presentation
As the World Turns: A Soap Opera at the Temporary Pool

Characters

Narrator

Tree Puppet with stand  Raccoon puppet  Raven puppet 

Treefrog puppet (the adult that is inside the tadpole puppet) 

Mouse puppet  Snake puppet  Box turtle puppet  Firefly puppet  Butterfly puppet 

Person wearing marbled salamander coat
Person wearing spotted salamander costume

Other materials needed

Egg mass attached to stick
Temporary pool with two leaf overlay covers
Rain and blizzard sound recordings
Theme music from *As the World Turns*
Speakers

Pre-skit set up

Lay temporary pool rug under center of curtain. Cover 'water' with both 'leaf' overlays with the smaller center cover on the top.

[start the theme music for *As the World Turns*]

Narrator: [begin just after music starts, in a deep announcer-type of voice]
As the World Turns: A Soap Opera at the Temporary Pool. Brought to you by our sponsors, The Salamander Society and the Association for the Friends of the Frogs.

[allow music to fade slightly]

A Temporary pool whispers or may even grow silent during the hot months when the water is low or completely dried up [indicate the dried nature of the pool in front of the stage]. If the rains begin in the fall we might hear a murmur. But in the late winter and early spring, as the snow melts and the rain falls, the temporary pool nearly shouts! What is the pool saying? Let's listen in.

[music swells again but then completely fades out]

Tree: I am important around the temporary pool and have a great influence on the animals living in the pool. During the early summer, I provide shade for the pool to help maintain cool water temperatures. Cooler water holds more oxygen so this is good for the animals that live there.

Later in the summer, my deep and spreading roots start to absorb much needed water. If there are few rains in the summer the pool will dry up. As you can see, there is no water in the pool right now. [put tree puppet on stand to remain in view of the audience]

[play recording of thunderstorm and rain softly in the background]

Narrator: An evening in early September

Marbled Salamander: [enter from stage right, walk to center of pool and stoop down] Hi, I'm a marbled salamander. I'm an amphibian like the frogs and toads. My skin is very moist and like my frog friends, I have 4 legs. However, unlike my frog friends, I have a tail. I belong to a family of salamanders called mole salamanders or the Ambystomatids. We are called mole salamanders because we spend much of our lives underground.

You might have noticed that it is raining. I emerge from my underground retreat during the first rains of the fall. During the fall breeding season, female marbled salamanders will lay about 30 to 200 eggs underneath cover objects in the dry basins of temporary, fish-free wetlands [motion your hand over the pool]. The adult female will usually remain with the eggs until the pool fills with water.

[fade out the sound of the rain]

[stand up and remove the inside leaf cover piece and walk to edge of pool stage right] The rest of the year you can find us underneath leaf litter and in small mammal burrows in deciduous forests, mixed hardwood forests, pine stands, flood plains and uplands. We are found all over the state of North Carolina. We eat things like millipedes, spiders, insects, worms and snails. We have to watch out for snakes and other animals however that like to eat us.

Raccoon: [appears on the other end of the stage from where the marbled salamander is walking off]
I think that might be my cue. If my mask did not give me away, I am a raccoon and I do love to eat salamanders while they are living in the woods or when the female marbled salamanders are guarding this nests. I will also eat frogs when I can catch them. Don't get mad at me, it's just the circle of life!

Tree: I also contribute to the circle of life's food web by dropping my leaves during the fall season. When the air temperature starts to cool my leaves begin to drop in and around the pool. There are many animals who either eat my falling leaves or who hide under them. Once the leaves hit the water, algae begins to grow on them and different bacteria, acting as decomposers, start to break down the plant materials. There are many animals who can now feed off of this decaying plant material.

Narrator: Well, it is November now, and you can see that the pool has water in it [point to pool]. The larvae of the marbled salamanders have been growing as they eat small aquatic invertebrates and even other smaller salamander larvae. You can tell a salamander larva from a tadpole because the salamander larvae have an elongated body, bushy external gills, and a dorsal fin. It has been two months since the marbled salamander laid the eggs in the dry pool bottom. If the pool starts to dry up at this point, the larva will start to transform into adults. They will then leave the pool and go into the forest to live under rocks and logs. If water remains in the pool then the larvae may take another 5 or 6 months to transform into adults. During this fall season we have heard the murmur of the temporary pool.

[play snow blizzard sounds. From behind curtain, pull the remaining leaf cover from the temporary pool]

Tree frog: Whoa, that was some winter blast. There is plenty of water in the temporary pool now but it is also covered with a thin layer of ice. Don't worry, many of the animals that are living in the pool don't mind the cold. Some of them will bury deep into the mud and leaves just waiting for the first warm days of late winter and early spring. During late winter you can start to hear wood frogs, chorus

frogs or spring peepers. Their concert is eagerly anticipated during longer late-winter days when it seems as though spring will never come. They bring a message of renewal and hope as the snow melts.

Narrator: An evening in February.

Spotted Salamander: [enter from stage left carrying the egg mass on the stick, walk to center of pool and stoop down] Hi, I'm a spotted salamander. I have been living all year long in my forest home but now I am headed to the temporary pool. I'm from the same family of salamanders as the marbled salamander. [looking at the audience] Does anyone remember what that family is called? That is correct, the Ambystomatids, the mole salamanders.

As the winter rain fills the pool the adult spotted salamanders enter the pool. The males arrive first and deposit several spermatophores on the leafy bottom. Females arrive shortly afterward and are courted by the males, which use touch and chemical cues to position females over one of their spermatophore packets. Some have even called this a salamander dance.

The female attaches one to several gelatinous egg masses containing up to 250 eggs to a stem or twig in shallow water [show the stick with egg mass and then place it in the pool next to the curtain]. The jelly-like eggs are clear or opaque white. Egg masses that appear green have a symbiotic alga inside individual eggs that may increase the oxygen supply to developing embryos.

Narrator: It is March now and during the spring season we are hearing the temporary pool begin to shout with excitement.

[from behind curtain pull the stick with egg mass from the pool]

Raven: The crystal-clear early spring pool is seething with activity now. It has been about 2 weeks since the spotted salamanders laid their eggs and the larvae are starting to hatch. Just like the marbled salamander larvae they have elongated bodies and tails with bushy gills on the side of their head. The life of a spotted salamander larva is not easy. Newts, larger marbled larvae, and a variety of water insects like giant water bugs and dragonfly nymphs will eat not only the eggs but also the larvae.

Mouse: That's right. Wading birds, raccoons, skunks and even snakes will eat both spotted larvae and adults. I come down to the pool to get water sometimes and I have to watch out for the snakes myself. [snake appears and looks toward the mouse, mouse looks at snake and quickly drops below curtain.]

Narrator: June

Box Turtle: I come down to the pool to get water. I'm a box turtle so I can close up inside my shell when I sense trouble. During the summer months I often run into spotted salamander metamorphs leaving the pool. They have lost their external gills and now breathe with lungs. These new metamorphs are migrating away from the pool and will quickly disappear into the leaf litter of the forest floor to grow up and someday return to the pool only for breeding.

[replace outer circle leaves in pool]

Narrator: July

Tree: The summer pool might look like a stagnant mud hole now, but there are still water bugs, recently transformed frogs, toad tadpoles and other living things. [Firefly flies across the stage and gets nabbed by the frog] As the water continues to dry up you are likely to find eggs, cysts and other resting stages of animals under the leaves ready to emerge and start the cycle anew when the rains come again. This is a specialized habitat for a variety of wildlife species that do not occur in permanently flooded water. [butterfly flits across the stage area] Because they fill seasonally and dry up at some time during the year they are unable to sustain fish populations which is why they are such good breeding places for our friends the amphibians.

[fade in the theme song from *As the World Turns* again and continue to allow it to play under the narrator's last dialogue.]

Narrator: Well we have come full circle in our Soap Opera at the Temporary Pool. There has been much drama and the pool has spoken to us sometimes softly and sometimes loudly! There are many animals that depend on the temporary pool for a breeding site such as the frogs and mole salamanders who we have met today. People are the biggest threats to the temporary pools. The pools are sometimes drained or filled when people do not understand their importance. As we learned in our story today, the trees are also important for shade and leaves that contribute to the food chain. We hope now that you have met some of the characters at the temporary pool you will help us to spread the word about its importance!