

The Bactograph Kit

Taking pictures with bacteria

See page 1 for storage instructions

Experiment Components

| COMPONENT | NUMBER | STORAGE |
|-----------------------|--------|------------------|
| Bactograph culture | 1 | 4°C |
| Starter plate | 1 | 4°C |
| Bactograph media tube | 10 | 4°C |
| Petri Dish | 10 | Room Temperature |
| Innoculation loop | 11 | Room Temperature |
| Battery LED | 30 | Room Temperature |
| Paper cups | 10 | Room Temperature |
| Black paper | 1 | Room Temperature |

REQUIREMENTS

A 37°C incubator

A beaker or similar container

Boiling water

Permanent markers

Clear tape

Scissors

When stored appropriately the kit is stable for 2 weeks

Experiment Timeline

| | |
|--------------|------------------------------------|
| DAY 1 | Streak out bacteria, prepare media |
| DAY 2 | Perform experiment |
| DAY 3 | View bactographs |

Safety

The *Escherichia coli* strain used in this experiment is BW29655, which is a decedent of the *E.coli* K-12 isolate. This is a non-pathogenic strain of *E. coli*, nevertheless it is important to follow standard microbiological safety procedures when working with the bacteria.

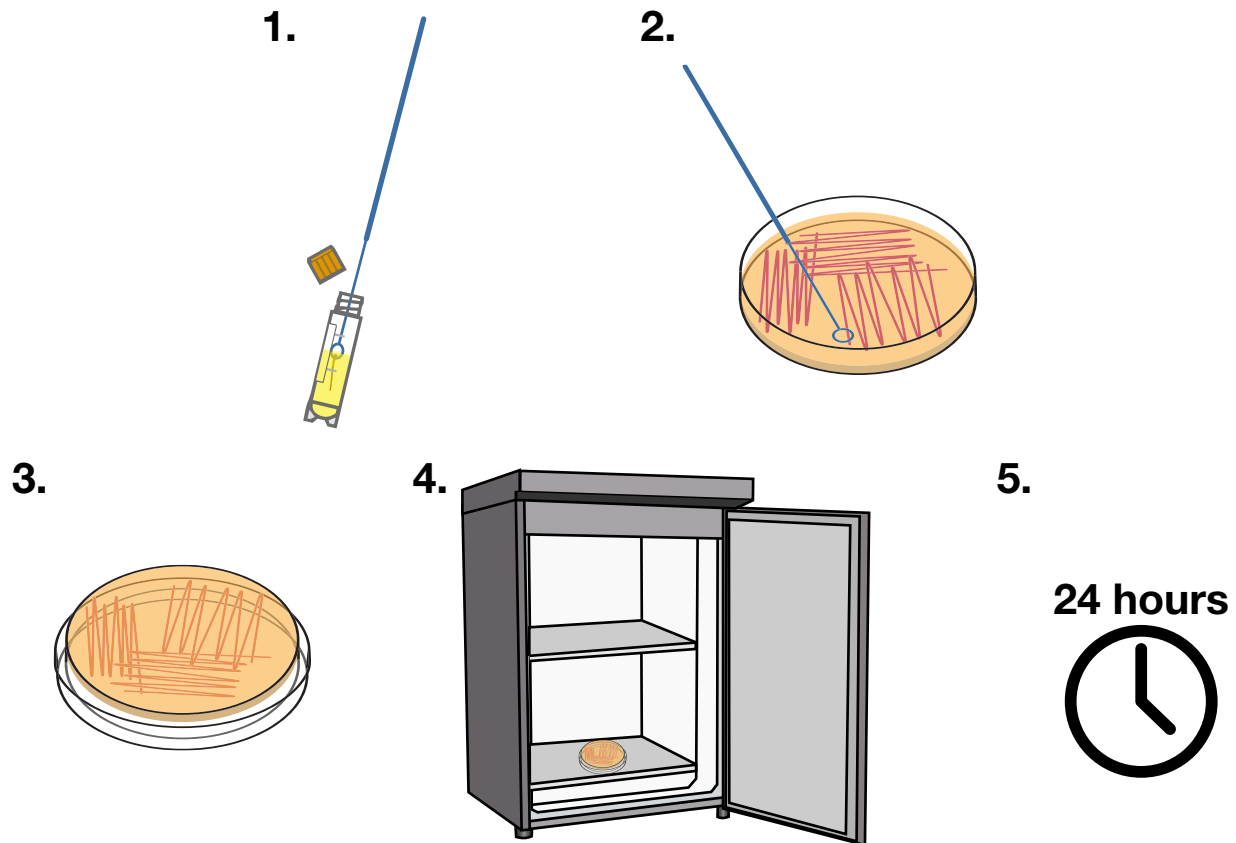
1. Gloves and goggles should be worn during the experiment and when viewing the Bactographs.
2. The lab bench should be wiped down with 10% bleach or a laboratory disinfectant at the end of the experiment.
3. After finishing the experiment or handling the Bactographs students should wash their hands.
4. All materials that come in contact with the bacteria, including the bactograph culture, starter plate, inoculating loops, media tubes, and bactographs should be sterilized before being disposed of in the trash. Sterilization can be achieved via autoclaving or bleaching. To sterilize materials via the autoclave run the autoclave at 121°C for 20 minutes. To sterilize materials with bleach soak materials in 10% bleach for 10 minutes. Double bag media prior to disposing it in the trash.

IMPORTANT

The starter plate and bactograph media contain the antibiotics ampicillin and spectinomycin. Students and teachers who are allergic to the antibiotics ampicillin, penicillin or related other antibiotics should not partake in this experiment.

Teacher Protocol

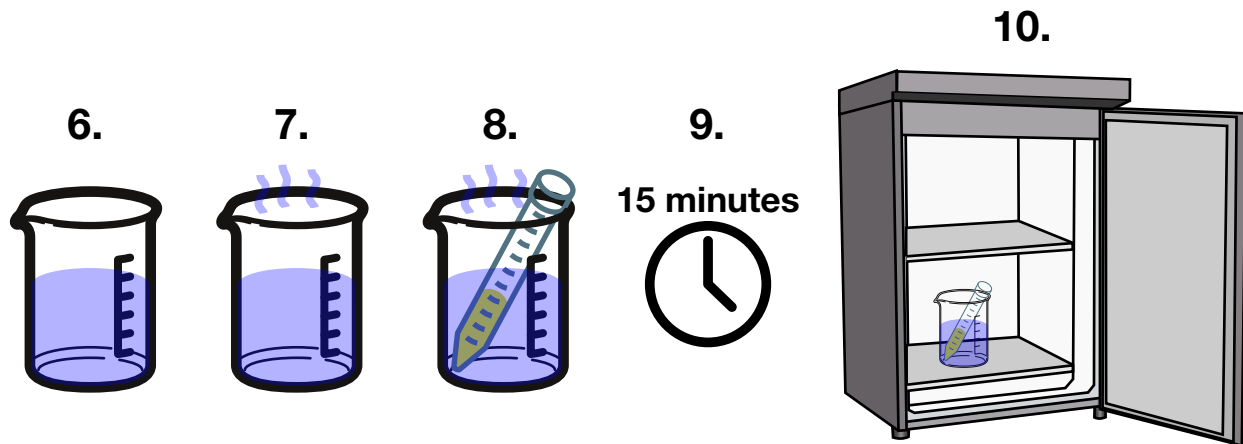
PREPARE THE STARTER PLATE



1. **INOCULATE** the loop with bacteria by inserting it into the agar stab.
2. **STREAK** the loop across the starter plate to spread the bacteria. Use a light touch to prevent gouging of the media.
3. **COVER** and **INVERT** the plate.
4. **PLACE** the plate in a 37°C incubator.
5. **INCUBATE** the plate for 24-48 hours.

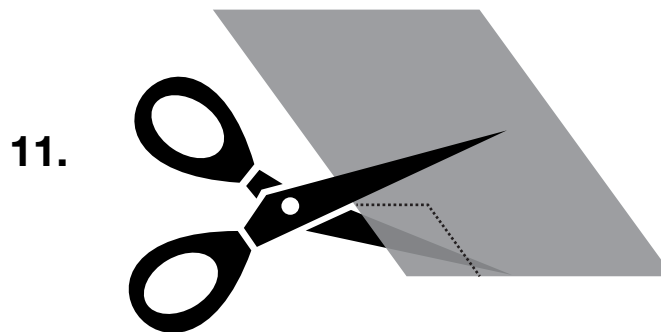
Teacher Protocol

PREPARE THE MEDIA



6. **FILL** a beaker with 5 inches of water.
7. **BOIL** the water using a microwave or hot plate.
8. **SUBMERGE** the bactograph media tubes in the beaker.
9. **WAIT** 10-15 minutes for the media to melt.
10. **STORE** melted agar at 37°C to prevent solidification.

PREPARE THE TRANSPARENCY



11. **CUT** the provided sheet of transparency paper into 2.25 inch squares.

FAQ

Can I do this at room temperature?

No, we have found that bactographs do not develop at room temperature

How long can I store the Bactograph kit?

The Bactograph kit is stable for at least two weeks when stored as specified

What is the antibiotic resistance of the bacteria?

The Bactograph strain has two plasmids, which convey resistance to 100µg/mL spectinomycin and 50µg/mL ampicillin.

Other Resources

The creation of bacterial photography

Levskaya A., et al. Nature, 438. 441 - 442 doi:10.1038 <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v438/n7067/full/nature04405.html> (2005).

Blog post: <http://www.nature.com/news/2005/051121/full/news051121-8.html>

3 color bacterial photography

Fernandez-Rodriguez, J., Moser, F., Song, M. & Voigt, C. A. Nature Chem. Biol. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1038/nchembio.2390> (2017).

Blog post: <https://www.nature.com/news/light-sensitive-e-coli-paint-a-colourful-picture-1.22026>

Biobuilder: This complimentary synthetic biology curriculum with a lesson plan focused on computational modelling of bacterial photography

Book: Hart, N. K. P., Rachel Bernstein, Karen Ingram, Kathryn M. (2015). BioBuilder.

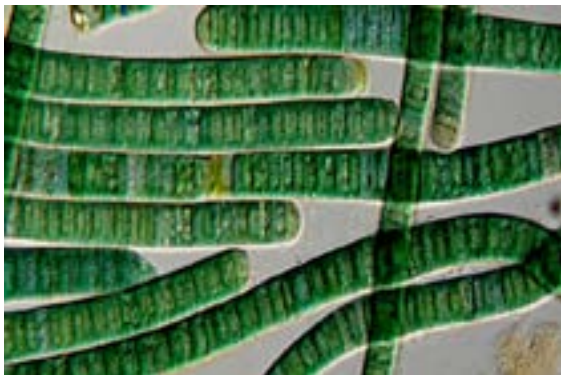
Website: <http://biobuilder.org/picture-this/>

Introduction to bacterial photography

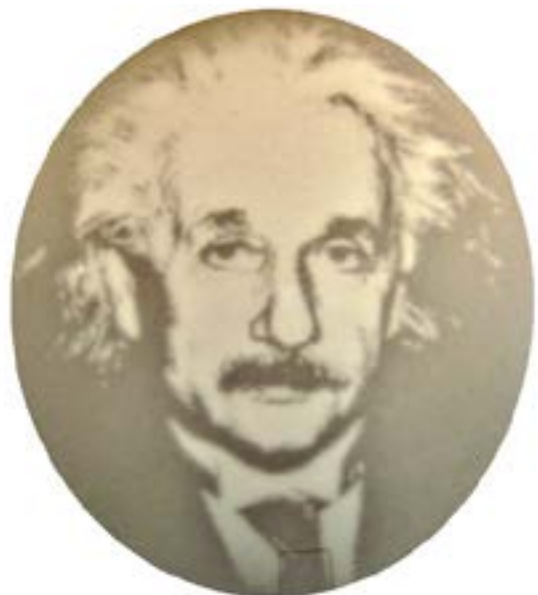
Bacteria have developed a variety of methods to see light. This enables bacteria to determine what time of day it is, if they are on the surface of a pond, or if they are experiencing harmful UV radiation. A specific protein was identified in 1998 in the pond scum *Synechocystis* PCC6803 that was found to bind the light absorbing molecule phycocyanobilin (PCB) and sense when the molecule absorbed light, enabling the bacteria to detect red light.

A few years later a group of synthetic biologists, who are engineers that create new bacteria using genetic transformation, wanted to create bacteria which could take photographs. To accomplish this they needed to make bacteria that changed color when exposed to light, imitating old photography film. To make the common laboratory bacteria *E. coli* see light, they took the portion of the previously discovered *Synechocystis* PCC6803 protein which senses light, and combined it with a *E. coli* signalling protein. After transforming the bacteria with DNA encoding for this combined protein as well as the enzymes which produce PCB, the bacteria were able to sense light. The synthetic biologists then transformed a second piece of DNA, which caused the bacteria to change colors after sensing light. This created a completely new bacteria that had been engineered to take pictures.

To take a photograph, billions of these bacteria were embedded within agar in a petri dish. A image was then shown on the plate, and bacteria which sensed they were in the presence of light changed color, and bacteria in the dark did not. In this way the bacteria replicated the image that had been shown on the plate, creating the first bacterial photographs.



Synechocystis PCC6803



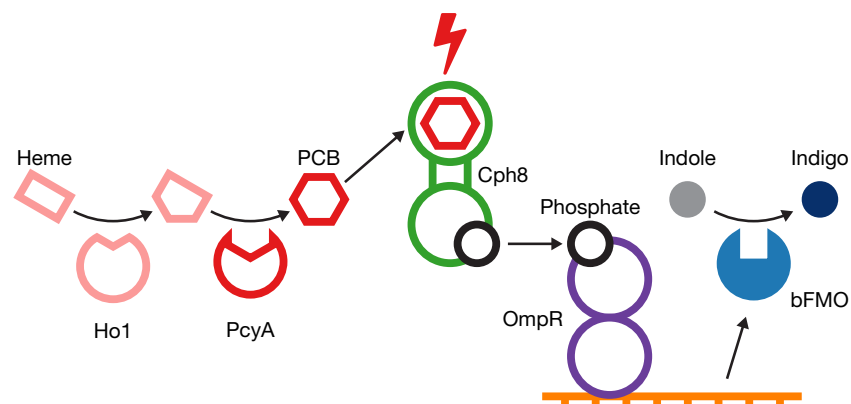
A bacterial photograph of Einstein

Introduction to the Bactograph

To take bactographs, we created a next generation bacterial photography strain. It was made by transforming two separate plasmids which contain the following enzymes, signalling proteins, and promoter encoded on their DNA.

1. The enzymes PcyA and Ho1 convert the naturally occurring molecule heme into PCB, a light absorbing molecule.
2. The signalling protein Cph8 binds PCB, and when PCB absorbs light, Cph8 becomes active by changing its shape. Activated Cph8 binds OmpR and chemically modifies it by adding a phosphate molecule to it.
3. The signalling protein OmpR is activated when Cph8 chemically modifies it, activated OmpR binds DNA and activates transcription from the P_{ompF} promoter.
4. The P_{ompF} promoter is activated by OmpR and transcribes the bFMO gene.
5. The enzyme bFMO converts the naturally occurring molecule indole to indigo, the blue pigment found in jeans.

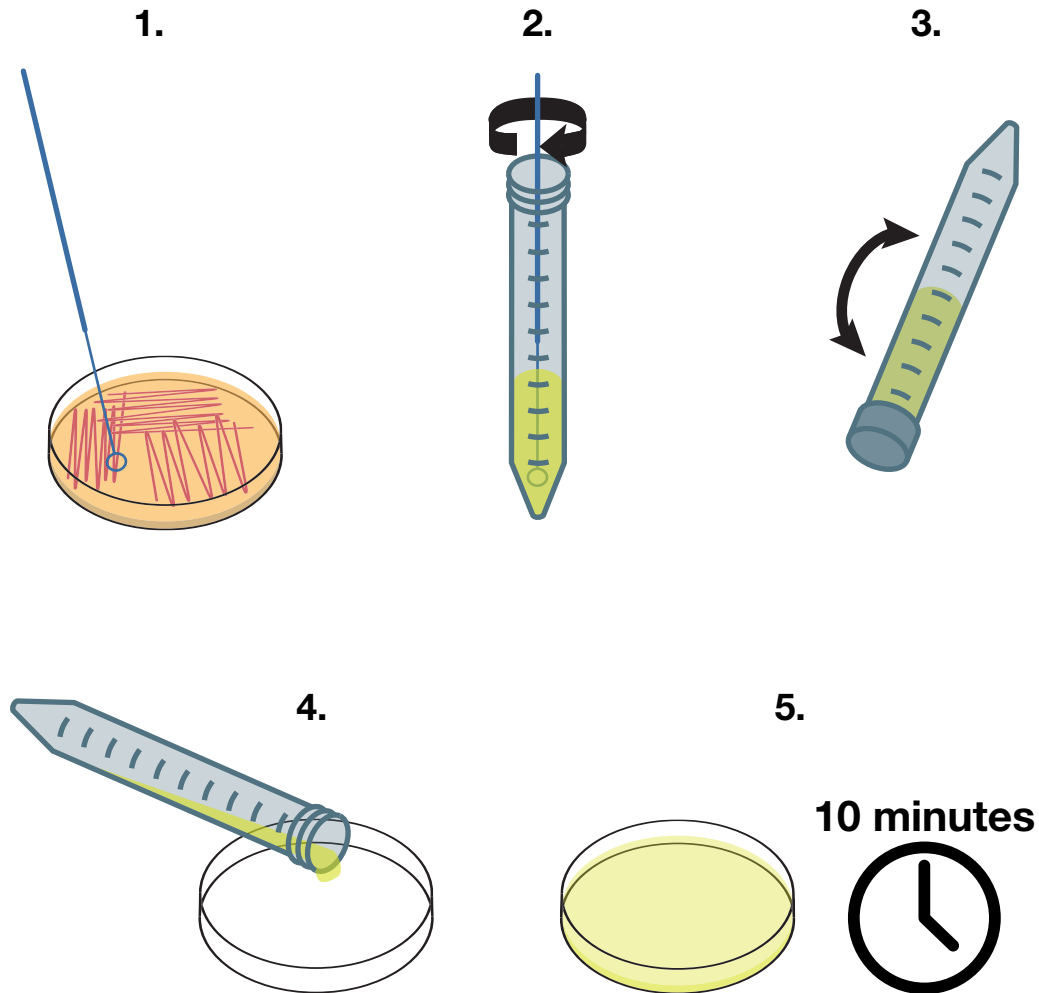
Each of the proteins, enzymes and promoter listed above was selected with a specific well-defined purpose, and when combined allowed the bacteria to see light and then decide to change color in response, creating bacterial photographs. This is a striking demonstration of the ability of synthetic biologists to use genetic transformation to create new bacteria with new capabilities. In addition to using these proteins to capture photographs, synthetic biologists are using them to mimic the patterns of gene expression seen in development in order to better understand how we grow from a single cell to a complex differentiated organism. They are also used in biotechnology to control the expression of the enzymes used to produce chemicals in large bioreactors.



The enzymes, signalling proteins and promoters used in the bactograph

Student Protocol

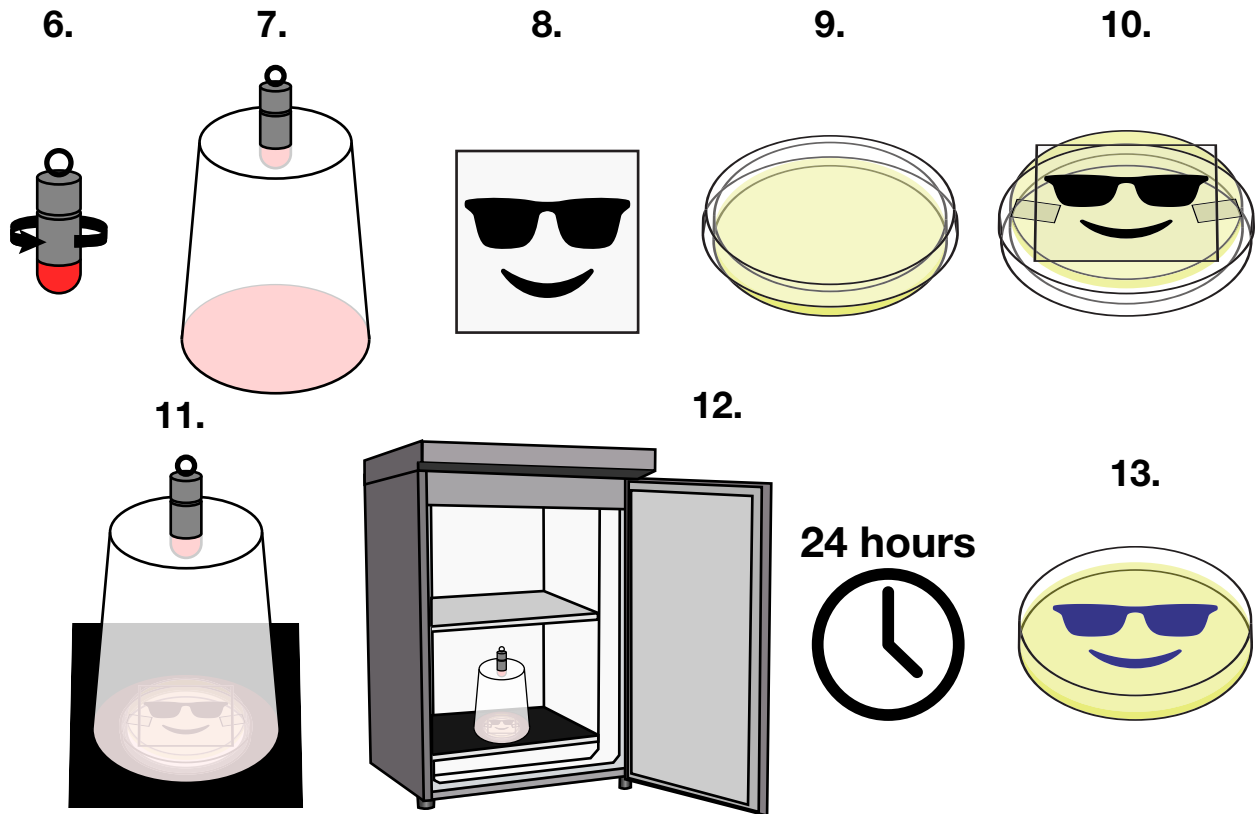
PREPARE THE BACTOGRAPH PLATE



1. **SCRAPE** bacteria off the class plate with an inoculating loop until the loop is filled with bacteria.
2. **SHAKE** off inoculating loop in media for 10 seconds.
3. **CAP** the media tube. **INVERT** the media tube quickly for 20 seconds to mix bacteria.
4. **POUR** media into the bottom of the petri dish.
5. **WAIT** 10 minutes for media to solidify. **TILT** plate gently to check if media has solidified.

Student Protocol

TAKE THE BACTOGRAPH



6. **TURN ON** the LED by unscrewing it slightly, removing the plastic divider, and then screwing it back together tightly.
7. **INSERT** the LED into the hole of the paper cup to illuminate the inside of the cup.
8. **DRAW** the image you want to take a Bactograph of on the sheet of transparency. Dark, thick lines will result in a better bactograph.
9. **CAP** the petri dish once it has solidified in step 5.
10. **INVERT** the petri dish and **TAPE** the transparency to the bottom.
11. **PLACE** the petri dish upside down on the sheet of black paper in the incubator, **PLACE** the cup upside down over the petri dish.
12. **INCUBATE** the bacteria for 12-24 hours.
13. **REMOVE** the transparency and **VIEW** the bactograph by placing the petri dish on a white surface. Bactographs can be parafilmed and stored for several months at 4°C.