

Gyotaku – fish printing

Background: Review Chapter 6: *Fish Anatomy* in Going Fishing

Standards:

Duration: 30-45 minutes

Materials: Fish of Nebraska books, Fish Anatomy Poster & gyotaku kit (available on loan from the Youth Fishing Program: includes fish replicas, tempera paint, paint rollers, newsprint), newspaper or plastic to protect work area, paper towels, crayons or colored pencils, disposable plates for dispensing and rolling paint.

Objectives: Students will simulate an art form established by Japanese fishermen centuries ago and illustrate the coloration of fish according to real life characteristics.

Background: Gyotaku (pronounced ghee-oh-tah-koo) translates to ‘fish rubbing’ and dates back to the early 1800s. Fisherman in Japan began this tradition to record their catch. Gyotaku enabled them to document the size and type of fish caught while still allowing them to sell or eat the fish. Also, certain fish in Japan are revered, and fishermen would take rubbings of these fish and then place them back in the water. Prints were brought back and displayed in the homes of the fishermen either on walls or in journals. These prints were used as conversation pieces and to relate proud and heroic stories of the catch. Today we have taxidermy and cameras to record our catches. However, gyotaku is still practiced and has developed into a fine art form.

Preparation: Prepare the work area by covering it with newspaper or plastic. Put a small amount of paint into several plates. Divide students into small groups and distribute a fish replica, paint tray and roller to each group.

Warm up: Have the students ever heard of “fish tales”? Fishermen are known to tell exaggerated tales of the “huge” fish they caught. In Japan, fishermen recorded the actual size of the fish they caught (long before cameras) with the art known as gyotaku. Explain that gyotaku literally translates to “fish rubbing” and that, although it isn’t necessary now (because of cameras and taxidermy), it is still a very popular art form. You may want to show examples of gyotaku prints made by professional artists. A Google Images search of “gyotaku” will provide many examples.

Activity:

1. LIGHTLY coat the paint roller in tempera paint – students may even want to roll out some of the excess paint onto the newspaper before applying it to the fish replicas.

2. LIGHTLY cover the fish replica with paint using the roller. A thin layer of paint works best to show the details of the scales and fins.
3. Place the newsprint on top of the fish. Without shifting the paper, GENTLY rub with finger tips over the entire form, making sure to find all the edges and all fins.
4. Carefully peel the paper off the replica and set aside for several minutes to let the paint dry.
5. OPTION: Groups can switch fish until everyone gets a print of each type of fish.
6. OPTION: Using the Fish of Nebraska book, have students locate their fish and using crayons or colored pencils color in the life colors of their fish.

Wrap up: Review the anatomy of the fish by labeling fins and other external features.

Thoroughly rinse paint rollers and fish replicas and lay out to dry.

OPTIONS:

1. Have students select one of their fish and illustrate a habitat that that they think would be suitable.
2. Make fish prints on t-shirts using acrylic paint.
3. Make fish prints using real fish. Partially frozen fish work well. Pat the fish dry, and use table salt to help remove slime.

