

Print a Fish (You Can Gyotaku, Too!)

OBJECTIVES

The student will identify fish body parts and create an impression of a fish.

BACKGROUND

Sometime in the early 1800s fish printing, or *gyotaku*, originated in Japan or China. Fishermen in Japan used fish printing to keep records of their catches. Fish printing has been practiced as an art in the U.S. for about 40 years.

MATERIALS

- one or more fresh or thawed fish
(*Use a fish with large, visible scales.*)
- fabric paints
- small and medium fairly stiff brushes
- modeling clay
- newspaper
- prewashed T-shirts (*for paper printing use newsprint or rice paper*)

ACTION

1. Wash the fish carefully but thoroughly with soap and water to remove the mucus. Pat dry the fish taking care not to rub off the scales. Clip any sharp spines with pliers.
2. Place the fish on several layers of newspaper. Plug the anus of the fish (the opening just in front of the anal fin) with a small wad of newspaper.
3. Students adjust the fish so that it lies the way they want it to look in their fish prints. They identify the fins and spread fins out into lifelike positions. Students support fins with modeling clay to hold them in place.
4. Brushing head to tail, students apply a light coat of paint to the fish, avoiding the fish's eye and the modeling clay. After the fish is covered with paint, students brush from tail to head.
5. Students place their hands inside the T-shirts as if they were going to put them on. They grasp the inside of the T-shirt to create a flat surface for printing. Students place T-shirts carefully on top of the painted fish and press firmly, head to tail. Warn them not to move the T-shirt around too much once they've set it in place.
6. Students carefully peel their printed T-shirts off the fish from head to tail.
7. Students use fabric paints to fill in the fish's eyes and to outline or add detail to their prints.



A fish print is a lifelike rendition of a real fish.