

# Fish Printing

## Suggested Number of Volunteers: 2-3

## Materials in Activity Tub:

- Rubber fish (12)
- box of newsprint
- paint rollers
- paint trays
- table cloths (2)
- permanent marker
- tempera paint

## Materials Provided by the Group:

- None

## Objectives

Participants will:

1. Learn about the ancient art of fish printing (Gyotaku).
2. Learn about Nebraska fish species.

## Background:

Gyotaku (gyo=fish, taku=rubbing) originated hundreds of years ago-before the “camera age” as a method to scientifically record the size and unique characteristics of the endless array of aquatic species. Gyotaku is a traditional form of Japanese fish printing, dating from the mid-19th century.

As the story goes..... an old samurai fisherman caught a fish and laid it on the riverbank while he continued fishing. For the long walk back to the village , he wrapped the fish in a cloth to sling over his back. When he unwrapped the fish in the village, the muddied side of the fish had left a beautifully detailed “mirror-image “ of the fish.

As the name suggests, inks or paints are applied directly to the surface of the prepared fish. When the paper or fabric is impressed upon the fish and lifted , a detailed image is produced- fin for fin, scale for scale.

Although real (dead) fish are often used for fish printing, replica fish are also used. This activity uses replica fish.

Traditionally, black block ink and brayers (rollers) were used. In this activity, tempera paint and fabric paint rollers are used.

## Procedure:

### *Before the Activity*

1. Place the table cloths over the table, you may want to secure the table cloths to the table with tape or clothes pins.
2. Fill the paint trays with tempera paint. Place one or two rollers in each paint tray.
3. Spread the rubber replica fish out along the table.
4. Get newsprint out and ready for participants.

### *The Activity*

1. Invite participants to choose a fish and a color of paint.
2. Instruct participants to roll a small amount of paint onto the surface of the fish. Cover the entire surface of the fish - if any

# Fish Printing, continued

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areas are left without paint, the print will be incomplete. If you put too much paint on the fish, the print will not work.

3. Once the fish has been covered in paint, lay the piece of newsprint on top of the fish. Using both hands, slowly rub the newsprint covered fish without moving the newsprint. Once you have completely rubbed the fish, carefully lift the newsprint off the fish. The image of the fish should now be on the newsprint.

*Following the Activity:*

Clean all fish, paint trays, and rollers completely. Do not leave paint on equipment.

