

Japanese Fish Printing (Gyotaku)

Materials and Equipment:

- thawed fish (flat fish work best) or rubber models
- newspaper (for lining surfaces)
- water-based ink or fabric paint
- paint brush and/or rollers
- printing materials: rice paper, newsprint, or other moisture-tolerant paper, t-shirts, etc.

Time: ~1 hour

History

Gyotaku (pronounced ghio-TA-koo), or fish printing, may have originated in Japan or China in the early 1800's. Fish prints have been used in Japan for over 100 years to keep records of fish catches and to learn about fish biology. This record-keeping technique became an art form that has spread around the world.

The art of Gyotaku helps students understand and appreciate the beauty and diversity of fish characteristics. It is also good review of fish morphology. Use the same technique to print shells, leaves, or other items you find during your field study.

Fish prints are easy, inexpensive, and don't require any sophisticated equipment. They make a great art project and can add to an exhibit or display about the field study.

Instructions:

General Directions:

1. *For real fish:* Clean the outside of the fish with soap and water as completely as possible. Rub gently so you don't remove the scales. Use paper towels to dry the fish well. The cleaner the fish, the better the print.
For rubber models: move to step 2.
2. Place the fish on a table covered with newspapers.
3. Brush or roll on a thin, even coat of ink or paint.
4. Carefully lay the material over the entire fish. Use your fingers to gently press the material over the surface of the fish, being careful not to move the material too much since this may cause double prints. Carefully lift off material.
5. Use a small brush to paint the eye if desired.

Fish Printing T-Shirts

1. Practice on paper first!
2. If using real fish, follow instructions for cleaning the fish.
3. Place a piece of newspaper between the front and back of the t-shirt and lay flat.
4. Brush on a thin, even coat of fabric paint. Leave the eye area blank.
5. Very carefully, lay fish in the desired location on the shirt. With your hand or piece of paper towel, press firmly and evenly over the entire body of the fish including the fins. Make sure you don't press so hard that the internal organs come out of the fish.
6. Lift fish off the shirt carefully. Clean fish in soapy water and place on newspaper to dry.
7. Use a small brush to paint the eye.

Clean up

***Please wash all fish, paintbrushes, and rollers until they are clean.**

***All scrap paper can be discarded.**

***Please wipe down all surfaces and floor if necessary.**

***Please return all items to the blue bin.**

***THANK YOU!**