

Lesson: Gyotaku

Phase of learning

Kindergarden - Pre Primary, Years 1 - 2, Years 3 - 4

WA Curriculum

K-10 Humanities and Social Sciences, K-10 The Arts

Region

North Coast, Gascoyne Coast, West Coast, South Coast, Indian Ocean Territories

Summary

Students will create a fish print using a species of bony fish.

Outcomes

- Students will create a fish print using a species of bony fish.
- Students will explore how records have been kept from the past.
- Students will learn an ancient technique, Gyotaku, to create an artwork.

Duration

60 minutes

Preparation

Background information about fish anatomy can be found in the Fact Sheet: [Fish Anatomy](#).

This lesson requires a number of whole fish (they may be gutted). The same fish may be used by more than one student. However, you may want more than one fish so that each student can complete the activity in a timely manner. You could either catch your fish recreationally (ensuring you follow bag and size limits), or purchase from your local fishmonger. Low cost species include sand whiting, leatherjackets and sea mullet. Flounder produce good results for the printing, although they are a little more expensive. Take note of the species (if purchasing) so you can pass the correct information onto students for the purposes of labelling their fish.

You will also require access to the TED-Ed video listed in the Recommended resources below (an internet connection is required).

Materials required:

- One or more fresh or thawed fish
- Non-toxic tempera paint
- Paint brushes
- Modelling clay/Plasticine
- Push pins
- Paper towels
- Newspaper
- Butchers paper

Recommended resources

Dodge, K.E. Gyotaku: The ancient Japanese art of printing fish, <http://ed.ted.com/lessons/gyotaku-the-ancient-japanese-art-of-printing-fish-k-erica-dodge>.

Western Australian curriculum

LEARNING AREA	STRAND	SUB-STRAND	CODES
Humanities and social sciences	History	Exploring ideas and improvising with ways to represent ideas	ACHASSK013 , ACHASSK045
The Arts	Visual Arts	Knowledge and understanding	ACAVAM107
The Arts	Visual Arts	Developing skills and processes	ACAVAM111

Steps

1. Use the [TED-Ed Video](#) (~4 mins) to introduce the art of 'Gyotaku' or fish printing.
2. Introduce students to the fish species they will make prints for.
3. Divide students into groups (depending on the number of fish you have available) and distribute all printing materials to each group.
4. Wash fish gently with water to remove slime. Pat the fish dry with paper towels, taking care not to rub off the scales.
5. Place the fish on several layers of newspaper. Plug the fish's vent (the opening in front of the anal fin) with a small wad of soft tissue. If the fish has been gutted, you will need to fill the empty cavity with soft tissue.
6. Slowly and gently fan out the fins and tail into a life-like position. Plasticine/clay may be used under the fins to support them, to allow for a better printing surface and to hold the mouth open. You can hold the fins down by pushing pins straight into the clay.

7. Using a paint brush, apply a thin layer of paint to the fish – taking care to avoid the fish's eye and the clay. Brush from head to tail so you don't disturb the scales.
8. Place paper carefully over the fish, holding with one hand so it does not move and gently press paper down over the entire fish, making sure you have pressed all parts from head to tail. Take care not to move or crease the paper.
9. Peel back the paper slowly, starting at one end and continuing across.
10. Allow the prints to dry. Students then paint in the eye with a small brush.

Additional resources

Sutera, C. Educational Uses of Gyotaku or Fish

Printing, <http://ocean.si.edu/blog/educational-uses-gyotaku-or-fish-printing>

Related resources

[Fact Sheet: Fish Anatomy](#)

Linked External Resources

[Gyotaku: The ancient Japanese art of printing fish](#)

Keywords

bony fish, fish anatomy, features, history, Japan, fish printing, Japanese fish printing