



# Fish printing with Nasco's Gyotaku fish replicas



## Objectives

Students will...

- Learn how to make their own gyotaku prints using fish replicas
- Discuss Japanese culture
- Learn about fish anatomy and different fish species

- Be encouraged to learn about other types of nature printing
- Increase their awareness of ecological problems and the environment around them

## Background Information:

### GYOTAKU: “gyo”= fish —“taku”= impression(pronounced guh-yo-tah-koo)

Gyotaku, a fish impression, is a great way to excite your students about everything from Japanese culture to printmaking. A science teacher can use gyotaku to introduce a fish anatomy unit. For a geography teacher, it's a great way to introduce the students to Japanese culture; for the art studio, gyotaku has endless avenues as a printmaking technique.

Gyotaku is a technique used by Japanese fishermen to record the size and species of a trophy fish they have caught. The Japanese fisherman returns from the sea and takes his fish to the market to sell. On the rare occasion that the fisherman catches a large fish worthy of record, he hires an artist to make a print of the fish using water-based inks or paints. Since the paint is water-based, or more importantly nontoxic, the fish can then be rinsed off and sold in the market. Each year the Japanese hold contests and use gyotaku as the proof of a trophy catch.

Although gyotaku originated in Japan over 100 years ago, it has more recently become popular in the United States. Along the docks in San Francisco, and also in other parts of the country, artists wait for the sport fishing boats to bring their catch back from the ocean. Many tourists on these fishing boats choose to have prints made of their fish, rather than having it stuffed and mounted by a taxidermist.

## Instructions

1. Select a few iridescent acrylic paints or inks and place a small bit of each of them onto an old plastic lid (great time to recycle those old margarine or whipped topping lids). Make sure to add some white to your colors. Besides having a shiny quality, the white seems to lighten up all the other colors and make them more dynamic on black paper. Set the plastic lids with paints or inks around the room like stations and let students move from one station to another, depending on the colors they wish to use. For black paper, you can use anything from ordinary black construction paper to the finest of Japanese rice paper. **HINT:** Keep the paper at least as thin as construction paper so it can be easily molded around the fish without creasing.
2. Place your fish replica on a clean surface — flat side down.
3. Coat your brayer lightly with paint or ink and roll evenly onto the fish. This may also be done with a brush, which makes it easier to vary the colors of paint/ink directly on the fish. If using a brush, be sure to brush from the head to the tail. A brush may also be used to accent the gills, fins, or the eyes. Make sure you only apply a thin layer of paint on the fish, otherwise the detail of the scales won't show up.
4. Move your fish to a clean area to avoid any paint that may have gotten on your work surface.
5. Take a sheet of paper and lay it **on top of** the fish. Be sure to hold the paper still with one hand so it doesn't move and cause a double image or smudging. Holding the paper in place with one hand, use the other hand to transfer the image to paper by rubbing the entire fish surface. Remember to rub all the areas — head, tail, and fins.





6. If you are printing on fabric, do the opposite. Lay the fish paint-side-down on the shirt and use a gentle rolling motion to transfer the print of the fish onto the shirt. Be sure to rub down on the tail, fins, and head. Also, lift up the dorsal fin and pull down on the anal fin to make sure their images print.

**NOTE:** It's a good idea to do a couple of practice prints using this method before printing on the actual piece of fabric or T-shirt.

7. Now embellish. Take black and accent the details of your fish, like the fins, tail, and eyes. Try a little yellow and blue paint or ink on a tray and see how many different colors of green you can create to add seaweed to your print. Run the seaweed both behind and in front of the fish for a more realistic underwater scene. Add rocks and even a fish hook hanging down from the top with a big, juicy worm dangling from it.

8. You and your students will be delighted at the instant results. Everyone can be successful. This is also a hands-on anatomy lesson that your students will never forget. What are the different fins on a fish used for? What does the gill cover do? Where is the lateral line on a fish and why do they have one? If you paint a fish going one direction, does the print come out with the fish going the other direction? Why?

## Gyotaku variations

Gyotaku started as a way of keeping a record and evolved into a fine art form. The artist starts with the print of the fish and then embellishes it to make the print more beautiful. Gyotaku as an art form has endless options:

- You can print on anything from cheap newsprint to the finest Japanese rice paper.
- You can use textile inks and print on T-shirts, sweatshirts, and fabric.
- You can print just a single fish on your paper or you can group your fish like a school and use this opportunity to teach overlapping to your students.
- Dynamic results can be achieved on black paper using iridescent, glitter, or metallic paints. These will imitate the natural shine of the scales on a real fish.
- You can use various media to do your gyotaku. Try acrylic paints, textile inks, block printing inks, and even tempera paints to make your prints.
- For embellishment, the sky's the limit. You can even cut out several gyotaku and make a collage from them.

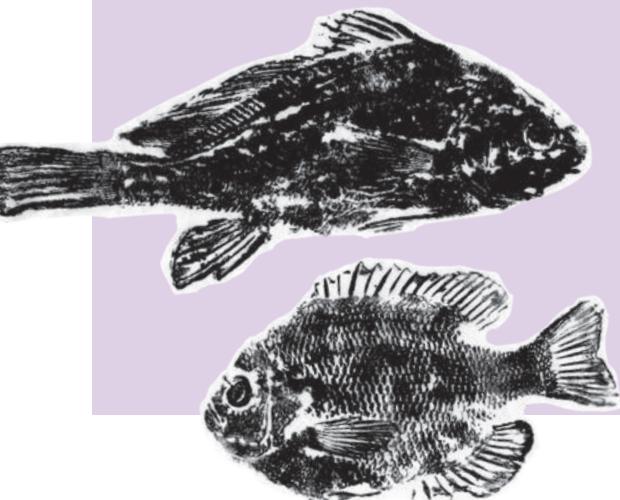
## Helpful hints

- Usually it is best to stay in one color scheme when you are printing so you don't have to rinse off the fish. You want to keep the fish rather dry, so if you do rinse it, be sure to dry it off completely.
- If you are printing on white paper, let your print dry for a few minutes and then add a wash of watered-down paint to look like water in the background. Once again, the iridescent paints are great for this because the shiny quality looks so much like real water. While you are painting your fish, rinse your brush off in a little jar of water. Save this water to paint the background of your picture, applying it freely with a big, soft brush. Don't brush over the print too much or you will begin to dissolve it.

**NOTE:** Follow all directions for textile paint or inks for heat setting your fish prints on fabric.

# Scaling the heights of fashion!

There's nothing "fishy" about these fabric printing ideas. Create colorful, realistic images of fish with Nasco's gyotaku replicas. Molded from actual specimens, these replicas are accurately detailed and easy to use. Print on T-shirts, backpacks, placemats, curtains, jeans — you decide. An excellent interdisciplinary project, these replicas are sure to cause excitement in the classroom.



## Materials list

- Nasco White All-Media Drawing Paper, 9" x 12", 80 lb. ([9728257](#))
- Nasco Water-Soluble Block Printing Ink, Set of 11, 5-oz. Tubes ([9728095](#))
- Big Kid's Choice™ Paint Brush Box Set ([9724278](#))
- Nasco Acrylic Paint, 4 Pints - Metallic Set ([9720559](#))
- Foam Paintbrushes, 1" wide, box of 10 ([9715397](#))

## Fish Replicas

- Freshwater Drum (right side) ([9711405](#))
- Freshwater Drum (left side) ([9712005](#))
- Sea Star ([9712121](#))
- Blue Gill ([9712120](#))
- Perch ([9712122](#))
- Carp ([9713262](#))
- Flounder ([9714343](#))
- Trout ([9714344](#))
- Skate ([9714345](#))
- Large Mouth Bass ([9716673](#))
- Grey Perch ([9716674](#))
- Piranha ([9719197](#))
- Salmon ([9719198](#))
- Walleye ([9720624](#))

