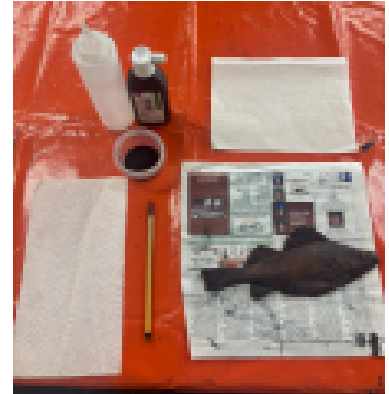


# Gyotaku: The Traditional Japanese Art of Fish Printing

## Materials/Tools:

- Fish Molds (or real fish)  
*\*Please inquire with the museum about the possibility of borrowing fish molds.*
- Sumi-ink (Can get via Amazon)
- Water *\*If the ink is too thick, dilute it with water.*
- Brush or a small sponge
- Washi paper or Calligraphy paper
- Ink Container
- Paper towel



Note: Wear clothes that people don't mind if they get messy

## Instruction: **How to Make a Gyotaku Print**

### 1. Prepare Fish molds (or real fish)

Start by thoroughly cleaning and drying the fish molds and/or real fish.

Any moisture or slime left on the scales will prevent the ink from sticking properly.

### 2. Positioning for (real) fish

Place the fish on a flat surface (ideally on a piece of felt or a padded mat). Use small pieces of clay or paper towels to prop up the fins so they stay spread out.

*\*This step is not required when using fish molds.*

### 3. Apply the Ink

Using a brush or a small sponge, thinly and evenly coat one side of the fish with ink. Be careful not to use too much, or you'll lose the fine detail of the scales.

*\*Use a paper towel to dab away any areas with too much ink.*

### 4. The Printing Process

Carefully place your paper (Washi paper works best!) onto the inked fish.

Gently press down with your fingers, making sure to rub over the head, body, and all the fins. Try not to let the paper shift.

### 5. The Reveal

Slowly peel the paper back, starting from the head to reveal your print.

### 6. The Final Touch

Once the ink is dry, use a small brush to hand-paint the eye to bring your fish "to life."

7. [Optional] You can add some information beside the fish printing to make it look like an authentic Gyoraku print.

- Fish Name
- Fish Length / Fish Weight
- Date/ When you caught the fish
- Place/Where you caught the fish
- Your Name



## Overview

### 1. What is Gyotaku?

**Gyotaku** is a traditional Japanese method of fish printing that dates back to [the mid-19th century](#). The word itself comes from "**gyo**" (fish) and "**taku**" (stone rubbing/impression).

Originally, it was used by fishermen and samurai to record the exact size and species of their catch, long before the invention of the modern camera.

During the late Edo period, fishing was embraced as a form of mental and physical training for the Samurai. Devastating a strategy and battling a powerful fish was seen as a reflection of Bushido—the Way of the Warrior. When a Samurai landed a prize catch, they would create a *gyotaku* print to present to their feudal lord as proof of their skill, often receiving rewards in return.

### 2. Historical Background

The oldest known record of Gyotaku was found in 1839 in present-day Yamagata Prefecture. It was a print of a Japanese whiting (Sillago) caught by the local lord of the Shonai clan. For samurai, fishing was not just a hobby but a form of mental and physical training, and the prints served as "certificates" of their skill and achievement.

### 3. More Than Just a Record

Today, Gyotaku is admired worldwide as a unique fusion of **nature and art**. It represents a deep respect for the ocean and a way to honor the life of the fish. Instead of being a mere record of a catch, it is a celebration of the beauty and spirit of the natural world.

### Pro-Tips & Important Reminders

- **The "Less is More" Rule:** Beginners often apply too much ink. A thin, dry coat captures the beautiful texture of the scales much better than a thick, wet one.
- **Keep the Underlay Clean:** After each print, remember to **blot any excess ink** off your mat or underlay with scrap paper. This prevents the "ghost" of the previous print from staining your next clean sheet.
- **Handle with Care:** Encourage participants to use their fingertips to feel the texture through the paper. This tactile connection is what makes Gyotaku so special!
- **Safety First:** If you are using real fish, remind everyone to wash their hands thoroughly after the activity and ensure the workspace is sanitized afterward.
- **Leave Room for Creativity:** Remind your students that every print is unique! Smudges or slight imperfections are just part of the artistic "personality" of their work.