

The *Gyotaku* 魚拓 Project

This Senseis' Voices article is brought to you by Elly-Kate McEwan and Natalie Bell of NSW.

Last year, Elly-Kate sensei and Natalie sensei incorporated two key learning areas to inspire and engage their students to learn more about their subjects; Japanese and Marine Studies/Science. In this article they kindly share how they did it.



As a Japanese teacher, I am passionate about creating engaging learning opportunities for students that highlight the connection their Japanese studies have to other key subject areas.

When I was working at Sydney Secondary College, Balmain Campus I collaborated with a Marine Studies/Science teacher to create “The *Gyotaku* Project” where students work together in groups to learn about the traditional Japanese method of printing fish.



These are the steps in which the project was organised:

Step 1 – Excursion to the Sydney Fish Market

Students visited the Sydney Fish Market as part of an excursion with their Marine Studies teacher to choose a variety of fish species to use for the project.

Step 2 – Study of the fish species in the science laboratory

Students studied the features and specifications of each fish with the Marine Studies teacher.

Step 3 – What is *Gyotaku*?

Students learnt about what the word “*gyotaku*” means by studying the two kanji characters 魚拓 and watched a TED-ed video on the history of *gyotaku* led by the Japanese teacher.

Gyotaku: The ancient Japanese art of printing fish – K. Erica Dodge

Step 4 – *Gyotaku* Making

Students made the *gyotaku* prints in the science laboratory. They assembled into groups and were given all the tools they needed such as ink, paper, gloves, and fish. They were directed by both teachers on how to create the prints by pressing the paper softly on the fish. Using a thin *washi*-style paper is recommended!



Students can also sign their name in Japanese on the *gyotaku* print or if you have time can create their own *hanko*-style stamp or signature as another step of the project.

This was overall a very successful project where students were engaged and inspired by how *gyotaku* connects their Marine Studies and Japanese studies to each other.

I would like to thank The Japan Foundation, Sydney for asking me to share my positive experience in implementing the “*Gyotaku* Project” and hope to inspire other teachers to try

it!

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Editors' Note: One of the commonly asked questions is what Japanese fishermen do with the fish after they print gyotaku. According to articles on the internet, they often clean the fish by washing off the ink, and then eat it. The ink is harmless and safe so the fish is even tastier if you eat it looking at your gyotaku print!