
LESSON 3

FISHING FOR LIVING DINOSAURS

Activity 1: Design a Decoy

During ice fishing, speakers lower their decoys through holes in the ice and wait to spot a sturgeon's shadow as it swims along the bottom of the lake. The decoys catch the sturgeon's attention, drawing it in to be harvested. It's believed that sturgeon swimming behavior and attraction to the decoy is more driven by curiosity than hunger. In this activity, students will learn about sturgeon-spearing traditions and about decoys as both functional (for spearing sturgeon) and artistic (as a work of art). They will construct their own decoy out of recyclable materials.

Activity Preparation

Gather a variety of supplies that can provide diverse resource materials for students. Bottle caps, buttons, and glass beads to serve as eyes; foam, cardboard, rubber, and thin plastic cutting board material for the fins; and string, pipe cleaners, and straws to form the barbels. Try to use materials that would be heading to the garbage or recycling bins.

Pre-Reading

In "Saving Our Sturgeon," have students read Chapter 3 Sidebar: The Lake Winnebago Sturgeon Spearing Tradition p. 36-37.

Key Vocabulary

Decoy: an item used to lure sturgeon into view.

Spear: a specialized fishing tool used to harpoon and capture large sturgeon.

Files Needed

- Decoy Images (slideshow)
- Artist Statement (handout)

Materials Needed

Suggested art supplies, including:

- Hot glue gun
- Tacky glue
- Newspaper
- Paper mâché paste
- Paintbrushes
- Paint (acrylic or washable tempera)
- Cardboard tubes cut to various lengths
- Cardboard, foam, rubber, cloth, thin plastic, or other scraps for fins
- Recycled bottle caps, buttons, plastic fragments, glass beads, or other objects for eyes
- Pipe cleaners, straws, or other materials to serve as barbels or similar features
- String
- Stick
- Hole punch
- Paper reinforcements to "fix" any misplaced hole punches

Objectives

After participating in this activity, students can:

Design an artistic decoy that demonstrates the expressive qualities of media, tools, and techniques and that also replicates the style of traditional decoys used for sturgeon spearing.

Describe the characteristics of their created decoy artwork using art and design vocabulary.

Wisconsin Academic Standards

Assessed

Art

A.A.Cr.9.m, A.A.R.11.m

Great Lakes Literacy Principles

Principle 6

The Great Lakes and humans in their watersheds are inextricably interconnected.

Activity Steps

1. Begin by showing the slideshow of the decoy images. Ask the students what they think they are made of and what features stand out to them. Remind them that speakers use all sorts of materials to create decoys to lure fish, including bone, wood, kitchen supplies, coffee cans, toys, etc.
2. Now that the students are inspired, have them start their own artwork by selecting a cardboard tube for the body of the sturgeon decoy. Using the scraps, have them cut out fins. Then attach them with a hot glue gun. Have them take newspaper scraps and dip them in the paper mâché paste before pressing them around their fish. Cover and let dry.
3. Now let's add some detail. Have students use recycled materials and tacky glue to add missing anatomical features.
4. Let students use paint brushes to make the decoy their own. Remember to add some red, a classic sturgeon lure color.
5. Now that their decoy is complete, let's make it into a workable lure. Have students punch holes in their decoy. Consider balance here – too close to either end, the decoy will be floppy! Multiple holes may be helpful. In case of any misplaced holes, use paper reinforcements. Then thread a string through the hole(s) and tie it in a knot around a stick.
6. Now, direct students to write an accompanying artist statement with the activity handout.