

# PIER NOTES

**A take-along guide for fishing with kids**

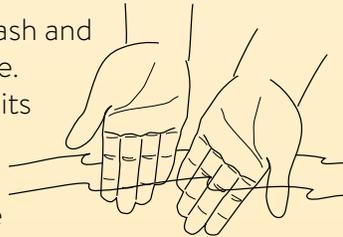
Handling Fish, Hook Removal, Fish Anatomy, and Identification

## Handling Fish Properly

How long can YOU hold YOUR breath? With no lungs, fish must run water through their gills to get oxygen. Keep fish in the water as much as possible.

### Keep the slime on the fish... not on your hands

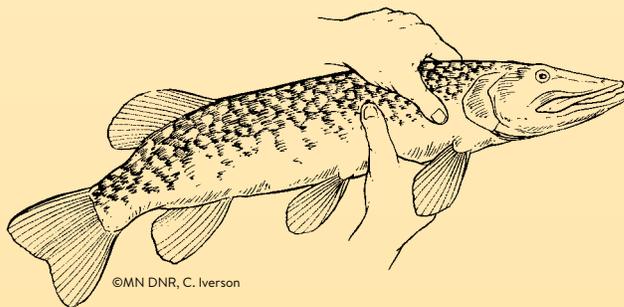
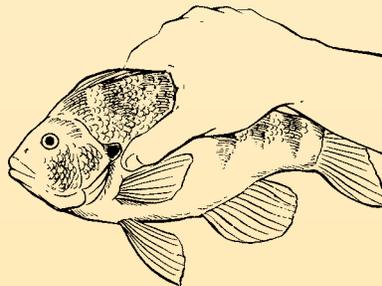
Before handling a fish, wash and wet your hands in the lake. A fish produces slime on its body to protect it from disease. If your hand wipes away the slime, the fish can become sick and die.



### Grasping the fish

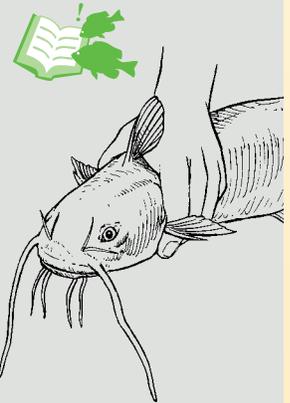
Grasp fish firmly, but be careful not to squeeze it too tightly.

Handle most fish by grasping around the body. Be ready for the fish to thrash.



### Did you know?

Many people think it's the whiskers on a catfish or bullhead that can sting you, but it's not true. The whiskers (or *barbels*) are for feeling and tasting at the bottom of the lake. It is their sharp spines that can hurt you.



### Watch out for spines!

Most fish have bones (called *spines*) in their fins to help them work properly. To avoid getting poked, simply "pet" the fins down before grasping the fish.

### Be careful of gills and eyes

Don't grasp a fish by putting your fingers into its gills or eye sockets. This will injure or kill the fish.



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For more information about handling fish properly, see Chapter 6: Lesson 1 in the MinnAqua Leader's Guide, *Fishing: Get in the Habitat!* [mndnr.gov/minnaqua/leadersguide](http://mndnr.gov/minnaqua/leadersguide)

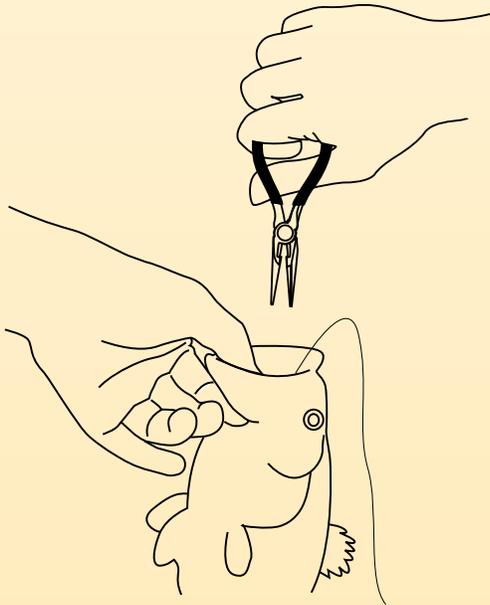
# Hook Removal and Release

## Was it a gulp or a nibble?

Grasp the fish firmly, and notice where your hook is located. This will help you decide the next step.

## Removing the hook

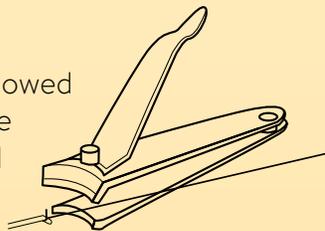
If the hook is not swallowed too deeply, use a pliers, forceps, or a hook remover to carefully and quickly back the hook out and remove it from the fish. Be prepared for the fish to thrash.



## Cut your losses



If the hook has been swallowed deeply, it is best to cut the line close to the hook and leave the hook in the fish. A fish has powerful stomach acids that will dissolve the hook over time.



## Did you know?

Using circle hooks can decrease the chances of the fish swallowing the hook deeply. Circle hooks are special hooks with points that angle in toward the shank. You can also make your hook barbless by simply pinching the barb down with needle-nosed pliers.



## Practice fishing C-P-R

No—don't give the fish mouth-to-mouth! Practicing “**Catch, Photograph, and Release,**” will help to ensure that there will be plenty of fishing fun for you and others in the future.



## Easy does it

Release a fish by gently easing it back into the water and allowing it to swim away. Move it forwards and backwards to help run water over its gills. NEVER THROW a fish back into the water.

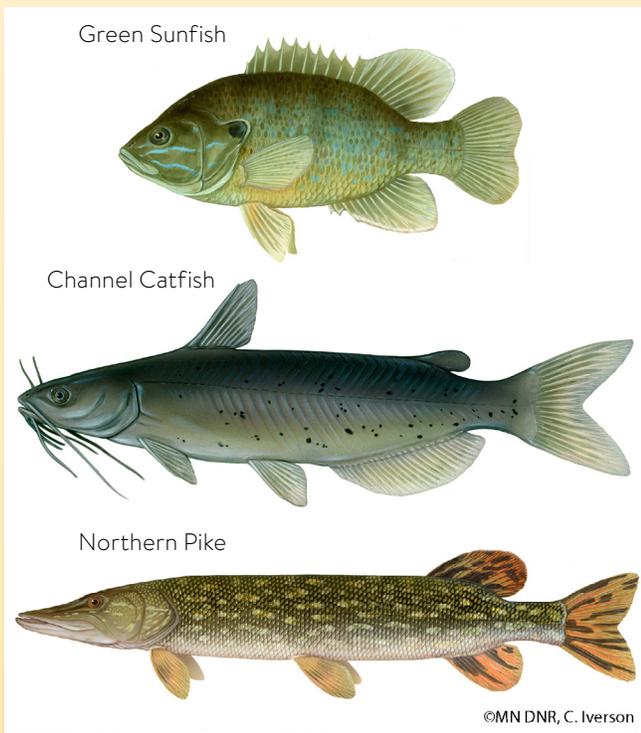
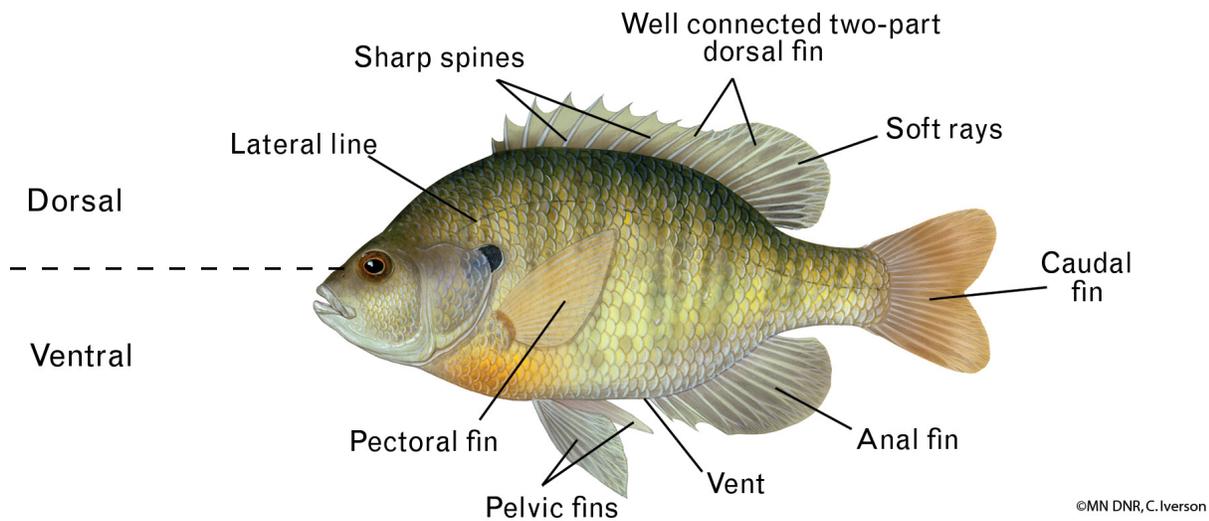


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For more information about removing hooks and releasing fish, see Chapter 6: Lesson 1 in the MinnAqua Leader's Guide, *Fishing: Get in the Habitat!*  
[mndnr.gov/minnaqua/leadersguide](http://mndnr.gov/minnaqua/leadersguide)

# External Anatomy of a Fish

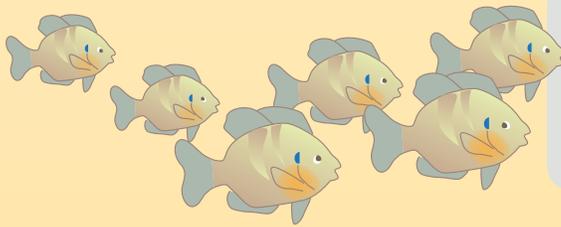


## Body shape and fin placement

A sunfish is pan-shaped, has a well-connected, two-part dorsal fin, and has fins placed for maximum maneuverability.

A catfish has a one-part dorsal fin with a hard spine, a small adipose fin near the tail, smooth, scaleless skin, flattened undersides, and sensory barbels (whiskers) to make it well-suited as a bottom-feeder.

An ambush predator like a northern pike has a torpedo-shaped body, a one-part dorsal fin, teeth, a flattened, duck-billed snout, and fins placed for bursts of speed.



## Did you know?

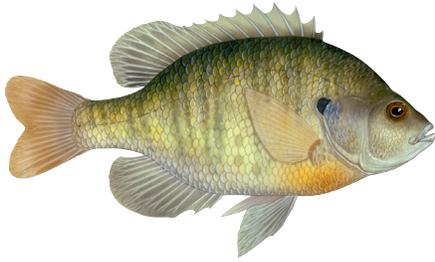
One reason catfish do not have scales is so they can have taste buds on the outside of their body.



# Which Fish is Which?

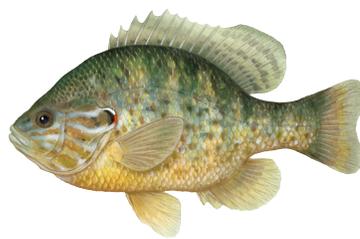
You just caught a fish! But what is it? With over 160 different kinds of fish in Minnesota, it can be challenging to tell them all apart. Here are a few of the most common fish you are likely to catch when pier fishing.

**Bluegill**

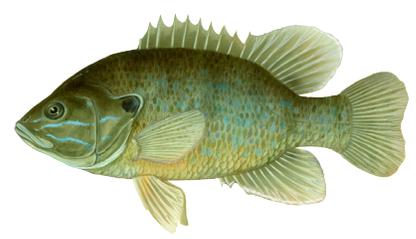


**Bluegill “look-alikes”**

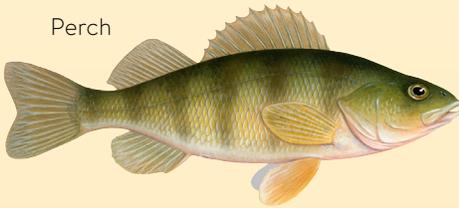
Pumpkinseed



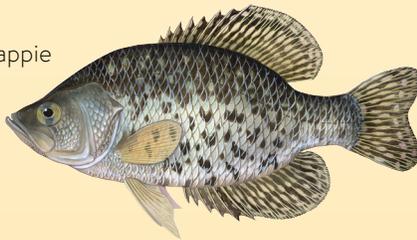
Green Sunfish



Perch



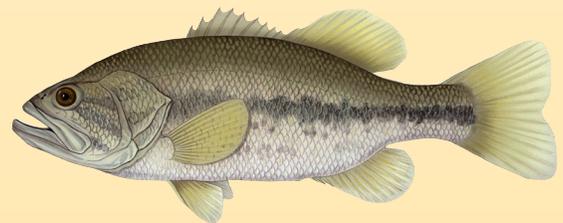
Crappie



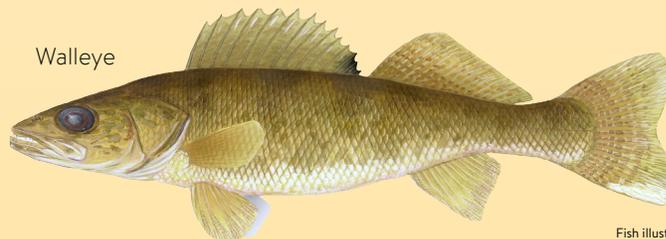
Bullhead Catfish



Largemouth bass



Walleye



## Did you know?

Bluegills can be notoriously difficult to identify. They often interbreed with other members of the sunfish family producing strange hybrids. Even pure bluegills can vary greatly in coloration depending on their age, diet, and season. Bluegills, pumpkinseeds, green sunfish, and even crappies and bass are all members of the “sunfish” family.



Fish illustrations ©MN DNR, C. Iverson

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For more information about identifying fish, see Chapter 2: Lesson 3 in the MinnAqua Leader’s Guide, *Fishing: Get in the Habitat!* [mndnr.gov/minnaqua/leadersguide](http://mndnr.gov/minnaqua/leadersguide)

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