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# Fish ID Dichotomous Key Activity

(for use with TPWD Fish ID Cards only)

Use this activity to help people to classify and identify an unknown species. Naturalists and biologists use keys to determine an animal or plant species.

The activity can be used with both youth and adults and can be used simultaneously for both the freshwater and saltwater fish species depicted on the Fish ID cards – you do not have to separate the fish cards by habitat.

It is also a great activity for a “station” at a fishing event.

## Materials:

- Two or more copies of the TPWD Angler Education 5” x 7” Fish ID cards OR a set of the large Fish ID Flash cards (from the Instructor kit.)
- Copies of the dichotomous key
- Black Sharpie Pen
- Scissors
- Clipboards (optional for groups)
- Tape (optional)

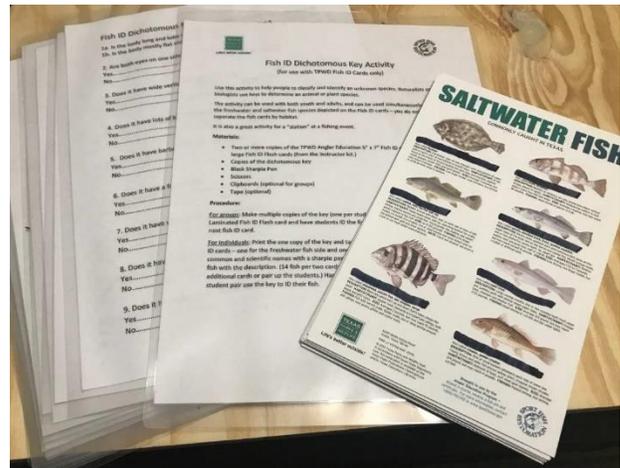


Photo by Michael Scherer, TPWD Volunteer Area Chief

## Procedure:

**For groups:** Make multiple copies of the key (one per student or student pair.) Hold up the Laminated Fish ID Flash card and have students ID the fish card you are displaying. Repeat for next fish ID card.

**For individuals:** Print the one copy of the key and tape to a table. Use two 5” x 7” Common Fish ID cards – one for the Freshwater fish side and one for the Saltwater Fish side-- mark out all common and scientific names with a sharpie pen but leave the descriptions; then cut out each fish with the description. (14 fish per two cards. If you have more than 14 students, use additional cards or pair up the students.) Hand one fish to each student OR distribute one Fish ID card to each student and let them choose a fish to ID; have the student or student pair use the key to ID their fish.

# Fish ID Dichotomous Key

1a. Is the body long and tube shaped?.....go to Question 5

1b. Is the body mostly flat and wide?..... go to Question 2

2. Are both eyes on one side of its head?

Yes.....Southern Flounder

No.....3

3. Does it have wide vertical stripes on its body?

Yes.....Sheepshead

No.....4

4. Does it have lots of black spots all over its body?

Yes.....Black Crappie

No.....Bluegill Sunfish

5. Does it have barbels (whiskers) on its face?

Yes.....6

No.....8

6. Does it have a forked tail?

Yes.....Channel Catfish

No.....7

7. Does it have wide vertical stripes on its body?

Yes.....Black Drum

No.....8

8. Does it have one spot on its tail?

Yes.....Red Drum

No.....9

9. Does it have many spots all over its body?

Yes.....10

No.....11

10. Does it have pink coloring running from head to tail?  
Yes.....Rainbow Trout  
No.....Spotted Sea Trout

11. Does it have many small thin stripes running down its body from head to tail?  
Yes.....White Bass  
No.....12

12. Does it have a forked tail?  
Yes.....13  
No.....14

13. Does the mouth extend past its eye?  
Yes.....Largemouth Bass  
No.....Guadalupe Bass

14. Does it have a pinkish color on top?  
Yes.....Sand Seatrout  
No.....15

15. Is the body mostly gray in color?  
Yes.....Freshwater Drum  
No.....Atlantic Croaker