Fish detectives

Hoʻomaluhia Botanical Garden · Ages 4–10 with a grown-up

MISSION 01 / FIND TWO FISH TO COMPARE

Stand back from the lake edge with an adult. Look only: no feeding, touching, or wading.

You can complete this activity without joining the fishing program.



REFERENCE PHOTO · NOT A GARDEN SIGHTING

Midas cichlid

Amphilophus citrinellus

Look for a deep, oval body. Colors vary: orange, pale, dark, or mixed.

Why color can fool us

An orange fish is not automatically a koi. Use several clues together.



REFERENCE PHOTO · NOT A GARDEN SIGHTING

Tilapia

Photo: Mozambique tilapia (Oreochromis mossambicus)

Many are gray or dark. Look for the long fin along the back and the rounded body.

A surprising parent

Mozambique tilapia mothers shelter eggs in their mouths. Several tilapia species live in Hawaiʻi.

BONUS CLUE / KOI ARE CARP

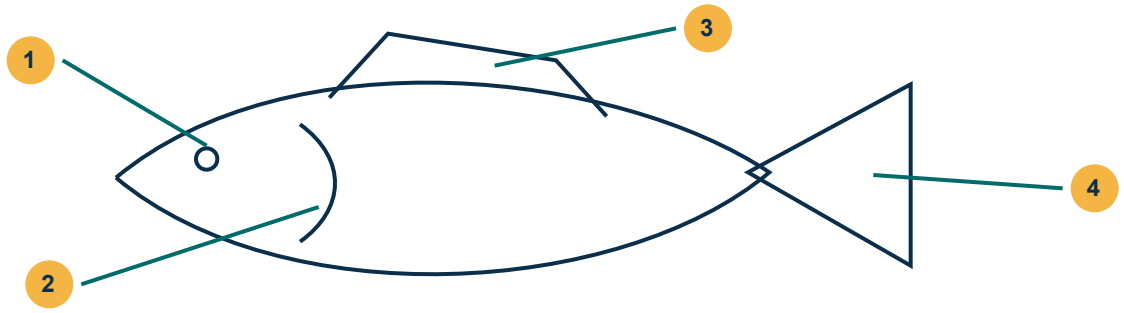
Carp have fleshy whiskers called barbels near the mouth. If you cannot see enough detail, write “unknown fish.” Never lean over the water to check. These fish groups are introduced.

My lakeside discovery lab

Name: _____ Date: _____ Water: calm / rippled / cloudy

MISSION 02 / LABEL A FISH

Word bank: eye · gill cover · dorsal (back) fin · tail fin



1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____

MISSION 03 / COUNT, COMPARE, WONDER

Pick one patch of water. Count visible fish for 20 seconds, then repeat.

Count A: _____ Count B: _____ Did fish move in or out? _____

SKETCH ONE FISH + ONE CLUE

My fish was: orange / dark / mixed / another color It swam: alone / with others

I wonder: _____

FINISH THE SCIENCE SENTENCE

“I think this is a _____ because I noticed _____.”

PARENT ANSWERS: 1. Eye. 2. Gill cover. 3. Dorsal fin. 4. Tail fin. Fins help movement and control.

Photo: Midas · George Chernilevsky · Public domain (click for source).
Photo: Tilapia · Bryan Harry / NPS · Public domain (click for source).

Species reference photos are not a complete lake inventory. Fish may vary in age, color, and shape.
Learning sources (tap): Hawai‘i DLNR fish profiles; Florida Museum midas cichlid profile.

Activities by Hawai‘i Bucket List · Facts checked Nov. 24, 2026 · Give wildlife space.