

Name _____



What Does a Catfish Look Like?

Catfish are some of the most interesting-looking creatures in the water. These fish are named for their whisker-like barbels, which stick out from around their mouths. The barbels look like a cat's whiskers, but they have an important job. They help catfish feel their way through dark or muddy water and find food.

Catfish come in many different sizes. Some, like the candiru catfish, are tiny—less than an inch long! Others, like the Mekong giant catfish, are huge and can grow up to 10 feet in length and weigh more than 600 pounds. Most catfish are somewhere in between, growing to about 12 inches and weighing a few pounds.

When it comes to colors, catfish are masters of camouflage. Many are gray, brown, or green, which helps them blend into the muddy riverbeds where they live. Some species, like the channel catfish, have spotted patterns, while others, like the blue catfish, have a shiny bluish color. Their scaleless skin is smooth to the touch and covered with a slimy coating that helps protect them from disease.

Catfish also have some unique body features. Most have strong, sharp spines near their fins that they can use for protection. If a predator tries to grab them, the spines can poke and scare it away. These fish are bottom-dwellers, meaning they spend a lot of time at the bottom of rivers, lakes, and ponds, searching for food like plants, insects, and small fish.

With their wide mouths, whisker-like barbels, and scaleless, smooth bodies, catfish are perfectly designed for their watery habitats. Whether they are small enough to fit in your hand or as big as a boat, these fascinating fish come in all shapes and sizes!