

Fish of the reef: lesson 1 of 3

# Shapes and mouths

What a fish's body tells you  
about how it lives



A parrotfish in Negros Oriental. Photo: MCP



# A reef full of fish

Coral reefs in the Philippines are home to hundreds of kinds of fish, in every shape, size and colour.

A fish's shape and mouth are clues. They tell you where it lives, how it swims and what it eats.

**What is the strangest fish you have ever seen?**



Clownfish in an anemone. Photo: MCP



# Body shapes



## Tall and flat

Turns quickly between corals. Butterflyfish and angelfish.



## Long and thin

Hides among seagrass or in cracks. Pipefish and trumpetfish.



## Flat on the bottom

Lies still on sand, waiting to pounce. Lizardfish.



## Huge and wide

Glides through open water, filtering food. Manta rays.



# Mouths



## **A beak**

Parrotfish scrape algae off dead coral with beak-like teeth.



## **A big gulp**

Grouper and lizardfish open wide and suck in their prey.



## **A filter**

Whale sharks and mantas sieve tiny plankton from the water.



## **A lure**

Frogfish wave a fake worm on their head to tempt small fish.



# Parrotfish make sand

Parrotfish bite off dead coral to reach the algae growing on it. The hard bits pass through them and come out as fine white sand.

Some of the white sand on tropical beaches was made this way!



Parrotfish. Photo: MCP



# Design a fish

1. Pick a habitat card: open water, coral cracks, sandy bottom or seagrass.
2. Design a fish that would do well there. Think about shape, colour, mouth and fins.
3. Give it a name, and label its special features.
4. Tell a partner how your fish survives.



# Talk about it

Why do fish that live in open water often have a torpedo shape?

How could you tell what a fish eats just by looking at it?

Which real fish is most like the one you designed?

Next time: tricks for survival



# Photos and sources

**Photos:** parrotfish, clownfish, pipefish, lizardfish, manta, whale shark and frogfish by MCP, Negros Oriental. All illustrations drawn for this lesson by Marine Conservation Philippines.

**Sources:**

- Marine Conservation Philippines.

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