MEET THEM AT PLUMPTON PARK ZOO

KOI

Cyprinus carpio · also called nishikigoi

Teacher & Student Fact Sheet · © **2026 Plumpton Park Zoological Gardens Inc.**
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Fast facts

ANIMAL GROUP	Fish: ornamental carp (domesticated)
NATIVE REGION	Developed in Japan in the 1820s from common carp
HABITAT	Freshwater ponds
DIET	Omnivore: insects, worms, molluscs, plankton and plants
LENGTH	20–30 in
WEIGHT	Up to about 20 lb
LIFESPAN	25–30 years
STATUS	Domesticated; not an IUCN risk category



Photo: Plumpton Park Zoo

Did you know?

- Koi were developed from common carp in Japan in the 1820s.
- In Japan they are called nishikigoi: ornamental carp bred for beauty.
- Varieties are told apart by color, pattern and scales. A Kohaku is white with a red pattern.
- Koi eggs turn sticky in water and cling to underwater plants.
- The young hatch as tiny larvae just a few days after the eggs are laid.

Words to know

Domesticated: Bred by people over many generations.
Gills: Body parts that take oxygen from the water.
Spawning: Releasing eggs and sperm in the water to make young.
Omnivore: An animal that eats both plants and animals.

Think about it

1. Where and when were koi first developed?
2. What job do gills do, and what job do fins do?
3. Why is a koi called an omnivore?
4. Where do koi eggs stick after they are laid?
5. Why should pet fish never be released into the wild?

Draw it

Draw a koi from the side. Label its gill cover, tail fin and one other fin. Use symbols to show its color pattern.

Where people first raised it



First raised here · ★ Plumpton Park Zoo, Rising Sun, MD

STANDARDS · GRADES 3–4 **WRITTEN FOR GRADES 3–5**

Maryland and Delaware (NGSS): **4-LS1-1 · 3-LS3-1 · 3-LS1-1**
Pennsylvania (STEELS): **3.1.4.A · 3.1.3.C · 3.1.3.A**

Draw here

Learn more: https://plumptonparkzoo.org/koi/ · **Sources:** Niigata Prefecture, nishikigoi history; FAO, Cultured Aquatic Species: common carp; USGS Fish Health Program; South Carolina DNR, fish anatomy
Supports Maryland and Delaware (NGSS) and Pennsylvania (STEELS) standards: 4-LS1-1 (3.1.4.A) · 3-LS3-1 (3.1.3.C) · 3-LS1-1 (3.1.3.A)
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KOI

Before and after your visit

Page 2 of the Koi fact sheet · © 2026 Plumpton Park Zoological Gardens Inc.
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Before you visit · 5 minutes

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Predict: where did people first raise this animal?

Circle one:

Africa | Asia | Australia | Europe | North America | South America

2. Predict: what does it eat?

☐ plants ☐ other animals ☐ both

3. Word hunt: find these words on page 1. Put a check by each one you already know.

☐ Domesticated ☐ Gills ☐ Spawning ☐ Omnivore

Pick one word and write what it means in your own words:

_____

_____

4. My question: one thing I want to find out when I see the koi.

_____

_____

At the zoo · look closely

Watch for one minute. What is it doing?

☐ resting ☐ eating ☐ moving ☐ watching ☐ with others

Draw or describe one body part that helps it survive, and say how it helps.

Draw here

After your visit · talk it over

1. Check your prediction. Where it was first raised: Developed in Japan in the 1820s from common carp. Was your guess right?

☐ yes ☐ no ☐ partly

2. Diet check. The fact sheet says: Omnivore: insects, worms, molluscs, plankton and plants. What did you learn about how it finds or eats food?

_____

_____

3. Discuss with a partner, then write your best answer.

• What job do gills do, and what job do fins do?

_____

• Why is a koi called an omnivore?

_____

4. Exit ticket.

One thing I learned: _____

One thing I still wonder: _____

ADJUST IT

Grades K–2: talk and draw instead of writing; read the questions aloud. **Grades 6–8:** add evidence from the fact sheet and the animal page to every answer.