

ABSTRACT

Title: ICHTHYOLITERACY: HOW FISH AND FISHERIES INFLUENCE HUMAN LITERACY

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This dissertation seeks to ultimately disrupt the cultural, economic, and political apparatuses that have long made fish an inferior animal. It first examines various cultural artifacts that reveal how fish have long been ignored and neglected culturally and in humanities scholarship. I then argue that this neglect has led to a unique type of subordination that has made fish an inferior species in the animal kingdom. While this neglect is in some contexts understandable due to fish's unique habitats and behaviors, it is also perverse and troubling. To mitigate this subordination, I argue that fish hold a unique influence over human literacy and in many ways communicate in complex ways themselves. Therefore, humanities scholars, particularly those in fields connected to writing and literacy studies, have a unique opportunity to study not only fish and their influence over human literacy, but other animal species' influences, which is an ideal way to promote more applied humanities-based scholarship. Part of the reason animals, and fish particularly, have been subordinated is because they have rarely, if ever, been perceived as "writers" capable of manipulating symbols to communicate. However, in this dissertation I argue that fish and fisheries possess unique qualities that influence human literacy, a phenomenon I call ichthyoliteracy, and outline specific pathways for conducting research in ichthyoliteracy. I start this process by writing a literacy narrative that explores how fish and fisheries have influenced my literacy. I then theoretically examine how posthumanism and its relationship to writing studies can help articulate a new set of maxims for understanding animal writing, a move I believe is critical for understanding how fish influence our literacy. I then conclude the dissertation with an examination of written artifacts to identify how these signs can help us articulate the rhetorical agency of the place known as a fishery.