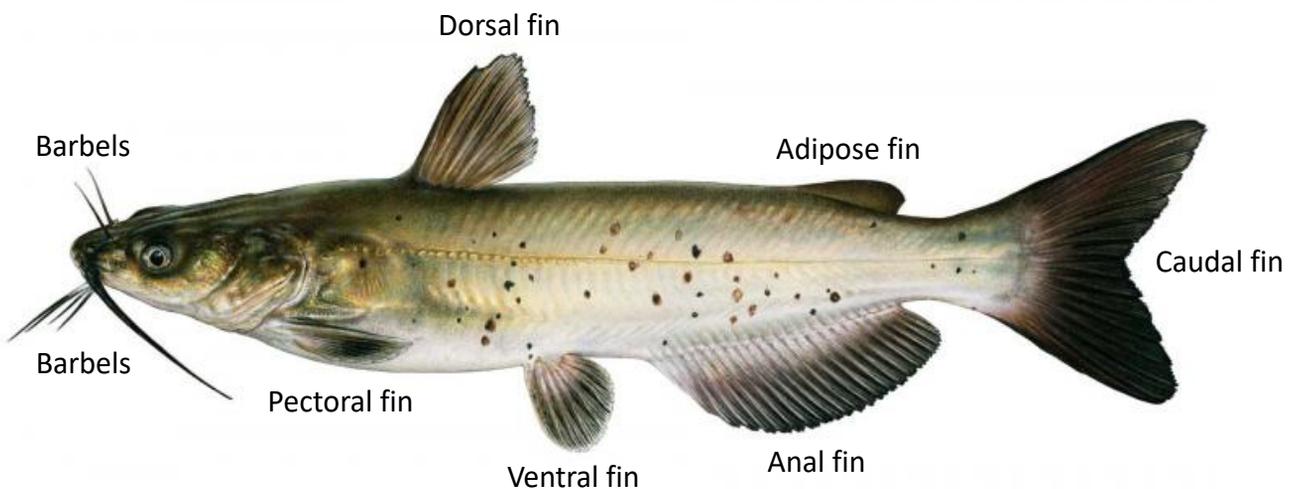




Channel Catfish

The Channel Catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*) is a smooth skinned fish that lacks scales. They are named for the barbels, or sensors, near their mouth that remind people of cat whiskers. Channel Catfish have forked tails, and their dorsal and pectoral fins feature very sharp spines that make them difficult to handle without gloves. Channel Catfish are a freshwater fish, but they can tolerate salinity levels of up to 12 parts per thousand.



Channel catfish have a variety of adaptations that allow them to succeed in the Chesapeake Bay. Their brown back allows the fish to blend in with the color of the water to hide them from predators hunting from above, and their white bellies allow them to blend in with the glare of the sun to conceal them from predators lurking from below. They have an excellent sense of smell, a strong sense of hearing, and they can sense electromagnetic fields that allow them to find food sources that are buried in the mud. Catfish even have taste buds imbedded in their skin!

Channel Catfish spawn in the spring and guard their young until they grow to be an inch long. Adults and juveniles will eat insects, worms, crustaceans, and other fish. They can grow to be quite large, reaching lengths of up to four feet. The Channel Catfish was introduced to the Chesapeake Bay from the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River watershed. Even though it is not native to this area, it is now found in all parts of the Chesapeake Bay watershed and has become an important part of the ecosystem and the culture of the region.



Channel Catfish

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

DIRECTIONS: Read the text on the previous page, then answer the following questions in complete sentences. Write your answers on the lines provided.

1. How did the channel catfish get its name?

2. Why are channel catfish dangerous to handle without gloves?

3. The channel catfish was introduced to the Bay. Where did they come from?

4. What do channel catfish eat?

5. Name some of the adaptations that allow channel catfish to thrive in the Bay.
