

# The Truth about Trout

## Observations from a Teacher and Class

*by Christian Shane      photos by the author*

Can you imagine being able to watch 200 trout feeding and swimming in the comfort of your own living room? While participating in Trout in the Classroom, my second grade students and I had this experience.

In October 2007, the Pennsylvania Council of Trout Unlimited and the Penn's Woods West Trout Unlimited Chapter donated the equipment needed to start our project. Equipment included a 55-gallon tank, a chiller and a filter system. In November, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission delivered over 200 trout eggs to our school. As we poured the eggs into the hatching basket, they were each the size of an eraser head. We watched for changes in the eggs daily as they hatched into sac-fry. Within weeks, they become fry. In January, we turned them loose in the tank to swim freely and develop into fingerlings. Then, we released them into the wild before the end of the school year.

During this development, we observed some trout behaviors that anglers can use while fishing.

### Trout Truth 1:

#### The bigger trout will eat first.

As the McKnight Elementary students fed the free swimming fry, the class observed that the bigger fish moved

to the top of the water column quickly to eat. While the little fry (under an inch in size) had to wait for leftovers. The big trout (over an inch) gorged themselves. I had to strategically over feed sections of the tank, so the little ones would get enough food.

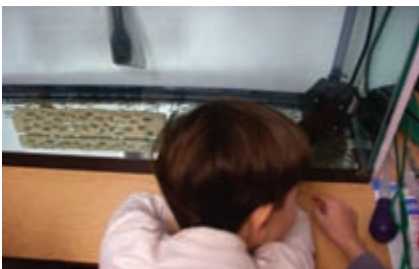
Anglers should be aware that usually the first cast of a fly, lure or bait is crucial since the bigger fish are opportunistic and will usually get to the prey before the little ones.

### Trout Truth 2:

#### Trout have their territories.

One of my students observed that one trout fry was bullying and scaring away others that came into a specific area. It would swim in a tight circle for food and then back to its original position within the tank. The class decided to track other individual fish within certain areas of the tank. Students recorded their observations in their trout journals. The other fish traveled little from their original positions in the tank.

When you are scouting and finding productive fishing areas in streams and lakes, you should note trout holds. Since trout will hold in spots safe from predators within the nutrient rich areas, it's best to hit these same spots before moving onto other unfamiliar water.



### Trout Truth 3:

#### Trout organize themselves into lanes.

Within each territory in the tank, the trout began to set up into racing lanes. The fry would use their counterparts to maneuver themselves to best conserve energy and be in the ideal position for food.

Trout can stack up in channels or water currents within a water system for energy conservation and food supply. Find the water channel or flow, and the trout will be there. One sign is the bubble flow on the surface of the stream. This bubble trail will lead the angler to find the fish.

### Trout Truth 4:

#### Trout regurgitate food quickly.

As our trout fry grew, it was easy and enjoyable to watch the trout feed. When dropping in the bigger trout flakes, we observed them taking each bite. The trout fry began to distinguish which was food and which was trout waste. They would suck in the food without chomping down. If it wasn't what they considered food, they would blow it out of their mouths.

I thought back to the many times I watched my indicator go down, only to miss the strike. Anglers should keep a tight line from reel to hook and stay alert for those soft strikes.

### Trout Truth 5:

#### Trout are piscivores (fish-eaters).

This was a sad truth for our class to accept. At times, the smaller fry that were not eating began slowly turning on their sides. The other fish would attack these weak fish seeing them as an easy meal. We removed these fish before they became fish food.

### Trout Truth 6:

#### Trout need to have clean water.

Though obvious to most anglers, a lesson I hope my students gathered from this amazing project was their understanding of water conservation and environmental protection. They observed that our 200 trout fry needed an ample supply of oxygen and filtered and fresh water without chemicals or pollutants. The trout fry also needed a consistent cold water temperature of 50 °F which was maintained by the chiller.

### Trout Truth 7:

#### Trout can inspire youth to become enthusiastic about the outdoors.

One sad truth is that most children don't interact with the outdoors to hunt, fish or hike due to many other choices they can make to stay indoors. I witnessed many students in my classroom become enthusiastic about trout and become experts on the life cycle of trout. They made the connection between fish and their food chain. And, learned the impacts we have on the water supply.

To pass on a love of the outdoors, get involved in programs like Trout in the Classroom and other programs that promote youth interaction with the outdoors. For more information, go to [www.troutintheclassroom.org](http://www.troutintheclassroom.org). Visit [www.fishandboat.com](http://www.fishandboat.com) for information on fish and fishing or [www.tu.org](http://www.tu.org) for information on Trout Unlimited. ☐

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