

Perhaps because I was born under the zodiac sign of Pisces, I like fish. Images of fish in art, ornaments, fabric, and jewelry attract me. I like to watch fish swimming in aquariums—large or small—and in their natural habitats, if I'm lucky enough to go snorkeling somewhere.

Closer to home, I like yards and gardens with koi ponds. I enjoy staring into the greenish waters of these ponds, watching the bright-colored fish glide and tumble over each other as they scrounge for food, their tails fanning back and forth.

One of the more well-stocked koi ponds I've seen is at a garden center where my friends and I buy plants in the summer. The pond, which seems to contain koi of every possible color, has a wooden deck around it so that you can watch the koi from many angles. A coin-operated machine nearby is filled with food pellets to feed to the koi. Whenever anyone starts dropping pellets into the

water, the fish whirl into a frenzy, racing to be first to the food. Children respond with delight to the thrashing and splashing that goes on.

One black koi, much larger than the others, lurks in shadows at the bottom of the pond. That fish is hard to see until it swims toward the surface or crosses a patch of sunlight. It seems to appear quite suddenly, and I've heard children shriek when they see it, shouting for others to "look how big it is!"

Apparently many people are fans of koi. In doing a little research, I discovered the Associated Koi Clubs of America (AKCA), an umbrella organization for 94 koi clubs in the United States as well as three in Canada. Members of the koi clubs meet to share their love of koi, to trade information about how to care for them, and to organize local koi shows.

To support the clubs, the AKCA produces educational materials about koi, sponsors an annual seminar, trains and certifies judges for koi shows, and publishes a magazine called *KOI USA*. These efforts all contribute to the AKCA's goal of improving and expanding the hobby of koi appreciation.

Koi are just one of the many kinds of fish you'll read about in the feature article, "Fish All Around Us." And the Classroom Activities section will have you, and your students, thinking and talking about fish. I hope it all goes swimmingly.

—MK



Koi in a shimmering pond