

Essay on fish, feelings, and sport fishing

Sometimes—well, actually quite often—I think about things, for example about fish. Not just about how they swim or how slippery they are, but whether they feel anything. Not just little pains, but real feelings, somewhere inside their heads. Our teacher says that animals think differently from us, but that they do have feelings. That made me wonder: if fish have feelings, how does that fit with sport fishing?

I often see people standing by the water with a fishing rod. They stand very still, sometimes for hours. And then suddenly they pull the rod up, and there's a fish hanging on a hook. Everyone says: "Nice catch!" But if fish feel pain, then maybe it isn't so nice for the fish at all. I mean—imagine someone pulling *you* out of the water with a metal hook in your mouth. That doesn't sound fun to me. And fish can't scream, so you never really know what they're feeling. But that doesn't mean they don't feel anything.

I've read (yes, I read a lot) that fish get stressed when they're caught. They feel a kind of fear in their bodies, just like I do when there's suddenly a test I didn't know about. Only fish can't say they're scared; they just have to be dragged along. Some fishers say they put the fish back afterwards. That's called "catch and release." It sounds kind, but I wonder whether the fish thinks so too. Because if you've just been on a hook and then you're hanging in the air gasping for breath, being put back might not instantly feel like a relief.

I don't mean that sport fishers are bad people. My uncle fishes too, and he's really kind. But sometimes I think people do things because they enjoy them, without really knowing how it feels for the animal. Kids do that too sometimes—laugh at someone in class and only later realize it wasn't nice for the other person. Maybe humans just aren't that good at thinking about what we put others through, especially when those others can't say anything.

Maybe we should ask ourselves: if fish have feelings, how much should they have to feel just for our fun? That's actually the real question. I don't know the answer, because I'm only ten. But sometimes, when I stand by the canal and see a little school of fish swim by, I think: they have their own lives down there. Their own ways of being scared, happy, or calm. And I think they should be able to keep that as much as possible—without hooks.

Maybe I'll become a biologist one day. Or a writer. Or someone who makes rules for animals. But for now, I just think: fish are more sensitive creatures than we thought. And if that's true, then maybe we should be a bit more careful with what we ourselves find fun.

