

Editor's Note

I love fishing. You put that line in the water and you don't know what's on the other end. Your imagination is under there.

—Robert Altman



can picture how the late film director might have peered over the side of a boat or leaned over the railing of a pier, his fishing line dangling idly into the water as he ran scenes of movies through his head (until the fishing line started running through his fingers and he'd snap into action to land the fish he'd hooked).

What Altman says about fishing captures what so many people feel about this popular hobby—it's not just about catching fish. (To squeamish people, that might be the least attractive thing about it.) Fishing takes people out in nature, away from their everyday chores and cares. It gives them a chance to relax, to get some fresh air, and lets them dream about catching the big fish they hope to go home and tell everyone about (and maybe have for dinner).

As the feature article in this issue will tell you, fishing can be as simple or as complex as you want to make it. That has a lot to do with the fishing gear—anything from a simple cane pole to expensive graphite rods with glistening reels and braided line, and maybe even high-tech sonar to find the elusive fish. (But using that technology would hinder the imagination our film director was fond of exercising.)

Part of the fun of fishing is the camaraderie that occurs between fishermen as they drift in a boat, sit on a dock, or wade together in a stream—waiting, sometimes for hours, for the fish to bite. All that waiting gives them plenty of time to tell tales about big fish—the ones they caught, and the ones that got away. One of the Classroom Activities in this issue, “The Biggest Fish Ever Caught” (see page 46), explores the “fish story” genre. It is a genre replete with improbability, often brimming with imaginative details (the kind that make for good movies).

An American writer who told his fair share of stories about fishing—some firmly in the realm of *fish stories*—was Mark Twain. Although he himself was fond of exaggerating, he had a suggestion for storytellers tempted to do the same: “Don't tell fish stories where the people know you; but particularly, don't tell them where they know the fish.”

That sounds like good advice—something our readers might want to pass along.

—MK