Making Spinnerbaits and Buzzbaits

Ronald A. Howard Jr. and

Objectives

Youth Development Objectives

Roles for Teen and Junior Leaders

Potential Parental Involvement

Evaluation Suggestions

Best Time: any time of year

Best Location: well lighted, work bench area

Time Required: 60 to 90 minutes

Equipment and Materials

References

Lesson Outline

Presentation	Application
I. Spinnerbaits and buzzbaits A. Spinnerbaits 1. "Clothespin" lures a) Resembled snap clothespin spring b) Jig on lower arm c) Spinner on upper arm d) Line attached to central loop 2. Combination of jig and spinner a. Usually components offset b. Jig dressed with one or more items 1) Skirt (silicone or rubber usually) 2) Hair, feathers, marabou 3) Soft plastic lure 4) Pork trailer 5) Combinations of the above B. Buzzbaits 1. Specialized for surface/near-surface fishing 2. In-line and offset designs	**USE** an illustration or large example of a spinnerbait and a spring from a clothespin to show the reason for early lures being known as "clothespin" lures. **POINT OUT** the major parts of a simple spinnerbait and **DISCUSS** the function of those parts. **SHOW** examples of how spinnerbaits might be rigged for some local fishing conditions and species.

3. Large, light blades for surface work
4. Many body, dressing types
a. Silicone or rubber skirt
b. Hair, feathers or marabou
c. Soft plastic lure
d. Pork trailer
e. Combinations of the above

C. Fishing principles
1. Flash, splash and vibration
2. Fishing in and around cover

3. Depth and retrieve rate control
4. Sized to species and conditions

II. Making a basic spinner bait
A. Casting the body
1. Components
a. Jig head
1) Size and shape for conditions
2) Size and shape for species
b. Wire connector
1) Pre-shaped or bent to shape
2) Wire diameter and stiffness
3) Angle to jig - hook setting gap
4) Type of eye
a) closed eye
b) long loop eye
c) open R-bend

B. Painting the jig head
1. Vinyl or epoxy paints
2. Powder paint

C. Hanging the spinner or spinners
1. Blade selection
a. Style, size and color
b. Single or multiple blades
2. Placing accessory blades on spinner arm
a. Clevis
b. Bearing bead
c. Spacer if needed
3. Attaching swivel to spinner arm
a. Bending a loop
b. Closing loop with swivel in place
c. Inward bend reduces weed problem
4. Attaching main blade with split ring

D. Adding hook dressing

E. Gap between blade and hook important
1. Permits good hook set
2. Prevents fishless and weedless hooks

III. Making a basic buzz bait
A. In-line buzzbait
1. Components
a. Broad, light head
b. Weed guard
c. Light delta blade in front
d. Hook dressing as above
2. Head cast and painted on wire or hook

3. Wire weed guards permit fishing in cover
4. Bearing bead in front of weed guard
5. Delta blade (plastic or metal)
6. Skirt and other hook dressing

B. Offset buzzbait
1. Offset, parallel wire
a. Long arm for jig body
b. Short arm for delta blade
c. Gap necessary for hook setting
2. Cast jig head
a. Weight influences
1) Sink rate/retrieve rate
2) Balance
3) Stability

Sputtering bait

Summary Activity

Lesson Narrative

Known early in their development as "clothespin lures," because they roughly resembled the spring from a clothespin, spinnerbaits are an offset type of spinner. The line is attached to a central loop or ring of relatively stiff wire. The lure body with its dressed hook designed to ride upward is attached to the lower arm of the wire form, and the spinner(s) is (are) attached to the upper arm or arms. Many have a single upper arm, but some models are built with tandem upper arms for greater flash, sound and vibration. Each of the spinner arms may have one or more spinners and other dressings on them. The lures range from tiny models in the 1/16 to 1/8 ounce range to large ones weighing one or more ounces. The spinner blades match the mass of the lures in sizes. They are available in a wide array of styles, finishes and sizes. These lures are relatively snag free, essentially a jig with a spinner acting as an attractant and weed guard.

Buzzbaits are specialized spinners or spinnerbaits designed to run high in the water - on or near the surface and creating a surface commotion. One of the first such lures was an in-line model with a flat jig head, rubber skirt, twin weed guards and a light, broad and sharply angled aluminum blade. Retrieved through the water, it would burble and sputter on the surface. It could be crawled over lily pads and similar cover while inviting strikes from bass, pike, pickerel or similar ambush predators lurking in that heavy cover. Current models may use a similar design or a modified spinnerbait form, featuring two parallel arms - one holding the spinner(s) and the other, longer one holding the head and dressed hook.

Making a Spinnerbait

Balance is a vital feature in these lures. The blade size and shape determine the amount of flash, vibration and drag through the water. The mass of the head and the type and amount of dressing applied impact those factors as well. The shape and length of the arms and the angle at which they intersect is important in the fishing characteristics of the lure as well. The gap between the blade and the hook is important in hook setting ability. The balance among the blade, the mass of the head and the amount and type of dressing strongly influence the way the lure "fishes." Large, broad blades tend to produce a slower vibration, but a more powerful one than do faster turning blades. For example, a willow leaf blade and a Colorado blade of similar sizes will have very different characteristics. The willow leaf blade will turn faster and stay closer to the axis of the blade as it rotates. This produces a twinkling flash that may appear minnow-like as it turns. It will run deeper if all other things are equal. The Colorado blade will turn more perpendicularly to the shaft. At the same retrieve rate it will rotate more slowly, plane upward more in the water, fall more slowly and produce more vibration and less flash (viewed from the side). The heavier vibration is more easily sensed by the angler through the rod and line, making it easier to detect strikes. Indiana, Idaho, French, and similar blades will fall between these two types. Heavily dressed lures will have more water resistance, tending to make them fall slower and plane more on the retrieve than will sparsely dressed lures.

With these things in mind, one can see that making a spinnerbait requires determining the manner in which it will be fished as well as the fish being sought, depth and movement of the water, and sensitivity to strikes. Selecting the lure to be built starts there, then goes to selection of the individual components to achieve the desired effect. The combination of wire, line tie type, swivel, beads, spinner(s), clevises, paint, and hook dressing add up to the finished lure.

Wire - Lures used to "fish on the fall" can have relatively flexible and light wire. Lures used in current or at a fairly rapid retrieve may require much stiffer and thus usually stouter wire. In general, spinnerbait wire ranges from about 0.030 to 0.045 inch in diameter. This material is light enough to work without damaging most tools, yet stiff enough to keep the shape intended under most conditions. The wire can be shaped with any type of wire bending tools. For those who want to make their own lures from scratch, one of the critical features in the process is getting the arms of the lure at the right angle and the proper lengths for effectiveness.

Many spinnerbait makers prefer to use pre-formed wire. These wire forms are available in a variety of sizes and line attachment types. Closed eyes can be twisted or wound like the spring of a clothespin. Open eyes usually feature either a U bend or an R bend. The lower arm most often includes an open hook that can be slipped into the eye of the hook to hold the parts together in mold. If desired, that hook can be closed with pliers to make a more secure bond between the parts. The upper arm is left straight in preparation for casting, painting and assembly.

Spinner Blades - The most commonly used spinner blades on these lures are willow leaf and Colorado blades. They may be used singly or in combination with others of the same or different types. Most blades are made of brass, copper or steel stock. Steel blades are generally the thinnest and lightest, while brass and copper blades are much heavier and often thicker. All of these blades may be hammered, embossed, and/or plated or painted to provide a wide array of finishes. Local or seasonal preferences may dictate the finish of the blade.

Body Finish - Powder paint, epoxy and lacquer finishes are hard and durable. The section on painting jig heads provides most of the information needed to do an adequate job in this area. If vinyl or similar paints are used, putting a white primer under the finish coat of color usually brightens the color. An overcoat of clear lacquer is advised if these less durable paints are used. The body can be dressed with bucktail or other hair, artificial hair, hackle feathers, soft plastics or either silicone or rubber skirt material, either alone or in combination. Pork rind is often added on site when these lures are fished. Skirts may be purchased from most mail order houses, but interested tackle crafters can make their own using a relatively inexpensive kit and bulk skirt material.

Other Materials - For single spinner spinnerbaits, the only other materials needed are small split rings and swivels. As long as the ring is large enough to keep the blade from binding, it is large enough. Generally size 2 or 3 rings are large enough. Most spinnerbaits are constructed with roller swivels, crane swivels or ball bearing swivels. All of them work well for the purpose. If multiple blades are going to be attached to the shaft, the accessory blade will need to have a clevis (again, large enough to avoid binding) a bearing bead and one or more beads to space the blades on the shaft. Stirrup clevises are preferred here because they are somewhat less likely to foul with fine materials and bind. Some anglers prefer glass beads because of the audible click they make when they are struck.

Putting One Together - Starting with a formed, painted head on a pre-formed wire, select a blade of the desired type, finish and size. Attach the blade to a split ring and a swivel. Bend a small loop on the tip of the upper arm of the lure, making sure that the open end is under the main wire. This keeps the top edge of the upper arm smooth and allows it to slip through weeds and debris better. Place the other end of the swivel on the loop that was just formed, and close the loop tightly. Take a moment to make sure the end of the wire is firmly against the upper arm wire and that the opening is smaller than the loop on the swivel. Selecting and applying the dressing desired is all that remains to complete the lure.

Tuning the Lure - Balancing the lure requires that it be fished and observed. The torque generated by the spinning blade will tend to roll the lure to the side at fast retrieve rates. That can be countered by simply using a smaller blade (or a heavier head). If the head size and blade size meet your desired specifications but the lure rides at an angle, you can add weight or bulk to the head to stabilize the lure. Experience with a particular head and dressing style will let you know what components work best with the combination.

Making a Buzzbait

Buzzbaits are specialized spinnerbaits designed to be fished on or very near the water's surface. Their large, light blades are designed to create considerable surface commotion and vibration, attracting fish which hit the body of the lure once they are close enough to see it. There are two basic styles of buzzbaits. The first type sets the thin, light, delta blade directly ahead of the body - an in-line buzzbait. Once started back to the angler, these baits plane to the surface and create a commotion directly ahead of the lure body. Having a hook that rides upright because of the weighting of the jig head makes it partially weedless, but most in-line models designed for weedy work have a wire weed guard attached. A skirt and pork dressing is usually attached. The second type uses parallel pair of arms spaced far enough apart to allow the blade to spin freely. The lure body is attached to the lower and longer arm. The spinner is attached to the upper arm. On some of them, a long gate-like blade is attached to the upright portion of the upper arm, extending back far enough to be hit by the spinner blades as they turn. These are usually called clacker blades. Some anglers prefer to have a counter-rotating blade to one that rotates in a single direction. These create less surface disturbance but yield a more subtle one and tend to run true.

The choice of blade types and sizes is similar to those for other types of spinnerbaits. Larger blades create more surface activity but create more torque. Torque can cause the lure to run off line or event make it attempt to roll in the water. Larger blades also tend to plane to the surface more easily, while smaller ones may be difficult to keep on the surface at slow retrieve rates. Heavier lures run truer but are more difficult to get up on plane in the water. Once again, the maker is faced with a series of decisions that involve compromise or balance to produce a lure that accomplishes its desired purpose optimally. If the lure tends to stay too deep at the desired retrieve rate, a larger blade can help get it on the surface. If it rolls on retrieve, a smaller blade may correct for the excessive torque. If casting ease is not a consideration, the angler may decide to use a twin arm buzzbait so the two smaller blades give the behavior of a larger one but without the off-line movement. Keep notes, work until you find a combination that balances well, and stick with it for the purpose.

Buzzbait Components - There are three components of buzzbaits that differ from those used on other spinner baits - the blades, accessory blades and the pivot for those blades. Blades can have two, three or four wings around a central axis drilled to accept the spinner wire. The blades can be curved, have sharply angled tips or have a tip in each direction (counter-rotating blades). They can be made of aluminum, thin steel, or plastics; and they can be purchased in several finishes. Most are left in silver, clear or chartreuse color. Accessory blades have been discussed above. They are designed to strike against the rotating blade, producing additional clicking or clacking sounds. Thus the name "clacker" blades. Although a bearing bead could be used with these blades, standard practice is to use a small rivet as the bearing surface. As with other spinnerbaits, all sorts of dressings can be applied to the hook of the lure itself.

Assembling a Standard, Two-arm Buzzbait - A basic buzzbait starts with a painted lure body and the parallel wires formed and ready to use. Simply slip a spinner blade on the upper arm, followed by a bearing rivet or bead. Adjust the position of the spinner blade so it has room to operate freely but allows adequate gap from the rear of the upper arm to the lure body. (This is the necessary space for hook setting purposes.) Bend the wire down sharply to hold the bearing in the proper location and trim it, leaving only enough material to make sure the blade is secure. Add the dressings desired to the hook. Now is a good time to field test. Is the lure balanced? Does it plane to the surface or hold the surface at the desired retrieve rate? Does it roll or run off line on retrieve? Remember that altering the weight of the head or the size or type of blade can make a significant difference in the way the lure behaves. Once you have it down to your satisfaction, would it not be a good idea to commit your component list to a record so you can duplicate it at a later date? You bet!

Assembling an In-line Buzzbait - These lures are very similar to in-line spinners. The straight shaft needs to have a spacer of some kind to get the blades away from the head enough to permit a fish to hit it without interference from the spinner blade. A piece of thin tubing or a couple rivets or beads should be adequate. A bearing bead goes on ahead of that assembly, followed by the blade. Forming a closed eye on the wire completes the lure. A field test will demonstrate one of the reasons for the major switch to the two-armed variety. The in-line design simply is difficult to balance adequately to prevent torque and line twist. Try one anyway.