

The Joe Humphreys' Fly Fishing Stream School

Warm Waters Summer Camp

Youth Fly Fishing Curriculum - Ages 6-17 - Inspired by the Methods of Joe Humphreys

"The secret of life is having something exciting to look forward to. And fly fishing is that - you're going fishing."

- Joe Humphreys

Warm Waters Summer Camp

5-Day Summer Camp Curriculum

“The basic fundamentals, refined to perfection, are your most advanced techniques.”

- Bill Koll • Coaching philosophy passed to Joe Humphreys

This curriculum follows the same structure as The Joe Humphreys' Fly Fishing Stream School Trout Edition. Instructors trained in the Trout Edition will find the philosophy, daily rituals, and conservation content identical. What changes is the species, the habitat, and the technique. The arc from panfish to bass to carp mirrors the arc from first cast to mastery.

Day	Theme	Species	Core Skill	Joe Story
Day 1	First Fish	Panfish - bluegill, sunfish	Casting fundamentals; bobber & nymph	Joe's first trout at age 6; Adrian the first-grader
Day 2	Read the Water	Panfish - advanced	Presentation; reading still water	Joe's father and the Susquehanna bass
Day 3	The Predator Mindset	Bass - largemouth & smallmouth	Structure fishing; cover reading	Bill Koll's coaching philosophy
Day 4	Patience and the Quest	Bass - advanced + carp intro	Sight fishing; presentation precision	George Harvey lie detector test
Day 5	The Ghost of the Flat	Carp - fly rod sight fishing	Full sight-fishing sequence	Spring Creek conservation; Joe at 97

DAY 1 - First Fish

Theme: Every Angler Starts Somewhere

Day 1 is about one thing: the first fish. Every child needs a moment where something alive pulls back on the end of the line. Panfish - bluegill, sunfish, crappie - make that moment accessible and almost inevitable. The technique is secondary. The experience is everything.

Joe's First Trout - Spring Creek, 1935

Joe Humphreys was six years old. His father had bought him a rod made by the Union Hardware Company in Torrington, Connecticut - a picture of him holding it still exists.

It was opening day. Fishing season opened at 5 in the morning. It was still dark. Joe and his

father walked to the island below the Rock on Spring Creek with flashlights and a can of worms.

Joe put a worm on the hook. He was clumsy. He got it in the water. He felt tugs. He pulled - and a fish came out of the water over his head, dropped off the hook, and landed in the weeds behind him. He scrambled around until he saw the weeds moving. He found the fish. It was an 8-inch brown trout.

His father, using a bamboo Kingfisher rod, hooked a fish, threw the rod down, grabbed the line, and hand-over-hand pulled in a foot-long brown trout.

They displayed their fish proudly to the row of fishermen along the bank. Joe took his fish home. His mother cooked it. Made him a trout sandwich.

"I think it was the best sandwich I ever had,"

- Joe Humphreys, age 97

Once I hooked that fish, I was hooked on fishing. And so my life as a child consisted of three peanut butter sandwiches, a jug of milk, a fly rod across the handlebars of my bicycle.

Adrian - A First-Grader's Lesson

This story goes to the very beginning of every Day 1 session. Joe, at 97, was still teaching fifth graders the week this program guide was written. He has taught youth fishing groups for approximately 30 consecutive years.

At one session, a father brought his first-grade son, Adrian, along to join the class. After the casting practice, Adrian pulled Joe aside and told him exactly what he would need to do to catch a fish: use a Woolly Bugger, fish it down and across, fish it real slow.

Joe went to the stream with all the children behind him. He missed a fish. He told the children he would fish on through and come back. He came back, stepped into position, was about to cast. Adrian reached up and grabbed his hand.

"This time, set the hook."

"Here is a six-year-old, a first grader, telling the old man: this time, set the hook. I never forgot that."

Open Day 1 with this story. Then ask students: what is something you already know about fishing that you could teach someone else?

Morning Session (2 hours) - Casting Fundamentals

Time	Activity	Notes
0:00-0:20	Program welcome + Joe introduction video	Play Video 1: Who Is Joe Humphreys
0:20-0:45	Casting on grass - the short	Bill Koll: fundamentals first.

Time	Activity	Notes
	stroke	Arm out, wrist in.
0:45-1:15	Gear introduction: 5-6 wt rod, floating line, bobber rig	Explain why panfish = the perfect teacher
1:15-2:00	Casting practice with targets on grass	Accuracy before distance. Always.

Afternoon Session (3 hours) - To the Water

Time	Activity	Notes
0:00-0:20	Bio-indicator survey: turn over 5 rocks, record findings	Hellgrammites = healthy water. Same concept, warm water.
0:20-2:30	Panfish fishing - ponds, dock, or bank access	Instructors rotate. Every student gets a fish today.
2:30-3:00	Fish ID, handling, release - Keep Fish Wet protocols	Respect the fish = respect the water

Key Teaching Points - Day 1

The casting stroke is short. Stop the rod - do not sweep it. Bill Koll: basics refined to perfection.

Panfish are not a lesser fish. They are the perfect teacher. Every great trout angler started with a bluegill.

When the fish takes the fly: pause, then lift. Don't snatch.

Joe caught his first trout at age 6 on a worm. There is no wrong way to start.

LOOK UP - Daily Closing Circle

Before leaving the water, instructors call a circle. Everyone puts down rods. Two minutes of silence - observe the water, the sky, one living thing that isn't a fish.

Day 1 prompt: "What was the moment today when you forgot everything except what was in front of you?"

DAY 2 - Read the Water

Theme: The Water Talks. Are You Listening?

Day 2 builds on Day 1's success. Students have caught fish. Now we ask: why was that fish there? What is the water telling you? The focus shifts from casting to observation - the skill Joe considers most important after 90 years of fishing.

Joe's Father and the Susquehanna Bass

Joe Humphreys grew up catching trout on Spring Creek - but the first fisherman in his family cast into warm water.

Joe's father grew up on a farm in Curwensville, Pennsylvania. When heavy rains made fieldwork impossible - when they couldn't farm and couldn't even pick stones from the field - he would cut a long bamboo rod, string it, put a grasshopper on the hook, and walk to the bridge over the West Branch of the Susquehanna.

There were schools of bass and other fish below that bridge. He caught two or three bass on grasshoppers. That was the only fishing he ever did.

Until his son handed him a fly rod on Spring Creek - and Joe's father became addicted too.

Every angler comes from somewhere. Some come from trout streams. Some come from warm water bridges with grasshoppers. Both origins are equally valid. The Joe Humphreys' Fly Fishing Stream School Warm Waters Edition honors both.

Morning Session (2 hours) - Still Water Reading

Reading still water is different from reading a stream. There are no riffles, no seams, no obvious structure visible in the current. But the water is still talking - it just speaks a different language.

Time	Activity	Notes
0:00-0:30	Shoreline structure walk - no rods	Find: points, drop-offs, weed edges, shade lines, dock shadow
0:30-1:00	Thermocline discussion: where fish are in warm weather	Surface too warm. Find the depth break.
1:00-2:00	Aerial observation: polarized glasses, reading feeding rises	What is on the surface? What are panfish eating right now?

Afternoon Session (3 hours) - Advanced Panfish + Bass Preview

Time	Activity	Notes
0:00-0:30	Fly selection: matching warm water food sources	Beetles, hoppers, small poppers - what lives here?
0:30-2:00	Fishing with presentation focus	Same fish, different approach. Stealth. Angle. Drift.

Time	Activity	Notes
2:00-2:30	Bass habitat preview: visit structure (dock, fallen tree, rocks)	Do not fish yet - just look and talk
2:30-3:00	Debrief: what did the water tell you today?	Students share one observation about where fish were vs. where they expected

Key Teaching Points - Day 2

Joe learned to read water before he could read words. Observation is the first skill.

In warm water: fish are near structure (shade, cover, edges), not in open water.

Bluegill and sunfish tell you what's hatching - watch where they are feeding.

Stealth matters as much in a pond as in a spring creek. Approach from behind. Cast low.

LOOK UP - Daily Closing Circle

Before leaving the water, instructors call a circle. Everyone puts down rods. Two minutes of silence - observe the water, the sky, one living thing that isn't a fish.

Day 2 prompt: "Name one thing about this water that you didn't notice the first time you looked."

DAY 3 - The Predator Mindset

Theme: Think Like the Hunter, Not the Angler

Day 3 introduces bass - and a new way of thinking. Bass are ambush predators. They hold in specific places, attack specific prey, and respond to specific presentations. Catching bass on a fly requires thinking like a hunter: where is the fish, what is it waiting for, how do I put the fly where it expects food to come from?

Bill Koll - The Fundamentals Coach

When Joe arrived at Penn State, he spent two years as an assistant wrestling coach under Bill Koll. Koll's record at Iowa State Teachers College was 72 wins, 0 defeats. Never taken down. Never ridden. Three-time national champion.

His coaching philosophy became Joe's teaching philosophy for wrestling and for fly fishing:

"The basic fundamentals, refined to perfection, are your most advanced techniques."

On Day 3, students meet bass for the first time. The fishing looks more complicated - bigger flies, faster fish, more deliberate presentation. But the cast that catches a bass from behind a fallen log is the same short, tight loop they have been practicing since Day 1. Basics. Refined.

Perfect.

Morning Session (2 hours) - Bass Habitat

Time	Activity	Notes
0:00-0:30	Structure walk: identify bass holding water	Fallen logs, dock pilings, lily pad edges, rocky points, undercut banks
0:30-1:00	Fly selection: poppers, Clouser Minnow, crawfish patterns	Why does fly shape and size matter for bass?
1:00-2:00	Presentation demonstration by instructor	Cast to structure, not open water. Let it sit. Twitch. Wait.

Afternoon Session (3 hours) - Bass Fishing

Time	Activity	Notes
0:00-2:30	Bass fishing - structured rotation by holding water	Instructor with each student: approach, cast angle, presentation
2:30-3:00	Debrief: where did you find fish vs. where you expected?	Compare to Day 2 panfish locations - what changed?

Key Teaching Points - Day 3

Bass do not chase - they ambush. Put the fly where the fish is waiting, not where you can see.

The popper is the most satisfying cast in warm water fly fishing. Let it sit. Then twitch once. Then wait more.

Smallmouth bass are to warm rivers what trout are to cold ones. Read riffles, seams, and rocky structure the same way.

Bill Koll never wasted a movement. Neither should your cast. Shortest path from rod to target.

LOOK UP - Daily Closing Circle

Before leaving the water, instructors call a circle. Everyone puts down rods. Two minutes of silence - observe the water, the sky, one living thing that isn't a fish.

Day 3 prompt: "What would you need to know to catch that fish you saw but couldn't catch today?"

DAY 4 - Patience and the Quest

Theme: The Fish That Makes You Better

Day 4 pushes students toward the edge of their ability - and introduces the concept that drives Joe Humphreys' entire life on the water. The Quest: a specific fish, a specific challenge, pursued with patience until solved. This is also the day students get their first look at carp.

The George Harvey Lie Detector Test

George Harvey and Joe were fishing Young Woman's Creek. George sent Joe upstream to fish down to a bridge, then wait. George would fish upstream to meet him.

Joe fished down. He waited on the bridge. George came up the stream, fishing, finally reached Joe, looked up.

"Boy, those fish sure were easy today, weren't they, Joe?"

Joe paused. He said: "Mr. Harvey, I didn't catch one legal fish. I didn't do very good."

George looked at him. "Neither did I."

He was testing Joe. He could have said whatever he wanted. Joe could have claimed a full basket. George was asking: is this kid worth fishing with? Is he honest?

On Day 4, before fishing, ask students: when is it tempting to exaggerate about fishing? Why does honesty matter on the water? Joe passed the George Harvey lie detector test. It changed his life.

Morning Session (2 hours) - Advanced Bass + Carp Introduction

Time	Activity	Notes
0:00-0:45	Bass technique refinement: mending, stripping, presentation angles	What did not work on Day 3? Fix it today.
0:45-1:15	Carp introduction: biology, habits, why they are challenging	Carp are not trash fish. They are the most difficult fly fishing target most anglers will ever encounter.
1:15-2:00	Carp observation walk: find fish in shallow water	Polarized glasses. Slow movement. Do not fish yet.

Afternoon Session (3 hours) - The Quest

Time	Activity	Notes
0:00-0:30	Each student identifies one specific target fish or location	Write it down: the fish, the spot, the challenge

Time	Activity	Notes
0:30-2:30	Pursuit fishing - one fish, one student, instructor coaching	This is not about catching. This is about learning to try.
2:30-3:00	Debrief: what did you learn that you couldn't learn from catching?	Joe hunted his state record fish for three years before he caught it

Key Teaching Points - Day 4

Joe fished for his fly-caught state record brown trout for three years before catching it. The quest is the point, not the fish.

Carp can smell you, see you, and feel your footsteps. They are not dumb. They are paranoid, and for good reason.

Patience is a technique. It is not passive - it is active waiting. Watch the fish. Learn what it does before you cast.

Failure on Day 4 is success. Every instructor should tell their own story of a fish that beat them.

LOOK UP - Daily Closing Circle

Before leaving the water, instructors call a circle. Everyone puts down rods. Two minutes of silence - observe the water, the sky, one living thing that isn't a fish.

Day 4 prompt: "If you had to teach someone else everything you learned today, what's the first thing you'd say?"

DAY 5 - The Ghost of the Flat

Theme: The Most Honest Fish in Fresh Water

Day 5 is carp day. It is also the conservation day - the day students learn why the water they are fishing needs protecting. Joe Humphreys saved Spring Creek with a jackhammer, a borrowed pipe, and five friends. Every student who fishes leaves knowing that the water can be saved - and that it is their responsibility to try.

Why Carp? Joe Humphreys and the Ghost of the Flat

Carp are the most challenging fly fishing available to most anglers. They require everything Joe teaches in every other context - extreme patience, precise presentation, the ability to read a fish's body language from 30 feet away, and a fundamentals-perfect cast delivered without spooking a fish that can see, smell, and feel your presence.

A tailing carp in shallow water - head down, tail waving above the surface - is the warm water equivalent of a rising trout in a spring creek. You can see exactly where the fish is. You know what it wants. The challenge is putting the fly in front of it without making it run.

"If you can fool a carp consistently on a fly, you can fish anywhere in the world."

Joe Humphreys has been sight-fishing for carp for decades. He calls it the most honest fishing there is - the fish either takes the fly or it doesn't, and there is nowhere to hide from what went wrong.

Spring Creek - The Conservation Story

In the 1960s, a highway project diverted the Thompson Spring - the cold water that fed Spring Creek - into the Penn State duck pond. The duck pond collected storm runoff from State College. All of that warm, polluted water flowed into Spring Creek. The water temperature rose. The insect population crashed. The Green Drake hatch disappeared.

Joe Humphreys formed the Spring Creek chapter of Trout Unlimited with five friends around his kitchen table. They borrowed a backhoe from the university's physical plant and a jackhammer from a construction crew working at the pond. Three men went down into the trench and broke through the concrete. A friend at a stone quarry donated the pipe.

They diverted the spring around the duck pond. The cold water came back. Spring Creek recovered. The Green Drake hatch returned.

"Spring Creek gave me my life. It gave me my happiness. I wasn't about to see it go."

- Joe Humphreys

The same threat is happening on warm water fisheries across the country. Farm ponds silted by erosion. Urban lakes choked by runoff. Rivers developed out of existence. The fish change. The threat does not. The response - get some friends, find a table, start a plan - does not either.

Morning Session (2 hours) - Carp Sight Fishing

Time	Activity	Notes
0:00-0:30	Carp biology and behavior	Spawning, feeding, tailing, cruising - what each means for presentation
0:30-1:00	Fly selection and rigging	Unweighted vs. lightly weighted. Cast AHEAD of the fish, not at it.
1:00-2:00	Sight-fishing practice: instructor demonstrates full sequence	Spot fish. Stop. Assess direction. Cast 2-3 feet ahead. Let it sink. Watch.

Afternoon Session (3 hours) - Conservation + Final Fishing

Time	Activity	Notes
0:00-0:45	Conservation action: local	Who is responsible for this

Time	Activity	Notes
	water quality assessment	water? What threatens it?
0:45-2:30	Carp fishing - student rotation with instructors	Celebrate the attempt. A spooked fish is a learning moment.
2:30-3:00	Final circle: what do you take home from this week?	Each student shares one thing they will do differently on the water

Key Teaching Points - Day 5

Cast to where the carp WILL BE in three seconds, not where it is now. Lead the fish.

If the carp spooks, do not chase it. Find another fish. Note what caused the spook.

Joe saved a stream with five people and a borrowed pipe. Every student here can do the same thing in their own watershed.

The Look Up moment today: find one thing about this water that you want to protect.

LOOK UP - Daily Closing Circle

Before leaving the water, instructors call a circle. Everyone puts down rods. Two minutes of silence - observe the water, the sky, one living thing that isn't a fish.

Day 5 prompt: "Joe Humphreys has fished for 90 years. What do you think he still wonders about?"

Instructor Notes - Warm Waters Edition

All instructor training content from the Trout Edition applies to the Warm Waters Edition. The Look Up ritual, conservation philosophy, Joe Humphreys biography, and George Harvey mentorship arc are identical. Warm-water-specific additions:

For bass and carp days, instructors should arrive 45 minutes early to locate fish before students arrive. Sight fishing fails without pre-located fish.

Panfish days are confidence days. No student should leave Day 1 or Day 2 without catching a fish. Adjust location and technique until this is achieved.

The Adrian story (Day 1) and the George Harvey lie detector test (Day 4) are required to be told - not paraphrased, told as stories, with the exact quotes.

Carp on Day 5 is not expected to produce catches - it is expected to produce lessons. Frame accordingly.

Joe Humphreys' website: joehumphreysfishing.com - video content for classroom use.

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