

The Joe Humphreys' Fly Fishing Stream School

Weekend Intensive Curriculum

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

The Weekend Intensive

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

Program Overview

The Joe Humphreys' Fly Fishing Stream School Weekend Curriculum is a three-day intensive experience designed to teach young fly anglers the foundational skills, water-reading abilities, and advanced casting techniques pioneered by Joe Humphreys. It builds toward independent fishing and introduces students to the conservation principles that every angler carries for life.

Weekend Goals

Understand fly rod, reel, and line systems

Execute the Short Stroke cast with thumb-squeeze mechanics

Tie essential knots from memory: Davy Knot and Double Surgeon's

Read water features and identify where trout hold

Execute the Tuck Cast to achieve quick depth

Navigate tight streams using restricted-space casts

Complete a Look Up moment - experiencing the stream as a whole environment

Complete a conservation action and understand the Spring Creek story

Master Equipment Checklist

Echo Gecko rods (ages 6-10)

Redington Path 4-weight or 5-weight (tweens and teens)

Quality fly lines: Rio or Cortland

9-foot tapered leaders

Tippet: 3X, 4X, 5X, 6X (we fish fluorocarbon at this school - it sinks well and is less visible.

Advanced note: experienced anglers often switch to nylon/mono for dry flies because it floats better)

Strike indicators (yarn or foam)

Split shot (assorted weights)

Wading belts - MANDATORY for all in-water students

Wading boots with good grip

PFDs / life jackets for younger participants

First aid kit

FRIDAY EVENING - Foundations & Flow

Theory and Dry Land Mechanics | 1 Hour

Friday evening sets the foundation for the entire weekend. Students learn equipment anatomy, execute their first Short Stroke casts, and tie the knots they will use on the water. Open with a brief introduction to Joe Humphreys - the man behind the method.

Learning Objectives

Understand fly rod, reel, line, leader, tippet, and fly components

Execute the Short Stroke cast with proper thumb-squeeze mechanics

Tie the Davy Knot from memory

Tie the Double Surgeon's Knot for connecting tippet sections

Timing Breakdown

Segment 1: Welcome & Equipment Anatomy - 10 minutes

Begin with an energetic welcome. Set tone: fun, learning, community. Lay out a complete fly setup and point to each component. For younger students: "The rod is a lever. The reel holds line. The leader and tippet are invisible strings that don't scare the fish."

Brief Joe Humphreys introduction: "Everything we are doing this weekend comes from one man - Joe Humphreys. He's been fishing since he was six years old. He taught at Penn State for 19 years. And at age 97, he says the secret to life is simple: 'Have something exciting to look forward to.' That's what this weekend is going to give you."

Segment 2: The Short Stroke Cast - 20 minutes

Joe Humphreys developed the short stroke by necessity, fishing brushy Pennsylvania limestone streams where the traditional 10-to-2 stroke didn't work. The trees were too close. The banks were too tight. So he shortened the stroke - and the loop got tighter, the cast got more accurate, and he could fish water nobody else could reach.

"Wrestling and fly fishing? They're both physical sports. Secondly, the technique is so important. There's technique and smarts involved. You have to have great fly control so that the fly will float perfectly, drag-free." - Joe Humphreys

Demonstrate wrong way: long, rigid stroke, wide loop

Demonstrate right way: short, compact stroke, thumb squeeze at stops

Have all students cast at hula hoops at 20, 30, and 40 feet

Key coaching point: "The thumb squeeze is the engine. Everything else is delivery."

Segment 3: Knot Tying Laboratory - 20 minutes

Start with paracord for Davy Knot practice - larger scale builds muscle memory faster

Four steps: thread the tag through the fly eye, form a small loop, pass the tag through the loop, cinch and trim

Run timed competition: who can tie it fastest?

Then teach Double Surgeon's on actual tippet

Segment 4: Preview & Homework - 10 minutes

Homework: "Visit a stream near your home this week. Spend 5-10 minutes watching. Don't cast. Just watch. Where do you think fish are holding? Write it in your journal."

LOOK UP MOMENT: Deliver the Look Up moment here - outdoors, even briefly. Ask: what sounds can you hear right now that have nothing to do with fly fishing? Build the habit from Day 1.

Age Adaptations

Ages 6-10: Shorten segment to 45 min total; focus on roll cast and simple identification

Ages 11-13: Full segment as written; introduce roll cast as bonus

Ages 14-17: Add leader/tippet sizing theory; ask them to explain the Davy Knot to a younger student

SATURDAY MORNING - Depth & Drift

Reading Water & Tactical Nymphing | 2 Hours

Saturday morning is where everything becomes real. Students move to actual water, learn to read it, and execute nymphs to depth. This session follows Joe's core principle: observation before action.

Learning Objectives

Identify water features: riffle, run, pool, seam, eddy

Understand trout behavior and energy conservation

Collect and identify aquatic macroinvertebrates

Rig a nymphing setup with proper leader length

Execute the Tuck Cast to achieve rapid depth

Hour 1: Ecological Observation & Water Reading

Stream Ecology Walk - 20 minutes

Divide students into pairs with kick-seine nets. Collect and identify macroinvertebrates from riffle sections.

Mayfly nymphs: three tails, gill plates - most important hatch food

Stonefly nymphs: two tails, flat body - indicate clean water

Caddis larvae: caterpillar-like, building stone/stick cases

Midges: tiny, red or brown

Freshwater scuds: shrimp-like - "This is exactly what Joe tied from his mother's sewing basket at age 10"

Tell the Thompson Run orange shrimp story here.

Reading the Water - 20 minutes

RIFFLE: fast, shallow, food conveyor belt - insects living on the rocks

RUN: steady, medium speed, 2-4 feet deep - comfortable trout holding water

POOL: deep, slow, refuge for big fish

SEAM: the money zone - transition between fast and slow water

EDDY: slack water behind rocks - but current runs backward

Teach the energy principle: trout hold where food value exceeds energy cost. They want the most food for the least effort.

Rigging for Nymphing - 20 minutes

Leader length: water depth x 1.5 = leader from indicator to fly

Split shot: 8-10 inches above fly

Strike indicator: small foam or yarn - set the indicator-to-fly distance with the formula above (1.5 x water depth)

Fly connection: Davy Knot

LOOK UP MOMENT: The LOOK UP MOMENT happens naturally here, when students are on the bank waiting or between exercises. Stop the group. Ask: what sounds do you hear? What animals are present? What is the light doing on the water right now?

"Look up. You've been staring at the water from the moment we made the first cast. I'd like to stop and live the moment." - Joe Humphreys

Hour 2: The Tuck Cast on Water

Tuck Cast Mechanics - Review

Overpowered stroke - load the rod fully

ABRUPT HIGH STOP at 12 o'clock or higher - no follow-through

Rod flexes downward, kicking fly under leader

Nymph enters water nearly vertically - sinks fast

On-Water Practice

Move to bridge hole or stocked pool

Each student: 10+ tuck casts - watch for indicator ticks (bottom contact)

When indicator ticks: "THAT'S DEPTH - that's exactly where you want to be"

When indicator moves oddly: "SET THE HOOK" - practice the hookset

When fish hooked: "Bent rod! Keep tension! Don't give slack!"

SATURDAY AFTERNOON - Dry Flies & The Tight Brush

Advanced Casts & Surface Presentation | 2 Hours

Learning Objectives

Execute the Bow-and-Arrow cast with full safety compliance

Understand drag-free dry fly presentation

Identify rise forms and what they indicate

Fish dry flies to rising or holding trout

Hour 1: The Bow-and-Arrow Cast

Why This Cast Exists - 15 minutes

Joe Humphreys grew up fishing streams tunneled over by rhododendron and hemlock. The best wild trout hold in water no one else can reach because no one else can cast there. In *Live the Stream*, he films a casting sequence in tight brush that he says he doesn't think has ever been recorded before. This cast is the key to water everyone else walks past.

Safety First

SAFETY: Grip the fly at the bend of the hook, point facing away from the palm - never near the point. Younger students grip the leader just above the fly instead. This is non-negotiable. Demonstrate wrong grip before teaching correct grip. Review before every station.

Station Progression - 45 minutes

Station 1: Open target - practice mechanics on a clear path

Station 2: Low branches - deliver under a 3-foot high obstacle

Station 3: Narrow window - hit a hula hoop through a 3-foot gap

Note for instructors: The week-long Summer Camp adds a fourth station for this cast - an Accuracy Challenge targeting rings at distance. That station is omitted from the Weekend Curriculum for time. If your group moves quickly through Stations 1-3, you may add it using the Summer Camp guide as a reference.

Ages 6-10: stations 1 and 2 only; Ages 11+: all stations

Hour 2: Dry Fly Presentation

What Makes a Dry Fly Float

Hackle fibers perpendicular to hook shank - support the fly on surface film

Elk or deer hair - trapped air, buoyancy

Foam - non-absorbent

Drag-Free Drift

Cast upstream and slightly across - let the fly drift naturally downstream

Mend: flip line upstream after the cast to extend the drag-free window

The greatest mistake: setting the hook before the fish has the fly - PAUSE, then set

"These fish don't want the flies swinging down over them. They want a perfect natural drift." - Joe Humphreys

Reading the Rise Form

Sipping ring: gentle, selective - fish eating small insects in the film

Boil/swirl: aggressive take - fish moving quickly to the fly

Splash: often a miss or a small, eager fish

LOOK UP MOMENT: Saturday Closing - LOOK UP MOMENT: Walk to the best viewpoint on the stream. One minute of silence. Ask: 'What is Joe Humphreys doing right now at his age?' He's probably right here - doing exactly this. Let that sit.

SUNDAY - Synthesis, Conservation & Mentorship

Pulling It All Together | 3 Hours

Morning Block (2 hours): Independent Fishing

Opening Circle - 15 minutes

Read Joe's words from Live the Stream:

"Every day on the stream is an adventure. And as a teacher, if I've passed some good things on - not only the how-to, the nuts and bolts - but an appreciation of nature itself - that's what it's all about." - Joe Humphreys

Students choose one technique from the weekend to execute independently

Must observe for 5 minutes before first cast

Must select fly and tie it on with a Davy Knot

Independent Fishing - 90 minutes

Instructors observe but intervene only for safety or when explicitly asked

Safety: buddy system, wading belts, and the 1:5 instructor ratio apply exactly as in the Summer Camp Safety Protocols

Older students mentor younger students - pair them deliberately

Document: how many students make an independent tactical decision and fish it successfully?

Afternoon Block (1 hour): Conservation Session

The Spring Creek Story - 20 minutes

Tell the full Spring Creek story: highway construction, Duck Pond contamination, water temperatures in the 90s, wild trout disappearing, Joe founding Spring Creek Trout Unlimited, the jackhammers, the concrete wall, the pipe, and the stream coming back.

"This was my treasure. This was my life. And I saw it going. I don't know how I can do this - but I'm going to change this somehow." - Joe Humphreys, on Spring Creek

"What can I do myself? What can one man do? It starts right here. It starts at home." - Joe Humphreys

Brook Trout Discussion - 10 minutes

Brook trout as bio-indicators: their presence means clean water

The same streams where brook trout live often supply drinking water

Joe: "To catch a brook trout in all its regal beauty - it's gold to me."

Conservation Action - 20 minutes

Stream clean-up: monofilament, litter, debris from riparian zone

OR: water quality testing with test kits

OR: macroinvertebrate survey - compare to Saturday morning's kick-seine results

Closing Circle - 10 minutes

FINAL LOOK UP MOMENT: Stand at the water. One minute of silence.

"These waters are filled with miles of endless memories. The springs are my heart. Their waters are the course of my life story. And there are trout - the friends I want to see flourish for lifetimes to come." - Joe Humphreys

Ask each student: one thing they will remember from this weekend

"We never stop learning. The good Lord made it that way." - Joe Humphreys

TAKE IT HOME

Give every student a piece of paracord and a small carabiner to clip to their backpack.

Knot:

Tie the Davy Knot onto the carabiner once a day. Quarter-inch tag end. One firm tug.

Casting:

Use a wooden spoon or dowel. Stand sideways at a mirror. Ten short strokes - feel the thumb squeeze at the stop.

Observation:

5 minutes outside. Sit still. Record one sound, one insect, and wind direction in the camp journal.

See the Take-Home Practice Challenges handout for the full weekly tracker and journal prompts.

Certificates: print Level 1 completion certificates if using them (template in the Camp Appendix)

Student Handouts (Included in Docs/Handouts folder)

Handout_Casting_Reference_Card.docx

Handout_Knot_Guide.docx

Handout_Water_Reading.docx

Handout_Aquatic_Insect_ID.docx

Handout_Conservation_Ethics.docx - includes full Spring Creek story and brook trout section

Handout_Equipment_Guide.docx

The Joe Humphreys' Fly Fishing Stream School | Inspired by the Methods of Joe Humphreys