The Joe Humphreys' Fly Fishing Stream School

One-Hour Clinic - Complete Package

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 One-Hour Clinic

"When you catch a fish, you're off and running. You never forget." - Joe Humphreys

Overview

The One-Hour Clinic is The Joe Humphreys' Fly Fishing Stream School's most accessible format - a fast-paced, high-energy introduction suitable for school visits, scout outings, community events, youth group programs, or any setting where time is limited. No water access is required. This clinic can be delivered entirely on a lawn, gymnasium, or field.

The goal is not mastery. The goal is ignition. Every student leaves having cast a fly rod, tied a knot, and understood something about the world beneath the surface of a trout stream.

Staffing

Enrollment	Instructors required
1-5 students	2 adults minimum: one certified Harvey Leader plus a second cleared adult
6-10 students	2 certified Harvey Leaders
11-15 students	3 certified Harvey Leaders

Minimum two cleared adults on site at every clinic, one of them a certified Harvey Leader, whatever the headcount. 1:5 is the supervision ratio, not the staffing floor. Youth Helpers (14-17) never count toward the ratio and are never alone with a student.

Joe Humphreys in 60 Seconds

Begin every clinic with a brief introduction to Joe Humphreys - the man behind the method. He has been fishing since age 6. He taught fly fishing at Penn State University for 19 years. He holds Pennsylvania's fly-caught brown trout record. He said this:

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

"I was on my bicycle with the fly rod across the handlebars, three peanut butter sandwiches in my pocket. Thompson Run was my classroom. What we caught and what we shot is what we ate. That is just the way it was." - Joe Humphreys

This is what the students are about to experience: the beginning of a lifelong reason to go outside.

Timing Breakdown

Segment	Time	Content
1	**10 min**	Welcome + safety brief, Joe introduction, equipment anatomy
2	**25 min**	Short Stroke Cast on the lawn
3	**15 min**	Knot Tying: Davy Knot
4	**10 min**	Stream ecology basics + Look Up moment + close

Segment 1: Welcome & Equipment Anatomy - 10 Minutes

Safety first (one minute, before anything else): Eye protection on - no glasses, no rod in hand; regular glasses count. Two rod lengths between casters, always. When you hear “RODS DOWN,” rods down, eyes on the instructor.

Script

“Welcome. My name is [instructor name]. Everything we’re doing today comes from one person: Joe Humphreys. He’s been fishing since he was six years old. He grew up in State College, Pennsylvania, and spent his childhood on a tiny stream called Thompson Run - figuring everything out on his own, one fish at a time. He taught fly fishing at Penn State University for 19 years. And he still fishes today. He says the secret to life is having something to look forward to. By the end of this hour, you’ll understand why he says that.”

Equipment Walkthrough

ROD: ‘A lever. Not a whip, not a wand. A lever.’

REEL: ‘Holds the line. In fly fishing, the reel is less important than the line.’

FLY LINE: ‘In fly fishing the line carries the fly, because a fly weighs almost nothing. The line has weight. That weight loads the rod.’

LEADER: ‘Gets thinner as it goes. Invisible to the fish.’

TIPPET: ‘The final, thinnest section. What the fly is tied to.’

FLY: ‘Made of fur, feathers, thread, and foam. Imitates insects. No bait today - we use flies.’

If anyone has fished a spinning rod, worms, or a bobber: ‘You already know how to set a hook and land a fish. Joe caught his first trout on a worm. There is no wrong way to start.’

Age Adaptations

Minnow (6-10): just rod, reel, line - keep it simple. ‘The rod is for casting. The reel holds your line. The fly is your lure - today we use flies, not bait.’

Brook Trout and Brown Trout (11-17): full walkthrough as above

Segment 2: The Short Stroke Cast - 25 Minutes

Why It's Different

Don't teach 10-to-2. Joe developed the short stroke for a reason: tight streams, brushy banks, real Pennsylvania water. Shorter stroke = tighter loop = more accuracy. This is the cast that works everywhere.

"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

Step-by-Step Instruction

Grip: thumb on top of handle. 'The thumb is the steering wheel.'

Pick-up: 'Smooth lift, accelerate to abrupt stop behind you - straight up - 12 o'clock.'

Thumb squeeze at back stop: 'This loads the rod. Without the squeeze, you're just waving a stick.'

Forward stroke: 'A short drift and a tap with the hand and forearm, to an abrupt stop - 11 o'clock. Thumb to elbow is one piece. The wrist never breaks.'

Second thumb squeeze on forward stop: 'Same feeling - squeeze and stop.'

Follow-through: 'Rod tip follows the line down toward the water. Don't aim at the sky.'

Lawn Drill Progression

Minnows (6-10): hoops at 15-20 feet only - success within easy reach

Older tiers start at 20 feet: hit a hula hoop (or chalk circle) on the first 5 casts

Move to 30 feet: same target or adjust

Add the roll cast for students who want more challenge

COACHING PRIORITY: Every student should cast at least 10 times. Quality over distance. 20 feet with a tight loop and good thumb squeeze is better than 40 feet with a sloppy stroke.

Common Errors & Corrections

Loop going sideways: usually thumb pressure uneven - check the grip

Line piling up on forward cast: the back stop is too early - wait for the back cast to fully extend

Fly hitting the ground behind: too much power on the pickup, not enough stop - slow the pickup

Segment 3: Knot Tying - 15 Minutes

The Davy Knot

The program standardizes on the Davy Knot for beginners because it ties fast and small. It ties in five seconds. It is small - low profile, allows natural drift. And it holds.

Teaching Sequence

Use paracord and a carabiner (or large ring) for the first practice - easier to see and feel

The four steps, with the cue “Through the eye, cross over, through the loop, wet and pull”:

1. Pass the tippet through the hook eye, front to back, 4 inches of tag end
2. Cross the tag end over the standing line toward you, forming one small loop
3. Pass the tag end through that loop once, front to back
4. Wet it. Pinch the fly and pull the standing line to cinch. Trim the tag end to a quarter inch

ENGAGEMENT TIP: Race the clock, not each other: every student times their own tie and tries to beat it. Students who struggle in school but have good fine motor coordination often excel here. Celebrate their competence visibly, by name.

Age Adaptations

Minnow (6-10): paracord only; goal is one complete knot with help

Brook Trout (11-13): paracord then actual tippet; goal is one independent knot

Brown Trout (14-17): actual tippet; goal is tying from memory without watching

Segment 4: Stream Ecology Basics + Look Up - 10 Minutes

What Trout Eat - 5 Minutes

Bring a couple of fly patterns to show. Explain what they imitate.

“This is a mayfly nymph pattern - the nymph lives under rocks in the stream before it hatches and flies away”

“This is a dry fly - it floats on the surface and imitates an insect the trout are rising to eat”

“This is a sculpin - it looks like a small fish, and big trout eat smaller fish”

Brief story: Joe at age 10, Thompson Run, orange shrimp in mother’s sewing basket, 14-inch trout on first cast. “The stream was talking to him. He just learned to listen.”

The Look Up Moment - 3 Minutes

This is the moment that separates a good clinic from a great one. Step outside if you aren’t already. Ask students to stop and look up from the rod.

SCRIPT: Say exactly this: “Joe Humphreys does this every single day on the water. He stops, turns to whoever is with him, and says: 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. He might point to a bird. Or the clouds. Or the sun on a rock. Those are the moments he says he comes back for.”

“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

Then: point out something real in the environment around you, no matter where you are. A bird. A cloud. The sound of wind. Make it genuine.

Closing - 2 Minutes

“You just learned to cast a fly rod, tie a knot, and understand something about one of the oldest kinds of fishing in the world. Joe Humphreys started at exactly the same place you did - with a

bamboo rod and no idea what he was doing. He fished for the next 90+ years. You now have everything you need to start."

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 a notebook.

See the At-Home Practice Sheet (in Practice Materials and the homework set) for the full weekly tracker and journal prompts.

"The secret to life is having something to look forward to. You're going fishing." - Joe Humphreys

"We need to be stewards of the stream. You don't have to pick the fish up out of the water and wave it around. Keep it in the water. We have to work on water quality." - Joe Humphreys

Joe sees fly fishing instruction as an investment not just in a sport, but in the long-term health of the waters and the people who love them.

Instructor Notes

What Success Looks Like

Every student cast at least 10 times

At least half tied the Davy Knot independently

Every student heard Joe's name and the secret of life quote

The Look Up moment happened

At least one student asked "when can I do this again?"

No Water? No Problem

This clinic requires no stream access. All casting is done on a lawn or field. Fly lines cast on grass with a small piece of yarn for a fly (no hook) work perfectly. If a stream is nearby, a 10-minute observation walk can be added after the clinic - but it is not required.

Extending to 90 Minutes

If time permits: add a 30-minute session after the main clinic where students cast in pairs, one coaching the other. Peer teaching accelerates learning. Use the video script from "Why I Don't Cast 10 to 2" as a debrief prompt.