

Press Release



Oklahoma Television Show Highlights Po-Hi Teacher's Unique Teaching Method

Outdoor Oklahoma television show recently selected a Ponca City Senior High School teacher's unique method of teaching to highlight in one of their future television shows. The attached picture shows the television crew filming outside at Po-Hi.

Language Arts teacher Ryan Shelton has been teaching his students how to fly fish as a part of his curriculum for many years. Shelton explains, "In mid to late September of each year, I teach my students how to fly fish. As part of their curriculum, we read *A River Runs Through It* by Norman Maclean. Most of my students have never fly fished before, so in order for them to fully understand Maclean's narrative, I teach them about the equipment used, the different types of flies, then I take them into the yard in front of the school to show them the casts. That evening the students meet me at the lake and we target bluegills, green sunfish, and sometimes we get lucky with a small largemouth. For many students, this is the first fish they have ever caught in their lives. For almost all of them, it is the only fish they have caught on a fly rod."

Shelton continued, "Fly fishing is my favorite hobby outdoors and gives me plenty of writing opportunities. I started teaching *A River Runs Through It* in 2011, and whenever I start a unit, I look for some sort of ice breaker to pique my students' interests. First, it dawned on me that fly fishing is typically seen as sport that is enjoyed wherever you have mountains. I take a trip to Colorado every summer with my brother to camp out as high in elevation as we can get and still fly fish for trout. I always looked at trout and fly fishing as an excuse to visit beautiful places. Then I discovered that right here in Oklahoma we have two year-round trout rivers, the lower Illinois River by Muskogee, and the lower Mountain Fork, down by Durant. But with the lower Illinois being three hours away, I could only go there a handful of times a year, which wasn't enough to quench my thirst for fly fishing. It dawned on me that Ponca City is surrounded by water, and though we don't have trout nearby (save for Lake Pawhuska in the winter time), we do have a lot of warm water species that might take a fly."

"One day back in 2002, my first full year of living here, I went to Lake Ponca and did a little fly casting, frankly not expecting to catch a thing. For the next couple of hours, my rod stayed bent, catching bluegills, largemouth bass, and the occasional crappie. I wondered if anybody else knew that you could have such a fun time on a fly rod right here in Ponca City."

"So when I approached *A River Runs Through It* in 2011, I realized that I needed to take my students fly fishing, and I could do that right here in Ponca City. When they hold the rod in their hands, moving to the four-count rhythm of the cast, and when they lay out the line on top of the water, then set the hook on a bass that has just exploded on their fly, the look of excitement on their faces is something that makes my day, and hopefully is a memory they will never forget. Since the book has fly fishing as a cultural setting, it only makes sense to me to let them experience it, so that they could have an appreciation of fly fishing. This allows them to have a deeper understanding of the more complicated aspects of the book."

For Release October 18, 2017

"The gentlemen from *Outdoor Oklahoma* told me the episode will air next season (August or September of 2018), so we will have to exercise a huge amount of patience between now and then!"

Two of Shelton's students were asked how they felt about the experience. Po-Hi student Presley Fuller said, "It was different than I imagined, but it was completely worth it. I would do it again if the chance arose."

Student Jaden Schneeberger said, "I think the clinic was very helpful in understanding the art of fly fishing. The fly fishing clinic was a fun event that I have never gotten to experience."

Mary Ladd

Public Information Coordinator
Ponca City Public Schools
580-352-4188
laddm@pcps.us