

## **How San Antonio Academy Teacher Leon McNeil is Shaping the Next Generation of Outdoor Enthusiasts Through the Outdoor Adventures Program**

For Leon McNeil, teaching isn't just about academics; it's about building life skills, fostering resilience, and instilling a deep appreciation for the outdoors in kids. As an educator at San Antonio Academy in San Antonio, Texas, and the co-founder of City Kids Adventures, Leon McNeil has dedicated himself to mentoring the next generation of outdoor enthusiasts, using hands-on experiences to teach essential outdoor skills for kids, including hunting, fishing, and wildlife conservation. His passion for responsible outdoor recreation has impacted his Academy students and many urban kids who might not have otherwise had access to these opportunities.

### **Implementing the Outdoor Adventures Program at San Antonio Academy**

A key part of Leon's classroom success comes from using the [Outdoors Tomorrow Foundation's Outdoor Adventures curriculum](#), which equips educators like Leon with the tools to bring outdoor education into the classroom. Through his work, Leon teaches students how to engage in the outdoors, inspiring a new generation of responsible hunters, anglers, and conservationists.

At San Antonio Academy, Leon McNeil has successfully implemented Outdoor Adventures (OA) into his engaging and hands-on Outdoor Leadership course for 3rd–7th graders. Leon stated, “The curriculum provides a structured yet flexible template, allowing educators to tailor lessons to meet students' specific interests and needs.” He's completed several units including archery and shooting sports giving students a well-rounded outdoor education experience.

One of the elements that makes this program so impactful is the strong support from the school. San Antonio Academy utilizes the OA curriculum and encourages opportunities outside the classroom, allowing students to apply what they learn in real-world settings. This support has enabled Leon to provide immersive experiences that help students build confidence, develop new skills, and gain an appreciation for the outdoors.

According to Leon, the real magic happens during hands-on activities. While Outdoor Adventures provides a solid foundation, it's up to the teacher to bring it to life. He emphasizes that educators must be motivated and find ways to engage students, making the lessons tangible and memorable actively. Many students' most impactful “light bulb moments” come during outdoor interactions, where they can physically participate in activities like shooting sports, fishing, and archery. These experiences turn abstract concepts into real-world skills, fostering a sense of accomplishment and enthusiasm for outdoor pursuits.

### **City Kids Adventures and Its Connection to Outdoor Adventures**

Nearly three decades ago, Leon and Leticia McNeil, dedicated educators, founded [City Kids Adventures](#) to provide urban kids with outdoor experiences that may not have been easily accessible in their communities. The program also serves as an extension of the classroom. Academy students are able to attend weekend events if they want. City Kids Adventures program

offers hands-on opportunities to engage in outdoor activities and develop a deeper connection with nature-based learning initiatives, furthering their leadership development.

While San Antonio Academy outdoor curriculum students can participate in Outdoor Leadership coursework up to the 7th grade, many of them continue their outdoor journey through City Kids Adventures, which serves youth from 2nd grade through high school. This crossover allows students to build upon the skills they learn in the classroom while expanding their real-world outdoor experiences, preparing them for future outdoor leadership training.

For McNeil, the outdoors is a bridge connecting kids from different backgrounds through shared experiences. Students who have participated in both programs often develop a lifelong appreciation for the outdoors, with many continuing their involvement well beyond their school years. The program fosters a sense of independence, leadership and responsibility, showing students the endless possibilities that exist beyond their immediate environment.

At the core of San Antonio Academy's Outdoor Leadership program and City Kids Adventures is youth outdoor mentorship, which McNeil believes is essential to any successful outdoor program. Experienced educators and outdoor leaders are critical in facilitating and encouraging participation, ensuring that students feel supported in exploring the outdoors. Outdoor recreation has seen a resurgence, but McNeil is mindful of the potential challenges ahead. With the increasing integration of Artificial Intelligence and digital technology, like the rise of social media, maintaining human connection through nature will be more critical than ever. The outdoors remains unmatched in its ability to ground, challenge, and inspire, making it an invaluable tool in shaping future generations of responsible hunters, anglers, and conservationists. Through Texas youth outdoor programs like these, students continue to embrace and protect the great outdoors.