

Inspiring the Future: Meet Lindsay Beaton, OTF Teacher of the Year

The Outdoors Tomorrow Foundation (OTF) Teacher of the Year award recognizes educators who excel in integrating OTF's Outdoor Adventures (OA) curriculum while fostering a love of nature and developing outdoor skills in their students. The 2025 honor goes to Lindsay Beaton, an elementary physical education teacher at DeWitt Elementary School in Arkansas. With almost twenty years of experience, Beaton has committed her career to motivating young learners to value physical health and outdoor activities, acquire essential life skills, and develop an appreciation for nature and wildlife.

Meet Lindsay Beaton

Lindsay Beaton has been shaping young minds as an educator for 19 years, primarily teaching K-5 elementary physical education. Her teaching journey was influenced by her parents, who worked in education, and teachers who profoundly impacted her life. Beaton holds an Associate of Arts in Health & Physical Education from Carl Albert State College, a Bachelor of Science in Health & Physical Education, and a Master of Education in Secondary Education & Physical Education from Arkansas Tech University.

Beyond PE, Beaton has coached high school track and cheerleading and has taught middle school health. She believes in fostering a positive learning environment where students are eager to participate, build confidence, and develop lifelong outdoor skills.

Passion for Teaching

For Beaton, the greatest joy of teaching is seeing students light up when they master a new skill. "I love that the kids LOVE coming to my class!" she says. She finds fulfillment in witnessing students' "aha" moments, such as when a child learns to tie a knot for the first time or succeeds in archery after initial hesitation.

Beaton incorporates Outdoor Adventures into her lessons, allowing students to gain hands-on experience in fishing, archery, conservation, and wildlife education. "Outdoor Adventures has allowed me to introduce more outdoor lessons and enhance what I was already teaching," she explains. By making lessons relevant to students' surroundings, such as teaching about duck migration and black bear conservation in Arkansas, Beaton uses OA to keep her students engaged and excited to learn.

Overcoming Challenges in Education

When asked about challenges, Beaton mentioned that, like many educators, one central issue is limited funding, especially for non-traditional subjects like outdoor education. She combats this by applying for grants, partnering with community organizations, and maintaining equipment to extend its longevity.

Behavior management is another challenge, but Beaton credits her strong classroom structure and engaging lessons for keeping students focused and eager to participate. "I try to keep my class relevant, interesting, and active so students want to learn," she shares. By creating lessons that resonate with their everyday lives, Beaton ensures students acquire skills and develop a lasting appreciation for the outdoors.

Advice for Fellow Teachers and Aspiring Educators

For new educators, Beaton emphasizes the importance of embracing the local environment and tailoring lessons to the interests of students and the community. "When you find yourself in a new place, take time to learn about your students, school, and area," she advises. "Bloom where you are planted."

She also encourages teachers to continue learning and growing, staying open to new teaching methods and outdoor activities. Whether incorporating birdwatching, fishing, or hiking

into lessons, Beaton believes that keeping education fresh and exciting benefits both students and educators. "If you're passionate about what you teach, your students will be, too."

Inspiring the Next Generation

Beaton says that being named OTF Teacher of the Year is a tremendous honor. It affirms her efforts to make a difference through outdoor education. She hopes to expand her outdoor programs, secure more resources for her students, and continue instilling a love for nature in future generations.

Her message to fellow teachers, parents, and students? "Kids inherently LOVE the outdoors. Teaching them outdoor skills and conservation from a young age will ensure they carry that passion for a lifetime."

Lindsay Beaton's unwavering dedication to outdoor education is shaping the next generation of conservationists, outdoor enthusiasts, and lifelong learners. Through her passion and commitment, she is making an impact, one student at a time.