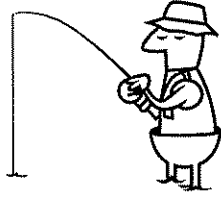


Joshua Bellau, Age 14



Reading, Writing, Arithmetic... & Fishing!

The opportunity to experience the outdoors goes far beyond the textbook for Louisiana kids. Growing up in Louisiana means that a life lesson is no further than the end of a fishing line and the experience in nature is far deeper than your hip waders. While every state in the nation has its own treasures to offer in nature, Louisiana has riches that are unique to its people!

It was not until I visited a land locked place that I realized just how special my home was. I always took for granted the seafood dishes on a menu and the availability of the term, "Fresh Catch" and until I traveled away from home for an extended period of time after Hurricane Katrina, I knew what it meant to live in, "Sportsman's Paradise."

While many kids along coastal Louisiana see fishing as a way of life, it is more of a good time for my family. It is an opportunity to laugh, learn and compete for the first and biggest catch of the day. Fishing is the one sport that you get to eat your trophy! I think casting a line in the water, getting that big hit and fighting the unknown is better than watching a mystery or action movie any day of the week. My family and I enjoy saltwater fishing, crabbing and crawfishing too. I jump at the chance to get out in the marsh and work my nets for the "mudbugs." It is a catch that people in other parts of the country consider too creepy and nasty to eat but, crawfishing is always fun and a little scary. In the swampy, grassy fresh water, there are no cages or glass panels between the

hunter and the prey. While I enjoy a fast rollercoaster, I think there is something just as alluring about fishing, crabbing and crawfishing. For me, it is a chance to learn about nature firsthand and it is one place where a lack of respect can be deadly! I have had the chance to see just how quickly a summer squall can erupt out on the water. I have learned to be cautious and attentive in the marsh and now know what it means to “walk tall and carry a big stick” when crawfishing. Regardless, I think kids, in Louisiana, have a chance to experience and learn so much about nature, wildlife and animal habitats while participating in good fun. While I really enjoy history, I still think it must mean something that waking up before dawn on Saturday and Sunday to pack lunch, gas up the boat, ice down the cooler and head to the launch is so fun and inviting!