

# Feature KIDS in Kayaking

## School Teacher D.A.R.E.s Kids to Choose Whitewater Over Drugs

by Ambrose Tuscano

Devon Barker is a national board certified elementary school teacher with six years teaching experience in Idaho schools; she is also a two-time national freestyle kayaking champion. Her love of teaching children and her passion for kayaking inspired Barker to create a program that encourages kids to reject drugs. Barker now takes her Dare To Kayak Program to schools, youth groups and even Rotary and other adult civic clubs.

The program targets children, ages 9 to 13. Its message is, don't just say "no" to drugs; instead say "yes" to something you are passionate about. Barker uses her love of whitewater kayaking as an example. The reigning National Champion freestyle kayaker is no stranger to big risks. Not only is this evident in her bold approach to freestyle kayaking, but also in her career choices. After teaching school for six years, Barker took a chance and put her career on hold while she pursued her dream of becoming a full-time kayaker.

After her first season of full-time kayaking, Barker went back to the Idaho school where she had been teaching and shared a video of her exploits with the children. In a discussion with 6th graders, the subject of drugs and sports came up. This interaction inspired Barker to create a video and discussion questions for the kids; the Dare To Kayak Program was born.



Need caption for pics.

Photos by ??????????



Barker uses the D.A.R.E. acronym to help kids see how they can become strong people without using drugs. Her version of the D.A.R.E. principles read as follows:

Dare to be who you want to be.  
Always do an activity you love.  
Risk losing, so that you can reach your goals.  
Everything can be achieved with hard work, dedication, clear vision, and a deep down drive, which says, "You can do it."

She also encourages the kids to write their own version of the D.A.R.E. principles. This helps them think actively and creatively about the solutions to drug use. Some of her favorites include:

Do believe in yourself. -Abby 5th grade  
Achieving goals can be easy without drugs. -Gavin 6th grade  
Right the wrong. -Brooke 4th grade  
Everyone has dreams; dreams are what make people happy. -Adam 6th grade

The emphasis of her program is on getting hooked on extreme sports, not extreme


drug use. After being presented to over 500 children (and counting), it is an obvious success. Barker even added a second day to her Dare To Kayak Program in response to the popular demand for a hands-on kayak demo day. On pool day, kids learn about paddling and water safety and they get to practice wet exits.

For Barker, her program is in keeping with the principles of the traditional D.A.R.E. anti-drug program that she used with her students when she was still teaching. However, it improves on the famous "Say no to drugs" slogan by giving kids something material to focus on instead of an absence of drugs.

"I wanted to take a different approach," says Barker. "I show them how I live a drug free, yet exciting life through kayaking and use this example to help them to find a passion in their own lives."

One of the things that interests kids most about her presentation is the allure of traveling across the globe. Barker's

kayaking has taken her to many fantastic places and children find her travels to places like Europe, Chile, Canada and Ecuador fascinating. "For many students," Barker says, "this is the first time they have realized that being involved with kayaking or any sport or activity can take them around the world."

This winter, Devon Barker made yet another impressive trip, representing the United States at the Freestyle Kayaking World Championships in Penrith, Australia. Now that she's back, she plans to expand her Dare To Kayak Program throughout the western US, and to continue challenging kids to stay off drugs. 

### A Kid's Perspective on Paddling

by Jason Craig

I started kayaking as early as I could remember, just sitting on my dad's lap in a boat while he took me around the river. After a while, as I started to paddle more and more on my own, I got better and better and began to love the sport more and more. Up to the age of 8 I ran rivers with my family in rafts, inflatable kayaks and canoes. A highlight during those years was when I was six and I went on a raft and kayak trip down the Grand Canyon. At the end of age 8 a friend named Josh got me an Eskimo Kayak. It was impossible to roll but I tried as best as I could and found myself running some pretty hard rivers in it.

I live in Reno and my mom works at the Nature Conservancy. Last year, right before the Truckee River Festival, the Conservancy was having a kayak party at the Patagonia Outlet. I met Eric Jackson there and he told me to come down to the new Whitewater Park and try out the Fun-1 kids' kayak that he had. Right off the bat I loved the Fun-1 and ordered one through Reno Mountain Sports, our local kayak dealer.

I learned a lot about the river when I was waiting for my kayak to arrive by taking my boogie board into surf holes where I played with the current and exit points of holes. It was awesome! When my boat finally arrived I took it into the ditch behind my house and learned how to roll. I practiced

river running, surfing and hole riding whenever I could. After a while I got real comfortable and I enjoy this sport a whole lot. A word to all those kids out there: kayaking is fun for adults, but it is ten times more fun for kids. Stick with it in spite of those doubtful situations.



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