

Best Teachers

1. Leah and Rena Dunbar

Courageous Conversations

2. Jason Tracy, Churchill High School
3. Daniel Gallo, Sheldon High School

Leah and Rena Dunbar share more than a last name. The two are identical twins, and, by the looks of their immaculate “Rate my Teachers” profiles, they are each beloved by their students at the high schools where they teach language arts: Winston Churchill High School and the Early College & Career Options (ECCO) High School, respectively. The Dunbar sisters have used their knowledge about and passion for social justice to guide their teaching styles, where they introduce important topics about identity to their students.

Eugene Weekly has written about the sisters’ “Courageous Conversations” program they introduced to the Eugene 4J School District before: The class focuses on the nuances of racial identity and oppression, and is a unique and important course to be offered at the high school level — a time for mental growth and change. And in a time when we would like our soon-to-be voters to be as socially informed as possible, this course seems particularly relevant. — Taylor Griggs

Best Animal Advocates

1. **Cascade Raptor Center** 32275 Fox Hollow Road. 541-485-1320. Cascaderaptorcenter.org.

2. Greenhill Human Society 88530 Green Hill Road. 541-689-1503. Green-hill.org.

3. S.A.R.A.’s Treasures 871 River Road. 541-607-8892. Sarastreasures.org.

If you Google “things to do in Eugene,” you will see Cascades Raptor Center as a top-tier search result. For those of you who have not made the small trek out past the south hills to check it out, Cascades Raptor Center is a nature center and wildlife hospital specializing in birds of prey. People who visit can be acquainted with various types of birds — eagles, falcons, owls and vultures, to name a few.

The organization’s “bird-first policy” puts them at the top of the list of local animal advocates. “From an internal basis we have what we call a bird-first policy, whatever decision we make has to consider the bird’s welfare first,” Louise Shimmel, founder and executive director of Cascades Raptor Center, says.

Shimmel says conservation issues have often been looked at from a human’s perspective. “We always try to take the point of view that the non-human world has been in existence for millions of years, and they each have an intricate role that they have to play. They have a right to their existence, whether it’s a mosquito or an eagle,” she says.

Of course, the people behind Cascades Raptor Center appreciate and value the conservation of other animals. But Shimmel thinks raptors are particularly useful in generating people’s interest in conservation efforts as a whole. “Every culture seems to have a fascination with birds of prey,” Shimmel says. “It’s an educational opportunity to use them to talk about all the other issues.”

Go see Aeolus, the bald eagle, or Archimedes, the snowy owl, and uncover your own fascination with raptors. — Taylor Griggs



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