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Winter 2020

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Low-tech pastimes **p8**

A Christmas
made by hand **p10**

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this winter **p12**

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This holiday season, thank a teacher

CC PARENT | Ashley Meyer

Teachers and first responders certainly deserve extra kudos this holiday season. For months they've been working overtime to adapt and adjust amidst a scary and constantly changing reality, often at the expense of their own safety and a well-being. Even in the best of times, teachers work long days on their feet without a bathroom break, all while meeting the social-emotional needs of kids. Add to that the stress of Zoom and a global pandemic, and it's safe to say that many are likely running on empty.

It's clear that the holidays will be different this year. Some of those differences, like missing out on parties and time with family, are going to be a bummer no matter what. However, there are likely some traditions that could do with a deeper look and a reevaluation beyond the risk of COVID exposure. Which holiday traditions actually bring joy, and which ones just result in stress and extraneous spending? With so many out of work, traditions that were once affordable may not be in the budget this year, so how can we pivot in a way that keeps the holiday spirit alive while still maintaining sanity and financial stability?

In the past, my daughter and I put together Christmas goodie bags for the staff at her school, filled with homemade cookies and treats. Last year I completely spaced and forgot about them until the night before we were to drop them off. I stayed up all night baking in a mad panic and remember snapping at my daughter as we frantically wrapped them before school the next morning. At some point I wondered, "What am I really doing here? Are these cookies an authentic expression of our gratitude for these hardworking folks, or am I just ticking off a holiday box?" and so I resolved to be more thoughtful about it this year. Fast forward to the 2020 holidays, and distributing homemade goodies en masse seems especially inappropriate, not to mention impractical. All this drove me to question what is truly the best way to express our love and gratitude for the folks who give so much of themselves all year



long.

"I've had students make me a handmade card, and it sounds cheesy, but honestly, it's my favorite thing because it makes me feel good and affirms that I'm doing something worthwhile," said Kristen Sowinski-Langer, an art teacher at Washington Middle School in Springfield. "This year has been so crazy, all I want is grace. Obviously, if someone hands me a gift card that's awesome, but just taking a minute in the spirit of things to say thank you and have your kid make a card means so much. That's what we need more than anything right now."

Carrie Jeffries, a third-grade teacher at Chatham Elementary School, reiterated the importance of families reaching out. "A heartfelt note truly means the most, especially when it highlights the things your child is enjoying about school. It's probably not the best year for homemade treats, but if folks do want to give a gift, something really nice that our PTO does is have a 'Teacher's Favorites' section on their

webpage, where teachers and staff can list favorite sports teams, type of candy, etc."

For those that are able to buy gifts, consider the daily realities and needs of teachers. Small niceties that teachers may not necessarily buy for themselves, like a pack of nice pens or a light to clip on their computer to enhance their Zoom experience are thoughtful choices. Items that promote relaxation and self-care are also ideal, such as candles or bath salts. And with so many small businesses struggling, gift cards for take-out at locally owned restaurants are an amazing way to support both teachers and the local economy. Many businesses are able to email gift cards directly to the recipient, which simplifies the matter, especially in the era of virtual everything.

Whatever you do, take the time to let all the teachers and other hard-working people in your life know they are seen, heard and appreciated.

Ashley Meyer is a Springfield mom of two, freelance writer and chef.



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Start a holiday reading tradition

CC PARENT | Deana Metzke

As the winter holidays approach, most families have any number of traditions they celebrate during this time. For me, when I was a child, we delivered cookies to extended family members, and we also read certain books on Christmas Eve. Now as an adult, there are no cookie deliveries for my family, but we have definitely continued the tradition of reading some of the same holiday books each December. Regardless of

whether or not reading with your kids is a tradition in your household yet, I would like to share some recent holiday books that are sure to be enjoyed by children and adults alike, both written and illustrated by Matt Tavares.

If your kids are a little older or just aren't fans of Santa, then *Red and Lulu* may be the book to add to your collection. This picture book, released in 2017, captivated my attention and

curiosity immediately, just from the cover illustration. Red and Lulu are two cardinals who live together in an evergreen tree. Unbeknownst to them, their home is cut down and taken away, all while Red is gone and Lulu is still in the tree. We then spend a good chunk of the book following the tree, wondering if Red and Lulu will ever be reunited. As you pay attention to the illustrations though, you realize that we have followed

the tree (and Lulu) to New York City. The illustrations continue to be beautifully captivating and demonstrate some of the love we often miss during the rush of the holiday season. When we read this book at my house, we tend to linger on each page, just admiring all we see. So, why has Red followed Lulu and ended up in New York City? Will Red and Lulu ever see each other again? I don't want to spoil it, so you'll have to check it out for yourself.

Matt Tavares' holiday release for 2019 was *Dasher*. As you may have guessed from the title, this picture book's main character is one of Santa's reindeer. This lovely book tells the story of how Santa went from delivering presents around the world with the help of only one horse to having eight reindeer in front of his sleigh. Besides stories about the red-nosed reindeer, we had not read any books about the rest of them, so it is nice to read an original story about them before Rudolph shows up. And just like *Red and Lulu*, the illustrations in this book are beautiful to look at. The illustrations are darker in color because most of the book takes place on Christmas Eve, but still something to stare at. And although it is clearly a Christmas story, this is also a story about taking chances, being brave and the importance of family.

Both of these books can be found wherever books are sold, as well as the public library in Springfield. And yes, even as my kids get older and read fewer and fewer picture books on their own, when it comes to this time of year, we will continue to grab books from that same pile and enjoy them before we go to bed. Then hopefully, when they have their own families, these memories will spark their desire to create traditions – maybe even around books – for them.

Deana Metzke is a wife, mom of two, blogger and book lover who is trying her best to raise children who will enjoy reading long after she's gone. She is a literacy coach at a Springfield elementary school. You can find her talking about children's books on Twitter at @DMetzke or her blog, raisingreaders.site.

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The Shovlin family tries to find puzzles and games that Grace, age 10, Leo, almost three, and Cecilia, age 6, can enjoy together.

Low-tech pastimes

CC PARENT | Lana Shovlin

On Friday evenings, after my family has completed a long week of remote learning and working from home, we eat dinner, clean the kitchen and head into the living room to watch a family movie. In theory, this seems like a great way to decompress, but as many parents know, the idea of family movie night is much different than the reality of family movie night. What should be a relaxing evening spent snuggled up on the couch, eating

popcorn and laughing at the onscreen antics of our favorite actors often turns into an argument between my two oldest children, who can't agree on what movie they want to watch. While they argue, my little boy completely loses interest in the movie and begins throwing popcorn everywhere. This flurry of activity (and popcorn) prompts my husband to start vacuuming the living room, which is my cue to pick up my phone and send a text

to my girlfriends asking them why family time can feel so stressful.

Aside from the drama that family movie night can elicit, there's another reason that watching movies is no longer at the top of my after-dinner activity list. Recently, like many children, my kids have been participating in remote learning. This means that the amount of time they spend on electronic devices has increased exponentially, and as someone who has



always been concerned about the negative impacts of too much screen time, I decided to explore different ways to keep my family engaged long after the dinner plates have been cleared away.

With three kids ranging in age from 10 to 3, finding activities to keep everyone entertained without the use of electronics can feel challenging, but it's not impossible. The first and easiest change we made was substituting games for movies. As you can probably imagine, my girls are much more capable of putting together puzzles and playing board games than my (almost) three-year-old son is, but we've found ways to include him in the games we love to play. For example, when we play *Sorry!*, we put him in charge of moving the pawns, and if we play *Lewo*, which is a colored version of *Jenga*, we let him roll the dice to tell us which color block to pull from the tower. These little jobs make him feel like he's part of the action and provide him with early learning opportunities.

He's still a toddler, though, and sometimes no matter what we do, the greatest pleasure he gets out of family game night is flipping the board or demolishing our carefully balanced wooden tower. This can be frustrating for everyone involved, so on evenings when

it's obvious he has a surplus of energy, we'll opt out of playing games and take a moonlit stroll instead. As we wander the streets of our neighborhood, illuminated by moonbeams, I'm often reminded of how Henry David Thoreau once wrote, "I had seen her only as it were through a crevice in a shutter, occasionally. Why not walk a little way in her light?"

As the weather turns colder, and night walks become less appealing, reading together has become a favorite evening activity of ours. After dinner, we light a fire in the fireplace and the kids curl up on the sofa under their favorite quilts to listen while my husband and I take turns reading chapters aloud to them from beloved children's books. When we first started doing this, I was certain it was going to be a disaster. I never assumed that everyone would sit quietly and listen to the story without peppering us with a million questions, so you can imagine how surprised I was to discover that all three of my children listen attentively to the books we read. Much to my delight, during these shared moments, there is a palpable family connection, and best of all, no one is missing the hypnotic glow of iPads and iPhones.

When asked if her famous books were still relevant in today's world, Laura Ingalls Wilder said, "The way we live and your schools are much different now. So many changes have made living and learning easier. But the real things haven't changed. It is still best to make the most of what we have; to be happy with the simple pleasures."

There's no doubt that we live in a high-tech world. We're all at the mercy of our devices, and to pretend like there are times when I don't surrender to screens would be a lie. However, in our quest to find entertainment that doesn't involve electronics, my family discovered that disconnecting from technology was much easier than we expected, and in doing so, we reaped the benefits of connecting with each other and finding joy in peaceful pastimes.

Lana Shovlin lives in Springfield with her husband and three kids, who have all been at home together since March.

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A Christmas made by hand

CC PARENT | Carey Smith

Twinkling lights, heartfelt cards, delicious cookies, singing together – Christmas can mean so much to us. Some celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday, commemorating the birth of Jesus, while others celebrate Christmas as a secular holiday, rejoicing in togetherness and the spirit of giving.

In times such as these, when we are living with daily circumstances that often seem beyond our control, having a tradition with familiar rituals can put us back in our comfort zone. Though much emphasis is placed on shopping and purchasing trendy gifts, there are many activities families can enjoy which do not involve being immersed in commercialism.

Handmade Christmas cards can be a

joy of the season. Children may draw one card to be copied, or may enjoy drawing an individual card for each person on the list. Stickers, paint, yarn, collage, stamps – all can be utilized for fantastic cards that will be treasured by those who receive them. However, the postal service notes that glitter can disable postage sorting machines, so use with care.

A variety of Christmas tree decorations can be made from strings of beads, decorated pinecones, Legos, painted salt dough, felt, chenille sticks and origami. The sky's the limit. These ornaments age with our children to become priceless heirloom mementos. Traditional holiday tree decorations such as popcorn or cranberries strung on string can

be hung on a Christmas tree for our viewing pleasure, or outdoors for treats for wildlife.

Cutting paper snowflakes can make for a fun afternoon for the whole family. While some prefer to freestyle their snowflakes, templates are available for traditional snowflake patterns while pop culture patterns from Frozen or Star Wars, or even shapes of Nobel Prize-winning physicists such as Marie Curie or Albert Einstein appeal to the quirker among us. Don't forget to listen to and sing along with your favorite Christmas songs to put you in the mood.

Watching holiday movies is a tradition many of us share, though it is debatable whether movie theaters will be open this Christmas. Fortunately, at-home movie



viewing has become the norm through the COVID-19 era. With comfort treats and drinks, snuggling up for an afternoon of watching classics and holiday favorites such as *It's A Wonderful Life*, *Home Alone*, *A Christmas Story*, *Miracle on 34th Street*, *Elf*, *The Nightmare Before Christmas* and *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* can be a fun shared holiday event for the family.

Baking cookies is a tradition for many families, whether sharing them with our own family or with our extended family, friends, neighbors and coworkers. Kids love to help cut out sugar cookies, decorate gingerbread people, sprinkle candy confetti, and press a Hershey's kiss into a snickerdoodle. Cookies are fun to make and a delight to share.

Common cookie gifts may include a cookie mix in a jar or a holiday cookie variety plate, but there are many other options for homemade food gifts. Spiced nuts, holiday Chex mix or Rice Krispie treats, peanut or cashew brittle, white and dark chocolate pretzels, various comestibles on a stick, fudge and peppermint or almond bark are all incredible edibles that are a joy to make, give, and receive.

Christmas gifts can be tangible or intangible, with services given in the form of gift certificates to be redeemed later. For older kids, this may be lawn-mowing or other yard work, folding laundry or other chores, breakfast in bed or technical assistance to grandparents. For younger kids, gift certificates for unlimited hugs are

always welcome.

Tangible gifts usually make up the bulk of what we give and receive. Soaps, scrubs and bath bombs are a cinch for older children to make, while artwork, bookmarks and key chains are usually easy to make with items found around the house. Fabric markers make personalized tote bags, T-shirts and pillowcases easy. Modern homemade gifts like coffee cup holders can be given alongside more traditional gifts like handmade trivets and potholders.

And let's not forget the handmade gifts parents can make for their children. Whether you are skilled enough to make a dollhouse, tool bench or play kitchen from creatively reused furniture, or operate more on the level of making educational or baby toys from items you already have, your children will appreciate these thoughtful homemade gifts for years to come.

In times of COVID, we can also create new traditions of our own. To get us out of the house in a safe way, create a winter scavenger hunt in your neighborhood. Distribute painted rocks in your neighborhood or local parks while keeping your eyes open for ones already hidden. Don't forget to go on a walk or drive to see all the Christmas lights and decorations.

A handmade Christmas is not only a delight to experience, it is a delight to create, warming our hearts on cold winter days and creating memories that will long outlast a pandemic.

Crafts:

www.personalcreations.com/blog/christmas-crafts-for-kids

www.thebestideasforkids.com/christmas-crafts-for-kids/

Snowflakes:

www.firstpalette.com/printable/snowflake.html

www.thesprucecrafts.com/amazing-snowflake-templates-1356264

www.symmetrymagazine.org/article/december-2014/deck-the-halls-with-nobel-physicists

Cookies:

www.foodnetwork.com/fn-dish/recipes/2015/12/christmas-cookies-so-easy-kids-can-help-make-them

www.allrecipes.com/article/easy-holiday-cookies-make-your-kids/

Edible gifts:

www.allrecipes.com/longform/homemade-food-gifts-for-kids/

www.eatsamazing.co.uk/seasonal-fun-food/christmas/30-easy-edible-gifts-that-kids-can-make-for-christmas

Gifts:

happyhooligans.ca/40-useful-gifts-kids-can-make/

www.parents.com/holiday/christmas/crafts/holiday-gifts-kids-can-make/

happyhooligans.ca/70-awesome-toys-make-kids/

www.howweelearn.com/gifts-kids-can-make/

Send the kids outside this winter

CC PARENT | Erika Holst

With the clocks turned back and spiking COVID cases cutting off outlets for entertainment, families are staring down the prospect of a long winter cooped up inside. What are parents to do with their stir-crazy kids when the temperature is freezing? Consider taking a page from Nordic countries, who know a thing or two about dressing for the weather: bundle up and head outside to enjoy the fresh winter air.

In the northern European country of Norway, which sits roughly parallel with Iceland and Greenland and extends north of the Arctic Circle, embracing cold weather is a way of life. I have firsthand knowledge of this, having been raised by a Norwegian mother who took me to Norway often. On one trip, I was shocked to see my cousin bundle up her infant daughter and place her pram outside on the porch in January for her nap.

"Why are you putting the baby outside to sleep?" I asked, looking at her strangely.

"Why wouldn't I? The fresh air helps her sleep," she replied, looking at me strangely in return.

I reached out to my cousin Paal for insight into how Norwegians keep their kids active outdoors all winter long. He lives outside Oslo and is the father of a 10-year-old boy and two daughters, ages 7 and 3. Although he assured me that Norwegian kids are just as enamored of their screens as American kids, he affirmed the role of winter outdoor activity

in his kids' lives and shared some cultural perspective on how I could get my own little couch potato outdoors this winter.

Norwegian culture places great emphasis on the benefits of outdoor activity, and the Norwegian government encourages

positive attitudes towards being outside and the experiences contribute to positive energy and joy of life."

Paal sends his 3 year-old to an outdoor education-based daycare. He estimates she spends about 75% of her time outdoors, year-round. The kids are taken on hikes through the woods and taught around outdoor campfires. They even nap outdoors in tents.

In this culture, Norwegian kids grow up with the expectation that they will be spending time outside, regardless of the weather. In both school and home settings, kids are perfectly content to play outside for hours in temperatures of 10-20 degrees. If the temperature dips down to zero or below, outdoor activity might be limited to a half-hour walk, but it is rarely suspended altogether.

On this side of the pond, we as parents can embrace the same culture of appreciating the outdoors in all seasons and not letting cold weather chase us inside. Our notions of "too cold" to go out can be revised, and we can build expectations that time will be spent outdoors, whether for an hours-long sledding session or a quick walk for fresh air.

The key to making outdoor activity tolerable, if not enjoyable, during the winter all comes down what you wear, and Norwegians excel at dressing for cold weather.

"How you are dressed is really important,"



outdoor learning for students. Its annual education plan states that "trips and play in nature throughout all seasons will form

Paal says. "You need to have wool closest to your skin."

Ah, the wool undershirt. My mother wore hers from October to April. When I made fun of her for this, she scoffed at me. "Americans have no respect for cold weather," she said, and then enlightened me on the finer points of how wool keeps you warm and wicks moisture. Indeed, in Norway, wool undergarments are such a basic component of life that they are sold at grocery stores right next to the deodorant and hairbrushes. Dressing a child for winter always starts with a long-sleeve wool undershirt and wool tights or long johns, and usually a wool gaiter around the neck as well.

Children who are spending most of their school day inside will then put on regular clothes over their wool base layer and finish with a down coat to walk to school. Children who will be spending the day outside dress in wool undergarments, another layer of



fleece or wool pants and shirt, and then waterproof coveralls for wet weather or a down coat and snowpants for dry weather. All schoolkids are requested to have a change of wool undergarments and socks at school so they can change out of their base layer if it gets sweaty from outdoor activity.

"You need to dress in many thin layers, then the body is able to breathe," Paal said. Layers also makes it possible to adjust for varying temperatures throughout the day, or when moving from indoors to outdoors.

By dressing properly for the weather, setting an expectation of outdoor time and not being daunted by cold temperatures, you can alleviate cabin fever and gain some quality family time outdoors this winter, just like the Norwegians do.

Erika Holst is the daughter of an outdoorsy Norwegian and the mother of an indoorsy 8-year-old American.

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Stuff the Sleigh for Springfield

Wednesdays, Nov. 18, Dec. 2, 9 and 16, 5-8pm. The Springfield Jaycees are accepting new toys, books, warm weather gear and non-perishable food items for local organizations such as the Northside Children's Community Library, HSHS St. John's Children's Hospital, and others. The chapter will also be collecting canned goods and other non-perishable food items for distribution to local micro pantries. Drive up for no-contact drop offs at the corner

of Fifth and Jackson streets. Part of the Old Capitol Holiday Walks. Find the event on Facebook. Illinois Governor's Mansion, 410 E. Jackson St.

Memorial's Festival of Trees

Sat., Nov. 21 through Sun., Nov. 29. This year's virtual format will allow people from all over the world the opportunity to view beautifully decorated trees and wreaths. Guests to the virtual platform will also be able to vote for their favorite item in all three design categories of trees and wreaths. This year's theme is A Season of Hope. Find the event on Facebook. 217-788-4301.

Old Capitol Farmers Holiday Market

Saturdays, Nov. 14, Nov. 21 and Dec. 1, 9am-12pm. Find locally grown produce, baked goods, craft items, art and holiday

gifts. This year's market will be held both inside and outside to accommodate social distancing. Anvil and Forge Brewing and Distilling Company, 619 E. Washington St., 217-544-1723.

Light up the Park

Every Thursday through Sunday, Nov. 27 through Dec. 27. Drive through over a mile of 100,000+ brilliant holiday lights, sculptures, arches and more. An annual drive-thru holiday light display. Chatham Community Park, Chatham, 731 S. Main St., Chatham.

The Nativities of St. Francis of Assisi Church

Fri., Dec. 4, 7-8pm. Host Dan Frachey, Chiara Center program director, will broadcast from St. Francis of Assisi Church. He will discuss the 1920s stained glass window of Greccio, Italy and its significance of a Nativity scene tradition. Email info@chiaracenter.org for the Zoom info. 217-523-0901.

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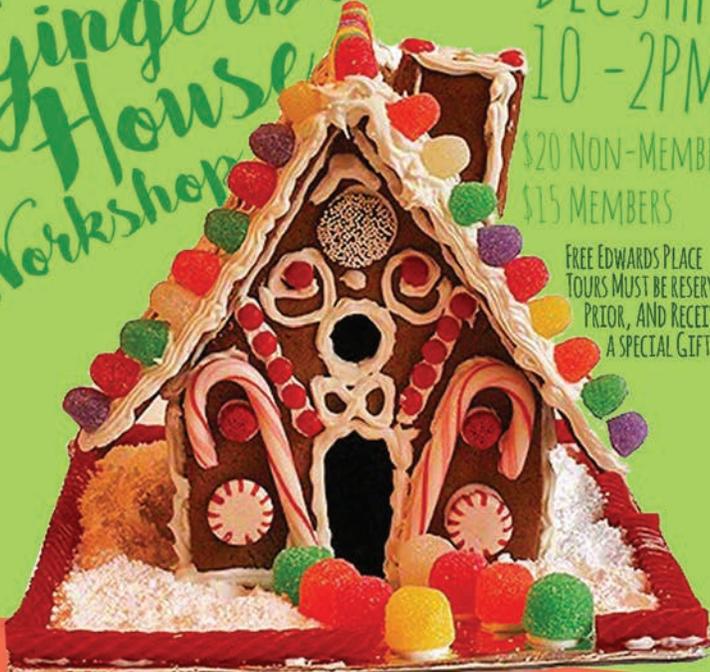
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