

January 2026

Language & Literacy

Did you know that if you read to your child 20 minutes a day, they are hearing an average of 1.8 million words per year?

Reading not only helps your child build a strong vocabulary, but it also has been shown to build empathy for others, boost physical health, and positively affect and boost mental health.

Reading also builds brain power and helps your child to understand more words and concepts. This helps them to process information at a faster speed.

Reading has been shown to lower stress levels and promote sleep. If you don't have a lot of books, that's okay. Check out your local library!

- Provided by Minnesota Valley Action Council: Head Start

The Power of Connection

A connection happens when people feel seen, heard, and valued. How have you connected with your child today? Whether you read a book, sang a song, or had a living room dance party, these small moments matter.

Children are born ready to be loved. These daily interactions help their brains grow and make your relationship strong.

Take a moment to reflect: How do you help your child feel valued? Who helps you feel seen and heard?

- Articles provided by Early Learning Department: Mankato Area Public Schools



Let's Explore the Wonders of Winter!

Winter is finally here! When the ground turns white and the air gets chilly, the world becomes a giant playground for learning. You don't need fancy toys to have fun in the cold. All you need is a little curiosity and some warm clothes.

Start with a Story

Your winter adventure should begin at the library. Look for books about snow, hibernating animals, or chilly adventures. Reading together helps children get excited about what they will see outside. It gives them new words to use when they start exploring.

The Five Senses Safari

Once you are bundled up, head outdoors for a sensory safari. Instead of just walking, stop and ask questions. How does the snow sound when you crunch it with your boots? What does it feel like when a flake lands on your tongue? Does the winter air smell different than the summer air? Using your five senses is the best way to learn about nature.

Get Creative in the Snow

There are so many ways to be active. You can go sledding down a hill or work together to build a sturdy snow fort. You can also go on a scavenger hunt to find items like sticks, stones, or dried berries to decorate a snowman.

Bring the Fun Inside

If the wind gets too cold, you can bring the "science lab" into your kitchen. Fill a shallow plastic bin or a cookie sheet with fresh snow. Give your child tools like scoops, magnifying glasses, and plastic containers. You can even use food coloring or water-based markers to "paint" the snow.

The most important part of these activities is to keep talking and interacting. When you describe the snow as crunchy, sparkly, or heavy, you are doing much more than just building your child's vocabulary.

Playing together helps your child's brain create new connections as they solve problems, like how to balance a snowman's head or why snow melts indoors. These moments also build your child's confidence and sense of security. By exploring the world together, you are strengthening your emotional bond and creating wonderful winter memories that last a lifetime.

COMMUNITY EVENTS



1/21: Lake Crystal Area Recreation Center's Indoor Playground: Free admission on Wednesday, Jan. 21, 2026 (all day). Playground rated for age 2-12. For more info, visit: LCARC.com/indoorplayground.

1/24: Saturday Shenanigans at North Mankato Taylor Library: Saturday, Jan. 24, 9 - 11 AM. Kids ages 1-5 are invited to join the Pete the Cat Party with various themed activities and treats! No registration required for this come-and-go event.

1/24: Storytime at Sota Scoops with St. Peter Library: Saturday, Jan. 24, 3 - 3:30 PM. Join us for a special ice cream-themed storytime! No registration required.

1/31: Lions Club KidSight Screening at Children's Museum of Southern MN: Saturday, Jan. 31, 10 - 11:30 AM. Lake Crystal Lions Club will provide free vision screenings for Museum members or paid admission guests.

2/7: Snow Day in the Park: Saturday, Feb. 7, 10 AM - 1 PM at **Veterans Memorial Park Ice Rinks, St. Peter.** Family fun and frisbee golf in the snow! There will be snowshoes you can try, bonfire, music, and fun for the whole family. FREE.

2/13: Raptor Center at St. Peter Community Center Gym: Friday, Feb. 13, 1:30 - 2:15 PM. A bald eagle will grace us with his presence! Please enter the gymnasium quietly. FREE.

2/14: "I Really Love Having You As My Friend" Storytime at Lake Crystal Public Library: Saturday, Feb. 14, 10 AM. No registration required.

Read & Play at North Mankato Taylor Library: Mondays and Tuesdays in January and February, 10 AM. Children ages 1-5 and their parents/guardians are welcome for educational play, games, stories, crafts, and more! No registration required.

Storytime at St. Peter Public Library: Wednesdays, 10:30 - 11:30 AM. No registration required.

Early Literacy Story Time at Blue Earth County Library, Mankato: Tuesdays, 10 - 11 AM and Wednesdays, 10:30 - 11 AM. Fun, educational stories for children while encouraging them to begin the habit of lifelong learning. Hands-on activities for kids. No registration required.

Family Storytime at Blue Earth County Library, Mankato: Thursdays, 10:30 - 11 AM. Join us for an awesome Family Storytime! Head to the library for some fun and educational activities. No registration required.

Newborn Discovery at Center for Learning, Mankato: Wednesdays, 9 - 10:30 AM. An inclusive and informative class designed specifically for newborns aged 0-12 weeks and their parents or caregivers. FREE.

Family Gym & Playtime at Center for Learning, Mankato: Thursdays, 5:30 - 7 PM & Fridays, 9:30 - 11:30 AM. Parents and children birth to age 5 are welcome! Spring Registration opens February 2. Sliding fee scale.

Creative Play Place at St. Peter Community Center: Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, 9 - 11 AM. Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5 - 7 PM. A free space for families and their children to play and connect. FREE.

Family Open Gym at St. Peter Community Center Gym: Second Friday of the month, 6 - 8 PM. This time is reserved for families with young children to play and do activities in the gym. FREE.

Have a free/affordable event for children or families in Blue Earth, Le Sueur, Nicollet or Waseca counties? Send to MankatoUW@mankatounitedway.org!