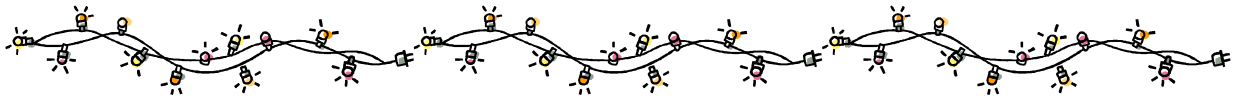
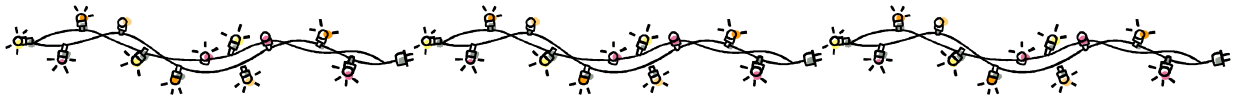


# Newsletter Project



Every Tuesday, the small Sunnyside Township distributes a weekly newspaper to its residents. These residents are predominantly upper middle-class, well-educated married couples (with many full-time moms) and retirees. Most children are in preschool through middle school, and a large portion of the retirees take care of grandchildren during the day. The articles in this weekly paper are to appear in the five weeks leading up to Christmas, and are meant to encourage the parents and caretakers (the vast majority of whom celebrate a traditional Christmas) to take time to make reading a part of their holiday celebrations.



## The Cure for Holiday Cabin Fever

November 21, 2006

It's that time of year again! The turkey is thawing, the pumpkin pies are prepared, and the kids have a nice long weekend at home. In order to wipe out their boredom, lucky little ones are expecting parents to invest a small fortune in the latest video game consoles, the Playstation 3 (PS3) and the Nintendo Wii. Both released last week, these gaming machines promise hours of action-packed entertainment. It's difficult enough to tear the

kids away from their new toys long enough to eat Thanksgiving dinner, let alone do anything else. However, this holiday season is the perfect time to take a break from sitting in front of the television and pick up some books that the gamer in your family is sure to enjoy.

Video games can provide a great escape from reality, weaving wondrous tales from lands far away. Princes, elves, mages, warlocks, dragons and many other magical creatures make up the characters in popular role-playing games. The Legend of Zelda: Twilight Princess, the newest installation in the popular Zelda series, is already a top seller for the Wii proving that fantasy has not fallen to the wayside. If your child is like most, they've read and loved the Harry Potter series, but have yet to find another book to hold their interest the way Harry and Hermione have done. Emily Rodda's series about Rowan of Rin is sure to captivate the heart of a young fantasy lover. With five books following Rowan's adventures are sure to keep your youngster occupied over the holiday break.

While role-playing games are a popular genre, equally popular are the action-packed sports games. John Madden's NFL 2007 is already a big hit for both consoles, building on the popularity of previous Madden releases. Whether they are playing Madden, Tony Hawk, or Tiger Woods, your kid is a sports fan and may be drawn to the idea of playing along with the big names in each sport. However, playing the game tells them little of the person and their accomplishments. Tiger Woods: Drive to Greatness by Mark Stewart is a great way to introduce your child to the man behind the mega-hit golf game. Similar books are available for other sports figures behind popular video games (such as One Wild Ride: The Life of Skateboarding Superstar Tony Hawk, also by Stewart) and

general books about sports will satisfy the sports junkie in your household, without sitting in front of the television.

Another big hit in the video game arena are battle games like Call of Duty 3, which takes the player back in time to World War II. With a “Teen” rating for its graphic violence, the historical war storyline has contributed significantly to the popularity of the Call of Duty series. Code Talker by Joseph Bruchac is the story of a young man recruited by the Marine Corps to send secret messages in his native Navajo tongue during World War II. This unique war story will steal your teen’s attention away from the video game without letting them know they’re actually learning something.

So instead of taking cash out of the college fund to pay for the Wii or the PS3, try getting your child to entertain themselves with a book. By appealing to the same interests that have drawn them to the games they love, they may rediscover their appreciation for a well-written book.

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Laughable Limericks for Snowy Days

November 28, 2006

With the holiday season comes the holiday weather. Children are praying for a snow day so they can sleep in, build snowmen, and have snowball fights. After they've froze their fingers off outside, they'll drag their exhausted little bodies inside for some hot cocoa and a warm blanket. Rather than letting them turn on the television, try to extend their love affair with the snow with some poems about the season.

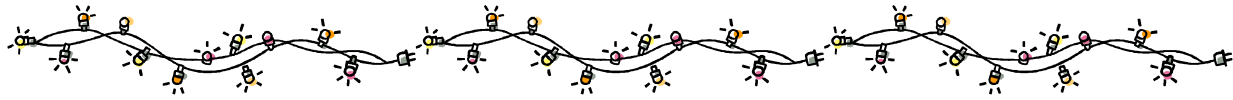
Many of us can recall poems we memorized as children (by choice or by force) and there's something pleasing about the rhythmic patterns that emerge as they tell a story, a joke, or share a memory. Shel Silverstein is loved by children of all ages for his humorous tales that read more like a joke than a poem. Silverstein poems about Christmas or winter are limited to rare gems like "Snowball" (from the collection *Falling Up*); however poems and entire collections of poems about the season are out there to bring a little bit of poetry into your winter days.

One of the most memorable pieces of Christmas literature is Clement C. Moore's poem, "A Visit From St. Nicholas". "'Twas the night before Christmas" and all that follows has been read, remembered, rewritten and recited every Christmas since its beginnings in 1822. Nancy Marshall's exhaustive bibliography lists over one-thousand editions of the Moore poem, leaving you plenty from which to. With little deviation from the traditional text, there are a few versions that will spice up the 'same old story'. *The Night Before Christmas: A Goblin Tale*, with pictures by Jacqueline Rogers, uses the traditional text accompanied by illustrations of a furry green goblin family. *'Twas the Night B'fore Christmas* by Melodye Rosales is an African-American Version, with adjustments to the text reminiscent of tales told on old Southern plantations.

While "The Night Before Christmas" is a classic poem, there are plenty of other poems about Christmas. Jack Prelutsky popularity is equivocal to Shel Silverstein's, and has two collections with seasonal themes. It's Christmas is a collection of humorous poems about the holiday, while It's Snowing! It's Snowing focuses on the colder aspect of the season. In fact, there are many collections of poems that are entirely about snow and cold weather. Audrey Baird's A Cold Snap! is just as witty and entertaining as Prelutsky's winter work, and Douglas Florian's Winter Eyes holds amusing poems that include a list of things to love and hate about winter.

Whether you prefer a collection of poems or single poem that tells a story, I'd like to encourage you to look beyond the most popular pieces. Whether it's a new twist on a classic or an anthology you've never seen before, reading a poem together is a great way to spend time with the little ones. Silverstein and Prelutsky have certainly taught us that poetry doesn't have to be serious and boring, but many other authors have taken the same approach. Tying the poems to a current event, experience, or interest, while being funny and enjoyable, will introduce your child to a whole new way of communicating. While they are being entertained, children will learn about rhyme and gain a new way to express their ideas. With the proper inspiration, you may even be able to convince your kids to try writing their own poem.

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## The Gift of Reading: Learning Literacy

December 5, 2006

With Christmas Eve fast approaching, it is easy to get caught up in the Christmas fever. Between Putting up the tree, hanging the lights, baking cookies, buying presents, wrapping presents, and millions of miscellaneous other tasks to complete before the big day, it is easy to leave it to the children to occupy themselves. But left to their own devices they are sure to choose television and video games over a good book. Whether you read the Sunday paper, a popular magazine, or a best-seller, your child will see you reading. If your child sees that you read, and that reading is important to you, they will understand that reading is an important part of daily life. More importantly, if you read with your child, they will see that reading isn't a lonely and boring activity, but rather an adventure that can be taken with others.

Technology has not only changed the way we communicate with our peers, but also the way we communicate with our children. Popular interactive teaching toys such as LeapFrog are great tools to supplement a child's learning process and encourage independent learning, but it is easy to rely on these too much and effectively remove yourself from the learning equation. Reading a traditional book with your child can foster positive interaction and help build your relationship with him or her. Studies from Temple University's Infant Lab show that parents who read with their preschoolers have

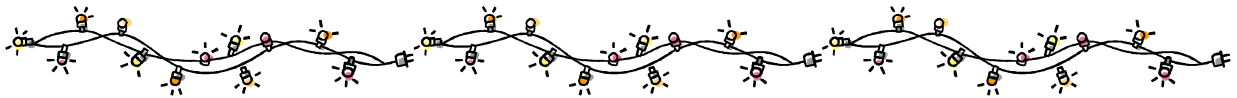
better conversations than when they share an activity with electronic toys. When it is up to the parent to guide the toddler through the activity, the human-to-human interaction provides a better basis for developing literacy. Additionally, traditional books with a human guide can be just as entertaining and interactive as an electronic toy. Walter Wick's *Can You See What I See?* books provide picture puzzles that allow the reader to search for a specific list of items. There's even a holiday edition, *Can You See What I See? The Night Before Christmas* which gives lists of toys to find in the Christmas scenery. What a perfect way to play with your child over the holiday break!

It is important to start early by reading to infants and toddlers to develop life-long literacy, creating a basis for educational development and academic success. While many of us recognize the importance of reading, we fail to fully acknowledge the importance of reading to children who are unable to speak, let alone read. According to Dr. Monica Ultmann, a professor of pediatrics at St. Louis University School of Medicine, children who are read to early in life are more likely to know the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic before entering school, giving children a foundation for a life-long love of learning.

When we think of giving gifts for Christmas, we often say that it's the thought that counts or that the best gifts are those that cannot be bought or sold. Why not apply the same principle to your own child? Before you get too caught up in the hustle and bustle of Christmas celebration, I want to encourage you to take time to give your child the gift of reading. It costs so little (especially if you get the books from your friendly neighborhood

library!) and even one book a day will give them a leg up on literacy that will last them a lifetime.

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## The Gift of Reading: Picking the Right Book

December 12, 2006

The bookstore can be overwhelming. Walls, displays, and shelves full of books dare you to try to pick the perfect book as a gift for your special child. You're left to wonder if the book is actually good, whether it will actually engage the child and enhance their learning, and whether or not the kid will fall asleep trying to read. The bookseller can make suggestions based on popularity, but that doesn't mean that book is the best one for your child. So many times a person pulls any old book off the shelf because it has an eye-catching cover, is on the new releases display, or has a clever title. But that doesn't always mean it's a quality book. Even if it is a quality book, it doesn't mean that your child is going to love it.

While I have nothing against choosing a popular book for your child (you can never go wrong with certain books or authors!), the Christmas season is the perfect time to

introduce your child to something they may not pick up on their own. With a little bit of research you can gauge whether or not the book is a quality work and if it's something the child might actually like. Resources available free online and through your local library are sure to make the choice much easier, and having a book in mind before going to the store is sure to reduce the stress levels.

Most of you are aware of the New York Times Best Sellers lists, and children's books are no exception in their listings. While there is some safety in numbers, several library associations create lists of Best Books for children and young adults. These books are selected by a committee of librarians, and meet quality and likeability standards. These annual selections are freely available online (links provided below), and are an excellent buying guide for any child.

If your young reader has a book or a series of books that they already know and love, you can also easily find books with similar themes and topics by using NoveList. With a special K-8 edition available at the library, you can search by your child's favorite Author, Title or Series to find similar books they are sure to enjoy. You can also search by key word, so if your child doesn't seem to have a favorite book or author, but they absolutely adore anything and everything about cats, you can search for books featuring feline friends. Since NoveList also provides a summary, reviews, and a listing of any awards the books may have received, you can use this tool to figure out whether or not it might be a book your child will love. NoveList also has a browsing option, so if you're looking for more lists of "best books", you can find them here as well.

Books are a great gift, but bad books can give a child the wrong impression about reading. Finding the right book for the right child will enhance their desire to read, and reward them with reading a book that they have truly enjoyed. By making informed choices for books you are giving as gifts, the child receiving the gift is more likely to want to read it, rather than tuck it away in the back of the closet with the sweater Grandma knitted.

Resources (note: Links for current year only, but past selections are also available):

- Young Adult Library Services Association's Best Books for Young Adults:  
<http://www.ala.org/ala/yalsa/booklistsawards/bestbooksya/06bbya.htm>
- Association for Library Service to Children's Notable Children's Books:  
<http://www.ala.org/ala/alsc/awardsscholarships/childrensnotable/notablebooklist/currentnotable.htm>
- School Library Journal's Best Books 2006:  
<http://www.schoollibraryjournal.com/article/CA6392368.html>

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Contrary to the popular poem, the night before Christmas is hardly a night where everyone is fast asleep. It's a chore trying to get the kids to settle down for a long winter's nap! The anticipation of Christmas morning might keep children tossing and turning, but a proper bedtime story may leave them with visions of sugar plums dancing in their heads.

After days, weeks, and possibly months of carefully constructing the perfect Christmas wish list, it is difficult not to wonder if Santa will bring you all that your heart desires. There are plenty of stories about Christmas lists and how they are, or are not fulfilled. In *My Penguin Osbert*, Joe's precise letter to Santa finally pays off, but he soon discovers the problems with having a pet penguin. Ann Estelle also has a very specific list for Santa, but the Queen of Christmas is more than content to settle for the intangible gifts of friends and family.

As Ann Estelle discovered, friends and family are an important part of the holiday celebration. Decorating the tree, baking cookies, and eating Christmas dinner are central to most of our holiday celebrations, and all are done with family and friends. While most of us are lucky enough to have friends and family nearby with whom we can celebrate, there are a few who are not so privileged. The loss of a loved one, lack of friends, or distant relatives may lead some children feeling lonely. It is important to let them know that they are not alone nor are they the only ones feeling this way. In *Snowie Rolie, Rolie Polie Olie* and *Zowie* build themselves a snowman friend, who must then be taken far away to a

cooler climate. Klanky Klaus welcomes the trio and gives Mr. Snowie a home. Even though Olie and Zowie miss their friend, they are given a memento on Christmas morning to remember their distant pal. As an only child in *Little Miss Spider: A Christmas Wish*, Little Miss Spider longs for a friend for Christmas. She befriends and adopts the orphaned Asparagus Beetle, and two Christmas wishes are granted. Santa is nowhere to be seen in this Christmas story, and shows that not all Christmas wishes are meant for Chris Cringle.

If a story about Santa is a must for Christmas, why not let your child know about all the hard work St. Nick puts in to making his list and checking it twice. Marla Frazee has a wonderful tale of *Santa Claus: the World's Number One Toy Expert*. This hilarious depiction of a very busy bearded man is sure to give children's a new perspective on holiday happenings at the North Pole. Children inevitably have questions about Santa Claus that many of us are unprepared to answer. *How Santa Really Works* by Alan Snow is a unique and detailed explanation to appease the most inquisitive child. Including information on the training (Christmas College for Elves, obviously) and the different departments (such as the CIA, Christmas Intelligence Agency) that contribute to the production and distribution of Christmas cheer. Entertaining for kids and kids-at-heart, this book is sure to quench the reluctant sleeper's thirst for Santa knowledge.

While you can never go wrong with a good old-fashioned retelling of the birth of Jesus and the story behind all this celebration, wide-eyed children will inevitably lie in bed waiting for sunrise when they can run downstairs to the Christmas goodies. But a great bedtime story could lull them to sleep, and you may just be able to get some sleep of your own!

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