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MARCH 2023

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## MARCH 2023



C/O MONTGOMERY PARKS



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Maydale Nature Classroom in Colesville helps kids connect with nature. **Pg. 14**

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We welcome your feedback — on specific articles, overall themes and anything else related to editorial content. Enter your comments on the Feedback tab of our website: [info@washingtonfamily.com](mailto:info@washingtonfamily.com).

*Please note we reserve the right to edit or refrain from publishing comments we deem inappropriate.*

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WE WANT  
**YOUR**  
FEEDBACK

# Washington FAMILY

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# Learning through Art and Reading

**A**s spring arrives this month, there's much for families to celebrate and remember in March, from women's history to brain injury and developmental disabilities awareness—and to bring all these topics together and encourage curiosity and learning—reading!

This March, encourage your child to learn through National Reading Month.

Our Book Marked selections from Montgomery County Public Libraries offer a closer look at related experiences that illuminate Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month.

Contributing writer Sandi Schwartz, in turn, provides ways kids can think about these narratives in a deeper way through critical thinking. At the same time, she explores the impact of technology on critical thinking techniques. (pg. 12).

This month, we also celebrate the learning process itself with stories about education.

Consider how outdoor education programs benefit children (pg. 14) as the weather gets warmer and there

are more opportunities to connect with their environment in a feature from staff writer Heather M. Ross.

Art can educate, too, but it also reveals the unsung heroes behind our children's education by connecting us with their stories (pg. 21). To cultivate in our kids the ability to create their own art, check out 13 DIY crafts (pg. 11) for your kids this month (that also aren't a pain to clean up!)

Learn more about spring sport safety and risks for head injuries in this month's Healthy Family (pg. 28), and educate your child on rare diseases with personal stories from local families in our Inclusive Family (pg. 26).

Finally, don't forget to teach your kids about Irish-American Heritage Month with these six ways to celebrate St. Patrick's Day together (pg. 10)!

Happy spring,

*Lindsay C. VanAsdalan*

## PERFORMANCES FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES



A WORLD PREMIERE KENNEDY CENTER COMMISSION

### *The Mortification of Fovea Munson*

*Abra cadaver!* Laugh out loud on an adventure like *no body* has seen before.

**Mary Winn Heider** brings her uproarious book to musical life in this world premiere Kennedy Center commission. Fovea Munson is stuck working at her parents' cadaver lab, but she is by no means Dr. Frankenstein's snuffling assistant, Igor! That is, until three disembodied heads start talking. To her. Out loud. And they need a favor.

**Mar. 4-19**  
**Family Theater**

**AGES 10+**



KENNEDY CENTER PREMIERE

### *Cenicienta: A Bilingual Cinderella Story*

by Glass Half Full Theatre

Revisit a classic fairy tale in a playful new way.

Ten-year-old Belinda loves to tell stories, but when she's in the basement preparing for a party upstairs, she'll have to get creative. Using everyday objects like a teapot and doily, Belinda recreates the classic tale of Cinderella. **Glass Half Full Theatre** from Austin, Texas, presents its award-winning "story within a story" using puppetry, Spanish, and English.

**Apr. 1 & 2**  
**Family Theater**

**AGES 5+**



KENNEDY CENTER AND NSO WORLD PREMIERE COMMISSION  
NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA FAMILY CONCERT

### *This Is the Rope: A Story from the Great Migration*

Follow a rope through generations of memories.

This world premiere NSO Family Concert features Education Artist-in-Residence **Jacqueline Woodson** reading *This Is the Rope* onstage, a new score by **Quinn Mason** played by the National Symphony Orchestra and conducted by **Kyle Dickson**, and projected illustrations by Coretta Scott King Award-winner **James Ransome**.

**Apr. 2 at 2 & 4 p.m.**  
**Concert Hall**

**AGES 7+**

**Kennedy-Center.org**  
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Groups call (202) 416-8400  
For all other ticket-related customer service inquiries, call the Advance Sales Box Office at (202) 416-8940

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## {TOP 10}

Family Events for  
March

Welcome spring with these fun spring activities in and around the DMV

BY HEATHER M. ROSS

1

THROUGHOUT  
THE MONTH,  
NOON – 10 P.M.

SILVER SPRING  
OUTDOOR SKATE

Silver Spring Outdoor  
Ice Skating Rink,  
8523 Fenton St.,  
Silver Spring, MD 20910



Catch the ice at Silver Spring's Veterans Plaza before it's gone! The outdoor rink is open for reservations seven days a week until March 31. Skating sessions are 1 hour and 20 minutes each. If you don't have a pair of skates, the rink has more than 400 pairs available, sized from toddler to adult.

\$10-11; skate rentals \$5 | [silverspringiceskating.com](http://silverspringiceskating.com)

2

MARCH 4, 12:30 – 4 P.M.

KIDS AND FAMILY KRAFT

the beachKraft, 18200 Georgia Ave.,  
Unit N, Olney, MD 20832

Enjoy easy arts and crafts projects for all ages! The beachKraft art gallery family fun day offers step-by-step guided activities including painting, collages, paper crafts, sculpture and more. All supplies will be provided. The gallery also offers art and creative classes for adults and children age 6 and older.

\$40 per person | [thebeachkraft.com](http://thebeachkraft.com)

3

MARCH 5,  
1 – 2:15 P.M.

BEAN-TO-BAR CHOCOLATE  
CREATIONS

JCrafts Center for Jewish Life and  
Tradition, 14803 D Southlawn  
Lane, Rockville MD 20850

Learn the art of chocolate making from the bean to the bar, create your own chocolate treats and learn about the role food plays in Jewish culture. Kids will get to participate in roasting, deshelling and grinding cacao beans to make their own chocolate-covered pretzels.

\$17 | [jcrafts.org](http://jcrafts.org)



4

MARCH 6, 10 – 11 A.M.

## CHILDREN'S PLAYTIME WITH MY GYM

Cabin John Village, 11325 Seven Locks Road,  
Potomac, MD 20854

Keep the kids active and social with My Gym Potomac's interactive kids' experience! Kids can enjoy songs, dances, bubbles, parachutes and more at the monthly event.

Free | [mygym.com/potomac](http://mygym.com/potomac)

8

MARCH 18, 10 A.M. – 3 P.M.

## FAMILY LIBRARY MINI-GOLF

South Bowie Branch Library, PGCMLS,  
15301 Hall Road, Bowie, MD 20721

Enjoy a Saturday session of mini-golf at the library. Families will putt-putt their way through an 18-hole course to make a memory and learn a new skill. All proceeds from this fundraiser benefit Books from Birth, a D.C. Public Library program designed to encourage literacy in children by sending them a free book each month until they turn 5.

\$5-10 | [pgcmls.info/event/7806767](http://pgcmls.info/event/7806767)

5

MARCH 8,  
10 – 10:45 A.M.TUDOR TOTS:  
WHO'S FEELING LUCKY?Tudor Place, 1644 31st. St. NW,  
Washington, D.C. 20007

Celebrate St. Patrick's Day and learn about Tudor Place's unique connection to the holiday with songs, crafts and stories. This event is ideal for children ages 18 months to 4 years old. All children must be accompanied by an adult. Registration is required.

\$6.50 per child, accompanying adults enter free | [tudorplace.org](http://tudorplace.org)



9

MARCH 22, 5:30 – 7:30 P.M.

## FAMILY PAINT PARTY

Detour Coffee Co., 946 N. Jackson St.,  
Arlington, VA 22201

Embrace your little one's creative spirit and paint a memory together! Beginners are welcome, and everyone is encouraged to come early and grab snacks. This family paint party is recommended for children age 6 and older. Children must be accompanied by an adult.

\$35 per person | [paintnite.com](http://paintnite.com)

6

MARCH 16, 2 – 5 P.M.

FAMILY & CHILDREN CUBAN DANCE  
CLASS WITH D.C. CASINEROSJoe's Movement Emporium, 3309 Bunker Hill  
Road, Mount Rainier, MD 20712

Enjoy a Cuban dance class and celebration as a family! Families will be able to learn casino, Rueda de casino, rumba, Son Conga and other Cuban dances. Food vendors will also be in attendance.



7

MARCH 16, 5 – 9 P.M.

## FAMILY GAME NIGHT

sweetFrog Laurel,  
3341 Corridor Marketplace,  
Laurel, MD 20724

Hop on over to sweetFrog for frozen yogurt and game night! Board games, dominoes and cards will be on deck for families to enjoy. Reserve your family 4-pack online through Eventbrite or see the cashier.

\$20 – 4 kids cups | [sweetfrog.com](http://sweetfrog.com); reserve: [eventbrite.com/e/family-game-night-at-sweetfrog-laurel-tickets-531472377187?aff=ebdssbdestsearch](http://eventbrite.com/e/family-game-night-at-sweetfrog-laurel-tickets-531472377187?aff=ebdssbdestsearch)

10

MARCH 25,  
10 A.M. – 3 P.M.BLACK CHILDREN'S  
BOOK FEST CHAPTER 1The Writer's Center, 4508 Walsh St.,  
Bethesda, MD 20815

Explore interactive story times, activities and snacks for kids ages 3-12 as you meet Black children's authors from Washington, D.C., Maryland, Virginia and beyond. This event is presented by Black Children's Books DMV+, a 4DMV Kids affiliated initiative. Reserve a spot online.

Free | [4dmvkids.com](http://4dmvkids.com)



CHILD IN GARDEN: FATCAMERA / E+ / GETTY IMAGES PLUS; ROLLER SKATES: KLIKK / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS; CHOCOLATE BAR: MICHAEL BURRELL / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS; BEANS: EVERYDAY BETTER TO DO EVERYTHING YOU LOVE / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS; HORSESHOE: ALEXRATHS / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS; BOARD GAMES: ADRAGAN; PALETTE: VECTOR TRADITION / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS; YOUNG READERS: LISITSA / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS.



# HERE'S WHAT WE'RE LOVING FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY THIS MONTH

BY ELENA EPSTEIN,  
DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL  
PARENTING PRODUCT AWARDS

For more product reviews,  
visit [nappaawards.com](http://nappaawards.com)

PCH-VECTOR/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES PLUS

## GiiKER Super Blocks

An interactive handheld console for jigsaw puzzles. Explore over 1000 leveled-up games with learning modes and time-limited challenges. Helps develop cognitive skills, concentration, spatial insights and logical reasoning. \$56.99, ages 6+, [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)



## Dino Puzzle Games for Toddlers

Match shapes and patterns, and find colors, while enhancing imagination, logical thinking and problem-solving capabilities. Hundreds of challenges come in five fun puzzle modes with ascending difficulty levels. Free, ages 2-4, [apps.apple.com](http://apps.apple.com)



## “The Hero of Compassion: How Lokeshvara Got One Thousand Arms”

A retelling of a classic Asian Buddhist tale of compassion and resilience that teaches us that even when we feel overwhelmed by the suffering we see in the world, we can still find creative ways to help those around us. \$18.95, ages 4-8, [shambhala.com](http://shambhala.com)

## Story Time Chess

Teaches chess to young children using silly stories, vibrant illustrations, custom chess pieces and a unique chessboard. No chess experience is required for parents or children. Makes learning to play simple and fun. \$39.99, ages 3+, [storytimechess.com](http://storytimechess.com)





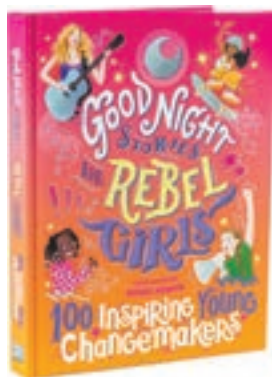


### Cool Maker Stitch N' Style Fashion Studio

An all-in-one fashion studio that includes an innovative cartridge thread system and automatic sewing sensors to make sewing safe and easy. Customize your designs with unique prints that are magically applied with water. \$34.99, ages 8+, [spinmaster.com](http://spinmaster.com)

### "Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls: 100 Inspiring Young Changemakers"

Celebrates barrier-breaking activists, artists, inventors and entrepreneurs younger than age 30 leading the next generation of girls to change the world. It includes a foreword by conservationist and book subject Bindi Irwin and features work by creators ages 11 to 30, including 13 contributing authors and original illustrations from 84 artists from around the world. \$35, ages 6-12, [rebelgirls.com](http://rebelgirls.com)



### Misfittens

A comical group of cats with a passion for...sitting. Inspired by the #ifitsitsits meme. Made with squishable materials that are ready to puff out and grow. \$9.99, ages 4+, [walmart.com](http://walmart.com)

### Purse Pets Print Perfect

Interactive purses that really blink and respond to touch. Featuring new trendy designs and stylish details with over 30 new sounds and reactions. \$26.99, ages 5+, [spinmaster.com](http://spinmaster.com)



### "Everything Changes"

A beautiful exploration of impermanence that touches every corner of the world, from rolling fields in Tibet to the cozy, fireplace-lit living room of a family member's home. It reminds children that everything changes no matter where you are or who you are, and that's all right.

\$17.95, ages 3-7, [shambhala.com](http://shambhala.com)

### KidiGo NexTag

More than just tag—it's a high-tech spin on 20 different backyard games including capture the flag, freeze tag and hide-and-seek. All you need are the four included electronic units and adjustable arm bands. \$44.99, ages 5+, [vtechkids.com](http://vtechkids.com)



### Pixobitz Studio

Magically transform your custom designs into 3D creations by using a spray of water. Decorate with the included PVA accessories. \$29.99, ages 6+, [spinmaster.com](http://spinmaster.com)



NAPPA Awards has been celebrating the best in family products for 33 years. For more product reviews and gift ideas, visit [nappaawards.com](http://nappaawards.com) ■

# 6 Ways to Celebrate St. Patrick's Day with Kids

BY SARAH LYONS

**E**ach holiday brings with it the opportunity to participate in unique celebrations with your kids, and St. Patrick's Day has no shortage of fun festivities. Whether you are lucky enough to be Irish or just love celebrating the holiday, try these fun and educational ideas to bring some luck to your home..

## Eat all things green

For breakfast, try some green eggs and ham while reading the Dr. Seuss book to your kids, or dye your pancakes green just for fun. For lunch, try serving up a buffet of green foods—broccoli, celery, salad, guacamole and grapes. Wash it all down with some green juice. Who knows? Maybe your child will try some new foods while trying to get good luck on St. Paddy's Day.

## Attend a parade

Check your local listings for a St. Patrick's Day parade and attend as a family. The Alexandria St. Patrick's Day Parade is the largest one-day event in Old Town Alexandria, with authentic pipe bands and performances by Irish dance schools, community groups and more. Beginning at 12:30 p.m. at 300 King Street, festivities last until 3 p.m. Go green by painting your face or picking up some silly hats or headbands at the local dollar store. See which family member can dress in the most green for the event.

## Set a leprechaun trap

The night of the 16th, have your kids set a leprechaun trap using a box or laundry basket. Put gold coins inside to attract your leprechaun, but remember, leprechauns are very sneaky and do not like to be seen. In the morning, your child may awake to see that the leprechaun has taken their gold coins and left them a small gift or treat.

## Scavenger hunt

Create a scavenger hunt for your kids (or let the leprechaun leave the first clue in the

trap). Make it educational by asking kids to answer a question or riddle to figure out the next clue, or leave an interesting fact about Saint Patrick to teach them about the holiday. Have your kids follow the clues through the house to find a pot of gold coins at the end.

## Make a rainbow

St. Patrick's Day wouldn't be complete without a rainbow. Have your kids use watercolors or finger paint to create their own rainbow. Vanilla pudding with food coloring makes for a fun and edible finger paint. Put food coloring in cups of water and let kids experiment by mixing them to see what colors they can create. Using eye droppers and ice cubes trays lets you sneak in a little fine motor practice, too. Make sure to offer some Lucky Charms cereal as a snack for a little inspiration.

## Explore the Irish culture

Learn about Irish culture by checking out books or movies about Ireland and the history of St. Patrick's Day from your local library. Have the kids watch a video of an Irish dance performance (YouTube is a great place to find one) and try some of the dance moves themselves. This activity will get the whole family moving, and probably produce some giggles, too. For the crafty family members, try painting or drawing an Irish flag or four-leaf clover. If you are lucky enough to be Irish, make a family tree and discuss your heritage. For dinner, try serving a traditional Irish meal like corn beef and cabbage. If this isn't a family favorite, Reuben sandwiches may be a good alternative.

There are so many ways to celebrate St. Patrick's Day that do not involve the stereotypical party that comes to mind. Parents can get creative with crafts and activities that are family-friendly and sure to become a well-loved tradition in years to come. ■

*Sarah Lyons is a mom of six kids, including 7-year-old triplets. She enjoys reading, writing and spending time outdoors with her family. (Heather M. Ross contributed to this story.)*

## Connect Through Local Libraries

The D.C. Public Library has a wealth of titles to help you and your children celebrate St. Patrick's Day.

### "Lucky Tucker" by Leslie McGuirk (Best for ages 2-5)

Tucker, a terrier pup, is having a horrible day, but a roll around a patch of clover changes his luck. A quick and fun story with simple and charming illustrations.

### "St. Patrick's Day" by Anne F. Rockwell (Best for ages 3-5)

A classroom celebrates St. Patrick's Day by wearing green, learning the story of St. Patrick, dancing, music, and more. An Irish student shares traditions from his family in Ireland.

### "Fiona's Luck" by Teresa Bateman, illustrated by Kelly Murphy (Best for ages 5-8)

"Luck's all well and good, but myself? I'd rather depend on my wits." A clever heroine restores luck to Ireland by beating leprechauns at their own tricks. Beautiful, dream-like illustrations accompany this original folktale that embraces the message of making your own luck.





# 13 Crafts for Little Artists

BY REBECCA HASTINGS

## THAT AREN'T A PAIN TO CLEAN UP

I think there's still glitter on my floor. From five years ago. Arts and crafts have a way of sticking around, and while I want to encourage creativity in my kids, I hate cleaning up the aftermath.

Yes, we can make them clean up. I know. But seriously, do they ever really clean it all up? If you're going to be the one picking up from the latest craft session, here are 13 crafts that will make your job easier and allow your little artist to be creative.

### Melissa & Doug Deluxe Party Pack Scratch Art Craft Set

Scratch through the black surface to reveal amazing colors. Reveal as much or as little as you want. This favorite comes with 16 boards, two stylus tools and three frames. Kids love the rainbow and metallic backgrounds. [melissaanddoug.com](http://melissaanddoug.com)

### Boogie Board Jot

A small notebook-sized LCD drawing panel, the Boogie Board Jot is perfect for drawing anywhere, even in the car. No mess and endless possibility. Kids love the erase button and the ability to start fresh. Great for keeping in your purse for kids to play with on the go. [myboogieboard.com](http://myboogieboard.com)

### Made By Me Build and Paint Wooden Cars

This one does involve paint, but it's all pretty self-contained. Spread a piece of newspaper and grab a cup of water. Kids put together small wooden cars and decorate them using the stickers and paints provided. This one is great for keeping boys busy and giving them a chance to create. [horizontgroupusa.com](http://horizontgroupusa.com)

### Fashion Angels I Love Fashion Sketch Portfolio for Kids

Kids design outfits and unique looks on the doll-like outlines provided. Tons of great activity books with stencils for those who love to create fun fashion looks. Makeup, fashion and even home decorating books give kids great ways to draw and imagine as they get older. [target.com](http://target.com)

### Melissa & Doug Paint with Water

Sometimes the little ones just want to paint. Here's a great compromise that just involves water! Watch images and colors appear magically as your little artist swipes a wet brush across a page. [melissaanddoug.com](http://melissaanddoug.com)

### Easy Playhouse Barn

Cardboard box play is taken to the next level. Kids can easily construct a house and then decorate it with crayons. Toddlers love this, and it keeps them busy for hours! [easyplayhouse.com](http://easyplayhouse.com)

### Crayola Color Wonder Magic Light Brush

Half the fun of this amazing toy is the magic! Kids use a special brush to paint on their paper. It lights up with each color they pick, and they create a masterpiece. Plus, it doesn't leave marks on hands, tables or clothes! [crayola.com](http://crayola.com)

### Rainbow Wikki Stix

These bendy, twisty sticks quickly become a favorite of kids and adults. You can link them together, twist them and create without making a mess to clean up. Another great toy for the traveling creative! [wikkistix.com](http://wikkistix.com)

### Sidewalk Chalk

Let nature take care of the cleanup! Kids love the ability to leave their mark and draw outdoors. A bucket of sidewalk chalk fits the bill, and all you have to do is wash your hands when it's done!

### LovesTown Lacing Beads

Fun and great for fine motor development, lacing beads give kids the chance to string chunky beads in different shapes and colors to create one-of-a-kind masterpieces. While there are a lot of pieces, this one is easy to clean up with its own carrying bag! [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)

### Alex Toys Little Hands Mosaics

Kids place the color-coded stickers on the template and create a beautiful picture. These are great for hanging up when they're complete, and they offer fantastic color and shape matching and fine motor development. [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)

### Crayola Model Magic

Softer and airier than the traditional Play-doh, Model Magic is a great way to let kids mold and shape with less mess. It also air dries solid, giving little artists the chance to create forever masterpieces! [crayola.com](http://crayola.com)

### Crayola Bathtub Finger Paint

When you can't avoid the mess, at least make it in the easiest place to clean up! Finger paints specifically designed for the tub give kids the chance to make a mess. And cleaning up when they're done is contained and fun. [crayola.com](http://crayola.com)

# Technology and Critical Thinking

## HOW DO WE KEEP YOUNG MINDS ENGAGED?

BY SANDI SCHWARTZ



**W**e are sitting around the dinner table and a question comes up. Who won the World Series last year? What is the most populated state in America? Is a cucumber a fruit or vegetable?

Instead of using our brains, we all whip out our handy devices and ask Siri, Alexa or Google to find the answers for us. On the one hand, it is incredible that we can instantaneously find the answer to just about any question that pops into our head. On the other hand, we no longer have to remember anything or spend time analyzing information because all the answers can be found with the click of a button or through voice recognition. How will kids ever learn to retain information and connect the dots if technology rapidly provides all the answers?

*Psychology Today* defines critical thinking as the “capacity to reflect, reason and draw conclusions based on our experiences, knowledge and insights.” Our children depend on this skill to communicate, create, build and progress. Critical thinking is a complex process that combines a number of tactics including observing, learning, remembering, questioning, judging, evaluating, innovating, imagining, arguing, synthesizing, deciding and acting. We use critical skills every single day to make good decisions, understand the consequences of our actions and solve problems.

Now that technology has infiltrated our children’s lives, critical thinking skills are harder to achieve. However, our children still need to be able to think critically even with all the gadgets that they can rely on. From solving puzzles to deciding when to

cross the street to eventually competing in the job market for positions in science, engineering, health, social sciences and other fields will require well-developed critical thinking skills.

For years, experts have been evaluating the impact of technology on critical thinking skills. According to Patricia Greenfield, UCLA professor of psychology and director of the Children’s Digital Media Center, children’s critical thinking skills are getting worse while their visual skills are improving. She analyzed more than 50 studies on learning and technology, including research on multitasking and the use of computers, the internet and video games. She found that real-time visual media do not allow for reflection, analysis or imagination. In addition, reading for pleasure has declined among children and teens in recent decades, which is a concern because reading enhances imagination, reflection and critical thinking in a way that visual media like video games and television do not.

Terry Heick, a former English teacher in Kentucky, explained to NPR that his eighth- and ninth-grade students immediately turn to Google for answers. They then report back what they find practically word for word, without thinking through the research. He wanted his students to take time to assess the information they needed, determine how to evaluate the data, and then address



# Our children's ability to expand their memory is greatly impacted by all of this technology, which affects their thinking skills.

any conflicts they found. Instead, this new "search and find" process completely eliminated any need for critical thinking.

Finally, a study in the journal *Science* showed that when people know they have future access to information, they no longer need to recall or analyze it. Our children's ability to expand their memory is greatly impacted by all of this technology, which affects their thinking skills.

We are all in big trouble if our children lose the ability to think critically. It is up to us to help them develop a critical mindset throughout their childhood. By instilling critical thinking skills from an early age, we will teach our kids how to effectively analyze the world around them. Here are some ways that you can enhance your children's critical thinking skills at home.



Read books for fun

Read with your children daily and discuss the material with them in ways that will challenge them to think critically. See if they can make connections between the story and their own life. Ask them to use what they have read so far to predict what will happen next. Have them summarize the key points of the story or chapter so they can determine what is most important. What roles did each character play and how do they relate to them? All of this practice with fun stories will help them analyze more challenging pieces of literature, both fiction and non-fiction, as they get older.



Explore Science

Science experiments and other related activities are fantastic ways to teach children how to think critically because they need to make predictions, evaluate data and then interpret the scientific facts and findings to relate them to the world around them.



Show them how to answer their own questions and evaluate information

Young children have tons of questions. Take advantage of their curiosity to teach them how to look for answers to their questions in a critical way. If they ask how something works, take a trip to the library and find books, magazines, videos and other resources on that topic. Provide opportunities for them to speak to people who can give them direct answers. For example, if they want to know what a fireman does, schedule a trip to the local fire station so your child can learn firsthand how everything works. When your children are doing research online, sit with them and help them find reliable sources. Also, show them the difference between evidence-based information and opinions.



Build problem-solving skills

When dealing with conflicts, our children need to use critical thinking skills to understand the problem at hand and to come up with possible solutions. Use games, puzzles, riddles, mystery novels, physical challenges and other activities to teach them problem solving skills.



Force them to memorize basic information

In order to exercise your kid's memory muscle, you can go a bit retro on them. Make sure they know some basic facts by heart like their address and important phone numbers. As they get older, continue to add more facts to this list like relatives' birthdays, math equations, state capitals and American presidents. Also, see if they can give directions from home to school and other places you frequent.



## FEYNMAN SCHOOL: ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

BY JARRAD SAFFREN

How do you get kids to think critically? Make them ponder long, hard and creatively about the answer to a question, says Stephen Harris, a middle school STEM teacher at the Feynman School in Potomac.

Some of Harris' eighth graders, for example, are learning about biology and viruses. So he asks, "Are viruses alive?" It sounds like a yes or no, but really, the answer is complicated. It requires research on the virus and a consideration of the meaning of life. Then, students have to write papers offering up their detailed opinions.

"One of the things that I find very helpful is giving open-ended problems with multiple solutions," Harris says. "I usually find that kids will rise to the occasion, and I'm pleasantly surprised by the work they do."

Harris says that when you motivate kids to think, instead of to regurgitate information, they become more energetic about learning. And, as a result, their brains start working faster and in more creative ways. Parents can do this just like teachers do.

"Anytime you can actively engage your child's brain, it's a good thing," Harris explains. ■



PHOTO COURTESY OF ROOTED NATURE OT

# THE CLASSROOM OUTSIDE OF FOUR WALLS

Creek cleanup with Rooted Nature OT

## *Outdoor Education Programs Offer Benefits to Children*

BY SASHA ROGELBERG

**a**t Maydale Nature Classroom, children who visit campus will hear the sounds of the green frogs, tree frogs and bullfrogs and see the gnawed-on tree trunks of a beaver who made its lodge by the nearby stream.

A delight to the senses, being surrounded with nature is more than just fun and engaging; it's an opportunity for education and growth.

"It helps [kids] understand the environment around them and make educated decisions on environmental issues," says Glenn Rice, a park naturalist at the Montgomery County Parks Department. "It just allows them to connect to this local environment—the natural local environment."

Maydale, in Colesville, Maryland, is part of the Montgomery Parks system in Montgomery County.

Constructed in 2019, it's one of five facilities in the Montgomery Parks system that provide opportunities for learning outside the traditional four-walled school building. Maydale invites students, Boy and Girl Scouts and even homeschooled children for a day of learning.

Their day begins indoors with an overview on a topic like habitats and ends with a long hike outdoors, student and teacher interaction and the opportunity to look at various habitats in real environments.

This is the kind of hands-on, real-world experience students react to with "interest and excitement," Rice says.

### **What are the benefits to outdoor learning?**

Beyond Maydale, enthusiastic learners are enjoying outdoor classrooms and learning experiences all over the DMV. The benefits of the unconventional model are plentiful.



PLANTS: LIGRENOK/ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES PLUS;



## Academic stimulation

First, there are educational benefits that come from simply being in an outdoor space.

“Being outside helps you lower your heart rate, increases your focus, and those things help children perform better academically,” said Rose Brusaferro, preschool director of the Nature Forward Nature Preschool in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

At Nature Forward, kids explore 40 acres of woods and greenery, observing how different plant and animal life interact. The groups also help identify birds as part of the Great Backyard Bird Count, a global program to find and report birds in order to better estimate their population and migration patterns.

Little minds begin to turn as children explore different spaces. Outdoor learning programs are designed using Montessori, Waldorf and Reggio Emilia pedagogies, which prioritize creative play and independence.

“The primary philosophy is to help children find the joy in learning by allowing them the freedom and the space to connect with the concepts and ideas that speak to them,” Brusaferro says.

## Healthy Kids

Outdoor learning also has just as much benefit for the body as it does the mind.

“Just being outside in general and being out in nature has a lot of health benefits. It’s good exercise,” Rice says. “Contact with nature improves your physical and mental wellbeing, so it increases the ability of your immune system to fight off sickness,” adds Brusaferro.

## Connection with nature

Being outside also connects kids with their surroundings in a positive way.



Crossing the creek with Rooted Nature OT

Consistent, uninterrupted interactions with the outdoors can lead to the creation of an “ecological identity,” which instills values of environmental protection.

Because this type of education increases awareness of the relationship between humans and the environment, any of the outdoor learning classrooms have an ecological component built into their programs.

“There’s also a philosophical hope that by being outside and connecting to nature every day, children will begin to form a bond with the natural world that will develop into environmental action,” Brusaferro says.

At Maydale Nature Classroom, the indoor space where children convene for the first part of their lessons is a repurposed administrative building, which, according to Rice, helped keep 7,000 pounds of waste from entering a landfill. The space is solar-powered and uses a rainwater harvesting system to collect water to use for the building’s plumbing.

The deepened connection between children and the environment can serve more than just eco-friendly causes. According to Mya



Maydale's Groundhog Day Celebration 2022

Zavaleta, a pediatric nature-based occupational therapist and founder of Rooted Nature OT in Washington, D.C., which combines time in the outdoors with occupational therapy for children, spending time outside can prevent children from feeling afraid of their outdoor surroundings.

“When kids know what’s around them in nature... they’re gonna want to understand it more, become more curious and want to protect it, want to preserve it, become part of it,” Zavaleta says. “Whereas if they stay behind closed doors, they’re not even going to know. And sometimes, it even goes to this scary place.”

A wooded area becomes mysterious and intimidating. Nature becomes associated with animals that sting, bite or poison, rather than an environment that can help soothe.

### Making the most of outdoor learning spaces

The good news is, everyone can go outside, making outdoor learning opportunities accessible. Experts offer some advice on how to make the most of time outside in a make-shift nature classroom.

According to Zavaleta, one of the beauties of outdoor learning is that the environment is always changing. This not only means that



Families en route; Maydale Groundhog Day

the lesson plans are always changing, but also that not even teachers or parents can know what exactly to expect, putting them on the same level as their students, neutralizing hierarchical relationships and bringing wonder to all parties.

“We are entering that space at the same time and we are both experiencing whatever nature offers us,” she says.

Using this philosophy, it’s important to embrace the changing of seasons. Each time

you go outside, you’re likely to experience something new.

“It’s a different experience because the wind is going to perform differently; the sun is going to be shining in a different place; the leaves are going to look different,” Zavaleta says.

Children can even explore the outdoors in the winter, and experts encourage it.

“There is a benefit to being outside in the wintertime,” Brusafarro says. “There’s immune benefits to being exposed to cold weather, just as there’s benefits to being out in the summertime. So we always like to say that there’s no such thing as bad weather. You just have the right gear, and you can go out in any kind of conditions. And it is beneficial to experience the whole cyclical nature of the seasons.”

You don’t need to stray far from home to reap the benefits of a nature classroom. Brusafarro insists that it’s just as valuable to observe nature right outside your front door.

“You can do it right off the sidewalk,” she says.

What are the trees and grasses outside of your house or on the way to school? What insects are munching on the plants?

“You can find so much life within a one-by-one square foot patch of grass,” she says. ■

PHOTO COURTESY OF MONTGOMERY PARKS

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## 2023 Camp Directory

With each new milestone that our children reach comes the need for information to guide them (and us) through this stage. This is particularly true when our children are old enough to attend summer camp. How do we know which camp is right for them? In an education-centered community like ours, there can be a lot of options — where do we even get started? Right here, actually, with these listings. Read about these camps, what they offer and the ages they serve. Then visit their websites to learn more. On our website, *WashingtonFAMILY.com*, you can find even more listings to help you in your search. Be sure to check back on our website and in our magazine in upcoming months for more stories and helpful tips. Good luck! Here's to a great summer.

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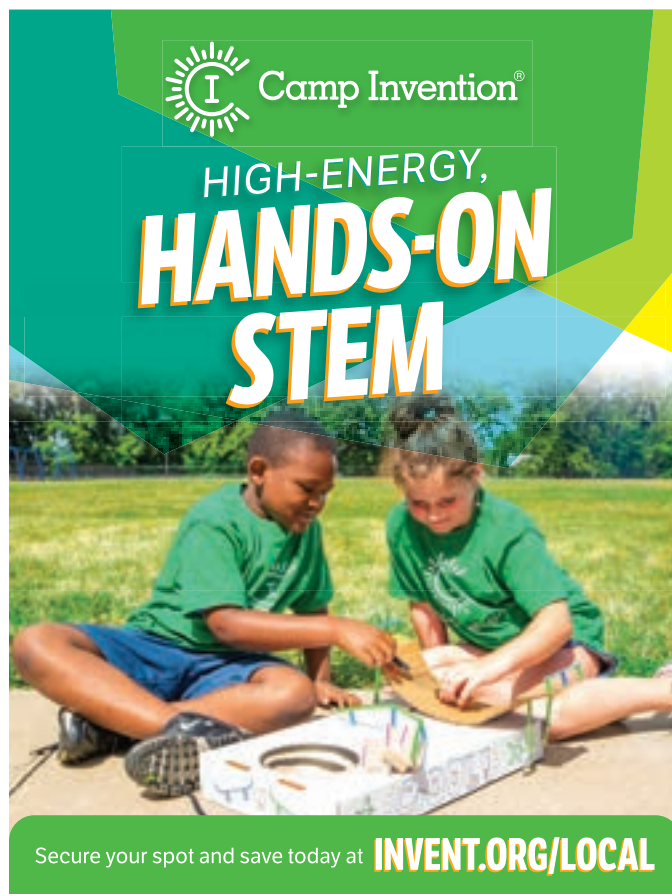
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*Editor's note: Information provided for these camps is subject to change after this issue goes to press. Please contact the camps directly to confirm details and related COVID-19 protocols in effect at these camps.*

*Look for more information about summer camps and camp programs for your child next month in our April issue and on our website at [washingtonfamily.com](http://washingtonfamily.com). ■*





# How Art Illuminates UNSUNG HEROES in Education

BY JILLIAN DIAMOND

When Terri Downey-Hilton, a training specialist in food and nutrition services at Baltimore City Schools, was recognized in a special art exhibit, she felt understood.

“To be a part of this, for someone to really acknowledge our work after all these years, is really important,” she says. “We’re finally appreciated, and it’s a really good feeling since we were overlooked for so long.”

That’s what art does—it helps us recognize others and show our appreciation, especially for those who often operate under the radar or behind the scenes. Giving people a platform for their stories can help us connect with them.

In education, there are a lot of moving parts that come together to ensure a student is learning and thriving in a school environment. The efforts of unsung heroes to keep these parts in place were noticed even more at the start of the pandemic, when students who relied on one-on-one support, classroom interaction and daily meals did not have access to those resources in the same way.

Even while school buildings were closed, teachers were working hard to administer online classes for their students, and food service workers were still delivering meals so that students who relied on them each day did not go hungry.


Collectively, BCPS staff prepared more than 11 million meals during the 2021-2022 school year.

For the first time, these school food service workers are being recognized by the wider community, thanks to a special exhibit, on display at the Baltimore Museum of Industry through the end of the year. It provides an opportunity to put names and faces to this important work and illuminate the stories of these hometown heroes.

“Food for Thought: Spotlighting Food Service Workers at Baltimore City Public Schools” features interviews with nine area food service workers, all either currently working or having worked to provide



“Thank a Teacher” art contest middle school winner 2022



“A child cannot learn  
if they’re hungry.”

— SHELIA ALSTON

FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICES STAFF, BCPS

*Baltimore City Public Schools staff  
prepared more than 11 million meals  
during the 2021-2022 school year.*

UMKEHRER/E+/GETTY IMAGES

students with healthy, filling meals throughout the day.

It combines photography by J.M. Giordano with art by Laura Lynn Emberson of the Baltimore Polytechnic Institute and three student art contest winners. These visuals pair with audio by podcaster Aaron Henkin, who has previously worked with the BMI for its Bethlehem Steel Legacy Project.

The idea for the exhibit came about in 2021, when the museum was holding its first-ever outdoor exhibit: “Women of Steel,” honoring women working in the steel industry. BMI’s community programs manager, Auni Gelles, recalls that BCPS staff approached the museum about doing a similar exhibit to recognize Baltimore-area teachers and food service workers.

“We really leaned into first-person stories and audio storytelling as part of our Bethlehem Steel Legacy project,” says Gelles, also on the “Food for Thought” curatorial team, “and found that an audio format was a great way for workers to tell their own stories in their own ways.”

“A lot of people don’t really understand what we do,” says Sheila Alston, one of the nine workers featured in the exhibit. Alston worked as a BCPS food service worker for 37 years. “I think it’s an opportunity for people to really see what food service is all about.”

BCPS’s food service workers play an important role in the lives of the children they feed. According to St. Vincent de Paul of Baltimore, a local nonprofit dedicated to fighting poverty, one in three Baltimore City children lives in a food desert and does not have access to the healthy meals they need to thrive. Food insecurity is a persistent problem in the Baltimore



COURTESY OF BALTIMORE MUSEUM OF INDUSTRY

“Food for Thought” exhibit at the Baltimore Museum of Industry



area, with Feeding America's "Map the Meal Gap" project revealing 21.3% of Baltimore County residents are classified as food insecure.

Through art, community members can learn about this essential work, and more importantly, say thank you.

"Food for Thought" includes a hands-on component to thank food service staff for their underappreciated work, including a letter-writing station to send notes to workers who impacted them as students, with wider letter-writing campaigns being planned for the future.

In much the same way, students entering the Virginia Lottery's annual "Thank a Teacher" art contest have found a way to thank teachers that have affected them in a positive way.

Jocelyn Turman, an eighth grade student at Edward Drew Middle School in Fredericksburg, Virginia—about 45 minutes southwest of Quantico, in Northern Virginia—won the contest in 2022. Beginning with a campaign from 2016 to 2017 that collected notes to teachers who'd had a positive impact on people's lives,



the art contest determining the illustrations that would appear on these notes began in 2018.

"Teachers deal with so much every single day. They are underpaid, work long hours, teach multiple classes and have to teach so many different students," says Jocelyn. "I think it's amazing that they can deal with all of that and still support all of us."

The contest racked up 700 entries for 2023, with judging for the elementary, middle and high school divisions currently underway. In addition to having student art featured, the school districts of each winner will also receive money for purchasing additional school supplies.

"We know that our educators are going above and beyond each and every day to shape the lives of Virginia's future leaders,"

says Jennifer Mullen, the lottery's director of public affairs and community relations. "They're putting in the blood, sweat and tears every single day to work with these students. I think every Virginian should be thanking them for what they do."

All proceeds of the state's lottery also benefit public education.

For Jocelyn, using art to show her appreciation for her favorite teachers is only fitting. She lists her elementary and middle school art teachers among the ones who have impacted her the most, helping her discover her passion for art.

"I think art is special because it's a way to show the world how you see things... There are so many different kinds of art in which to express yourself, and I love that everyone's art is unique to them," she says.

Though art can be a great tool for education, the very nature of art is one that can connect us with people and ideas around us—and as it educates us, it also brings to light the teachers and staff members that make that education possible. ■



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Inez Vasquez and her 7-year-old daughter Violet Colone. The family is working with Kennedy Krieger Institute to research Violet's rare disease, TBCK syndrome.

# What is Rare?

## D.C. and Baltimore families share their journey with rare diseases

BY HEATHER M. ROSS

**W**hen you hear hoof beats, think horses—not zebras. This is what doctors are taught during their training, meaning that the first and more likely diagnosis is the one they should be thinking about. But what about when it really is a zebra?

This was the case for Inez Vazquez. Her 7-year-old daughter, Violet Colone, is the first person in Maryland to be diagnosed with TBCK syndrome.

TBCK is a rare neurogenetic disorder characterized by decreased muscle tone, developmental delay and intellectual disability, but the list of potential symptoms is long and highly varied.

And the term rare is not used loosely.

“When we think about a rare condition, in general, we’re talking about conditions that exist in less than 1 in 1,000 individuals in a population,” says Dr. Mahim Jain.

Jain works with Kennedy Krieger Institute’s osteogenesis imperfecta clinic. Osteogenesis imperfecta is a rare genetic bone condition more commonly known as brittle bone disease. This condition puts those with it at a heightened risk for bone fractures, hearing loss and teeth abnormalities.

According to the National Institutes of Health, osteogenesis imperfecta is just one of more than 7,000 rare diseases.

Violet—now patient ambassador for the Baltimore-based Kennedy Krieger—and her mother work with Jain and one of the syndrome’s co-discoverers, Dr. Xilma Ortiz-Gonzales, at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), on Violet’s treatment. According to CHOP, Violet’s condition is so rare, there are only 35 reported cases worldwide.

“It’s a hard process, but Kennedy Krieger helped us a lot — to get our team together,” Vasquez says.

For children who find themselves with one of these 7,000+ rare diseases, it can be a tough journey because their condition is often harder for doctors to recognize.

“We got [Violet’s] diagnosis when she was 2. They had to do a special DNA test to check for it. A lot of insurances don’t cover it, or it’s not the first test the doctors do,” Vazquez says.

This is why families touched by rare diseases advocate for more awareness. Rare Disease Day, recently celebrated on February 28, provides visibility and opportunities for advocacy so they can get the support they need.

And parents such as Beth Frigola-McGinn are taking an active role in raising awareness and providing advocacy for a community that too often feels unheard or forgotten.

Frigola-McGinn was working on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. when she found out her daughter was diagnosed with a rare disease, in 2011.

“At first, Ellie met all her milestones,” Frigola-McGinn explains. “It started with her not being able to do some things, struggling on the balance beams. I remember thinking, ‘I hope something’s not wrong.’”

“There is nothing that prepares you [for it],” she says.

Her daughter Ellie, 14, has a condition known as LBSL (Leukoencephalopathy with brainstem and spinal cord involvement and lactate elevation). LBSL is characterized by a range of neurological issues. People with LBSL typically experience stiffness of the muscles, weakness and difficulty coordinating voluntary movements. Similar to the far more common multiple sclerosis (MS), it affects the myelin sheath, but LBSL is not an autoimmune disease.

Now Frigola-McGinn uses her political prowess to dedicate herself to advocacy full time.

PHOTO C/O KENNEDY KRIEGER





In 2013, she founded A Cure for Ellie (now Cure LBSL) with the mission to spread awareness about the condition, offer support to other families and drive research toward finding a cure. According to Frigola-McGinn, since they began their mission, the Cure LBSL team has raised nearly \$3 million dollars for research. The foundation has also led to the formation of a strong online community.

For many, an online community is key to feeling supported on a daily basis.

"I was overwhelmed at first, and scared to share. But then you see your kid, and she's just stronger than what they tell you," Vazquez says. "I probably worry about [Violet's condition] more than she does."

The future can be uncertain when dealing with conditions we know very little about, but through the efforts of parents, doctors and researchers, science is making promising strides every day.

Kennedy Krieger neurogenetic specialist

Ali Fatemi, M.D., is one of the researchers searching for a cure for McGinn, with research plans ranging from those that involve new techniques, from nanomedicine to stem cell therapy, to gene editing.

Meanwhile in Philadelphia, CHOP is looking at a whole classification of genes using high-throughput screening (HTS). HTS allows researchers to quickly conduct millions of chemical, genetic or pharmacologic tests.

According to Frigola-McGinn, these tests are being used to see which potential medications already in use might also be helpful for conditions affecting certain genes.

Vazquez knows that even with these strides, there is still a long fight ahead.

"People have to stay strong, and it is a fight," she says. "I love calling our kids TBCK warriors. That's what it takes to fight this rare condition. You really do have to be a warrior." ■

The future can be uncertain when dealing with conditions we know very little about, but through the efforts of parents, doctors and researchers, science is making promising strides every day.



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# Spring Sport Safety

## Keeping Your Kid Off the Bench

BY HEATHER M. ROSS

**S**taying active is an important part of staying healthy, and spring sports are a great way to keep your child on the move. However, there are risks involved.

We spoke with Matthew Jepson, a sports medicine physician at The Centers for Advanced Orthopaedics, the second largest provider of orthopaedic care in the country, with offices in Virginia, Maryland and Washington, DC., and Bryan Pugh, executive director of the Baltimore-based Brain Injury Association of Maryland, on how to prevent some of the most common injuries from spring sports and keep your kid off the bench.

### Injury Prevention

Jepson, who has been practicing sports medicine for almost five years, says that the most common injuries his centers treat are sprains, strains and overuse injuries. But he stresses that participating in spring sports doesn't have to be risky, and is good for overall health.

"We strongly encourage everyone to participate in athletics. It's a great way to stay active. Staying fit benefits physical health and mental health," says Jepson, who works at locations in Frederick and Urbana.

As the saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. One of the most effective ways parents can help their children prepare for the athletic season is by encouraging something Jepson calls "dynamic stretching."

Dynamic stretching differs from the typical stretches we're used to in that it focuses on the movements associated directly with the activity. Working through the motions of what they're going to do warms up the muscles and tissues in that area.

While stretching might save your child from strains and sprains, dedicated single-sport athletes have another woe to contend with—overuse injuries.

Overuse injuries are more likely to happen when starting a new activity or increasing time spent on an ongoing activity. Taking on

too much physical activity too quickly can be dangerous, and might have occurred if your child's sport restarted after a pandemic hiatus. The best thing you can do to help your child is teach them to pace themselves.

"Remember, these are kids," Jepson says. "This is supposed to be fun."

Jepson advises parents to equate hours of participation with their child's age. (For example, a 4-year-old should have no more than 4 hours of that sport per week.) And, he encourages parents to let their child sample other sports.

"We know research here says that early sports specialization doesn't really impact your ability to play until you're at least 12 years old, with tennis and gymnastics being exceptions," Jepson says.

### Check Your Gear

"One of the things we always tell people is that if there is a helmet for your sport, wear it. You only get one brain," Pugh says.

Parents should be sure to check that their child's equipment still fits. Many sports activities were paused for an extended period during the pandemic, leaving kids time to grow out of old gear.

### Know the Rules

The rules aren't just for fun. Many rules exist to keep the players safe, and sometimes, rules are different as children get older and move into more advanced leagues of a sport, so it's important to stay updated.

### Take Care of Your Body

Adequate sleep, hydration and nutrition are all important parts of sports safety. According to Pugh, these guidelines will help your child avoid falls and impacts, which are the main causes of injury in sports.

"You want to keep your mind clear, vision clear, joints lubricated and be aware of your surroundings," Pugh says.

Another important step players should take to prep for spring sports is getting a sports physical. Physicals are important



because they can catch health issues that are prone to worsen with activity or make injury more likely.

### Injury Care

Injuries can still occur even when your child follows all the rules, wears the right gear and takes proper preventative measures.

After an injury, it's important to follow up with a physician to know when it might be safe to return to normal activity and what limitations your child may have during recovery. This is especially crucial when dealing with head injuries.

"A second impact event can be incredibly dangerous, up to and including death. The brain can become more susceptible to concussions, take longer to recover or not recover at all," Pugh says.

Some signs of a more severe head injury include loss of consciousness, slurred or incoherent speech, nausea, sensitivity to light or sound and staggering.

Convincing your child to take the necessary time to heal can be a challenge. Children

of all ages are often eager to get back in the game and may minimize or downplay their injuries to do so. Younger children or children with disabilities may lack the necessary awareness of their bodies to know when to take a break. For these children, parents should pay close attention to how they're moving. They might be favoring their injured

body part, avoiding certain movements or getting distracted. Older children and teens competing for scholarships may try to rejoin their sport before healing fully.

"The reality is, if they come back too soon and have a subsequent injury, it's really going to incapacitate them from any scholarships," Pugh says. ■





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# Developmental Disabilities Awareness

## 13 Tales to Inspire and Educate

BY LUZ FLORES, LIBRARIAN AT NOYES LIBRARY FOR YOUNG CHILDREN,  
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARIES

For Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, dive into the stories of kids, teens and adults who experience the world a bit differently. These tales touch on the real-life struggles of living with a disability and the joys that come from friendships, growth and understanding.

### PICTURE BOOKS

#### **"Benji, the Bad Day, and Me"**

by Sally J. Pla, illustrated by Ken Min

The whole world is against Sammy. He is having bad, bad day, and when he comes home, he realizes his little brother, Benji, is having a bad day, too, and has retreated to his box. Having an autistic little brother can be hard, but this story shows that brotherly love can shine through even on the bad days.

#### **"Can Bears Ski?"**

by Raymond Antribus, illustrated by Polly Dunbar

"Can bears ski?" is a question that Little Bear keeps hearing from Dad Bear, the TV and his teachers and friends at school. This colorful picture book follows Little Bear as he navigates the world with childhood hearing loss, visits an audiologist and, with the help of hearing aids, finally learns the answer to the question, "Can bears ski?"

#### **"It Was Supposed to Be Sunny"**

by Samantha Cotterill

Changes in routine can be hard for any kid, but especially for kids on the autism spectrum. When

Laila starts to feel okay about moving her birthday unicorn obstacle course indoors to avoid a thunderstorm, disaster strikes and she starts to feel anxiety on top of anxiety. But after time with her service dog and a little birthday magic, Laila realizes that unexpected surprises aren't always a bad thing.

#### **"The Mitten String"**

by Jennifer Rosner, illustrated by Kristina Swarner

This Jewish folktale follows Ruthie Tober, a girl whose family raises sheep and makes wool for their local market. One day, Ruthie meets a deaf woman and her baby by a broken wagon, and when the woman, Bayla, accepts an invitation to stay at Ruthie's family home for the night, Ruthie watches in amazement as Bayla uses her hand to sign to her baby.

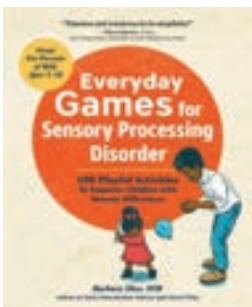
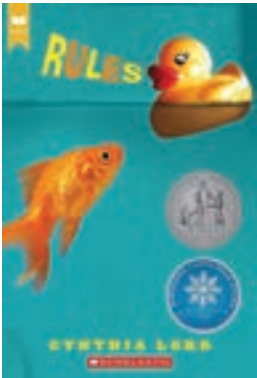
### EARLY ELEMENTARY

#### **"Isaac and His Amazing Asperger Superpowers!"**

by Melanie Walsh

Isaac isn't like his brother or his classmates at school. He has super sensitive hearing and can sometimes hear the lights at school. He has so





much energy he can spend hours jumping on his trampoline. His super brain remembers lots of information. Isaac knows his superpowers come from his Asperger's syndrome. In this straightforward story, you find out how Isaac navigates his world with Asperger's and how sometimes it can be very hard to keep his thoughts to himself or make eye contact with others. But with the help of his family, Isaac knows that it's OK to be different.

### "Aven Green, Sleuthing Machine"

by Dusti Bowling, illustrated by Gina Perry

Aven Green, detective extraordinaire, was born without arms, but that doesn't stop her from solving all kinds of mysteries. In this first installment of her series, Aven uses her super brain to solve two mysteries: who is stealing food at her elementary school and what has happened to her grandmother's beloved dog. All throughout the story, Aven is very matter of fact about not having arms and about how she uses her feet to help her do things—especially solving mysteries.

### MIDDLE GRADE

#### "Rules"

by Cynthia Lord

Twelve-year-old Catherine thinks it's hard to find her own identity when she's helping take care of David, her autistic brother. Over the summer, Catherine makes two friends—Kristi, the new girl next door, and Jason, a nonverbal boy confined to a wheelchair who uses illustrated cards to communicate. Catherine worries David's outbursts might jeopardize her friendship with Kristi, and as Jason and Catherine grow closer, she is faced with the question, "Would she be okay taking Jason to the dance?"

#### "Real"

by Carol Cujec and Peyton Goddard

Charity is a nonverbal autistic girl that loves gummy bears, and she worries that no one will know how smart she is because she can't talk and her body has outbursts she can't control. But underneath it all, Charity is a very intelligent, empathic and kind girl. When her family sends her to a public junior high school, Charity is faced with the question: Will people finally see her as the intelligent young girl she is? With the support of others, Charity finally finds her voice.

### "The Distance Between Me and the Cherry Tree"

by Paola Peretti, translated by Denise Muir, illustrated by Carolina Rabei

Nine-year-old Mafalda was diagnosed with

Stargardt disease, and she struggles emotionally and physically trying to get used to her progressive vision loss. When she meets Filippo and Estella, their friendship helps Mafalda find the courage and strength to accept her eventual loss. Told through five parts, each titled after the increasingly shorter distance from which she can see the cherry tree at school, this Italian import shows readers that "Fear will always be there, but [you have to] live your life. [And] Never ever give up."

### TEEN

#### "Say What You Will"

by Cammie McGovern

"Say What You Will" follows the lives of Amy, a girl born with cerebral palsy, and Matthew, a boy with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and severe anxiety. When Matthew volunteers as one of Amy's student aides, both teens grow closer, and they challenge and help each other grow as well. When they realize they are falling in love with each other, their friendship is challenged with the world forever seeing them as outsiders.

#### "Turning"

by Joy L. Smith

Genie has dreamed and worked hard at becoming a professional ballerina, but her dreams are dashed when she has a terrible fall that lands her in a wheelchair. At physical therapy, she meets Kyle, an athlete with a traumatic brain injury that also cost him a future he envisioned for himself. Genie learns that sometimes you just need to forge a new path for yourself. With Kyle's support, as well as her best friend's encouragement, Genie finds the strength to heal from her past and find her love of ballet again.

### PARENTS

#### "Everyday Games for Sensory Processing Disorder: 100 playful activities to empower children with sensory differences"

by Barbara Sher

Understanding that kids learn through fun, the author has combined a series of games and fun activities that are designed to remediate sensory processing issues through games and activities that can be done right at home.

#### "Hands-on Activities for Children with Autism & Sensory Disorders"

by Teresa Garland

With almost 200 activities and interventions, this illustrated guide highlights step-by-step activities that can help anyone working with children who have autism and sensory disorders. ■

# Never the Right Numbers

BY PATRICIA VELKOFF

What is lost when young people become too focused on numeric feedback? Here in Northern Virginia, a number of the high school students I talk with are fixated on having the “right numbers.”

To hear them tell it, parents and teachers are all unhappy with them. Their GPA is not high enough. Their SAT and ACT scores have not improved enough. Their list of extracurriculars is not extensive enough... and on and on.

It's one thing to hear this from students who believe that it's going to turn out OK. It's quite another to hear it from those who are convinced they've failed at life already. That's the group that concerns me most deeply.

With rare exception, these young people are smart, courteous and perceptive. They have loving families and friends, and they've steered clear of the serious problems that can derail a promising trajectory.

They've internalized a message, though, that leaves many of them feeling inadequate, powerless and defeated. I am troubled by their self-talk, which can often be translated into thoughts such as:

- Someone is good enough, but it's not me.
- There's a “success checklist,” and it's too late for me to check the right boxes.
- College is only the next ruthless competition; an endless series of grueling trials stretch into my future.

At best, some respond by finding a balance. They use their time badly but then get their work done eventually and with reasonable quality. Over time, they start caring about college and next steps.

At worst, they feel overwhelmed, burdened, exhausted and unsuccessful. They avoid their families and themselves, squandering enormous amounts of time. Some are high achievers; others are not. In both cases, though, there is despair about a system that feels designed to keep moving



the goal post just beyond where it used to be so that they are perpetually doomed to fail.

Do scores matter? Of course they do. But several serious difficulties come with a focus on test scores and GPAs:

1. Numbers fail to measure many characteristics and skills needed for life – things like social give-and-take, honor and integrity, setting and meeting personal goals and humility when we have made a mistake.
2. Research shows that a steady stream of external evaluations can diminish internal motivation.
3. For some students, test scores are entirely inappropriate measures of their capabilities and potential.
4. When young people internalize the notion that their worth is determined exclusively by others, they may struggle to develop necessary confidence in internal standards for success.

5. Numeric evaluations do not give young people the values and vision that connect them to participation in a world that is larger than themselves.

If we reflect deeply and thoughtfully, the purchasing power of those numbers does not fully set our children up for the quality of life that we want for them. Nor do those credentials necessarily signal that they are self-motivated, courageous in the face of challenges, able to work cooperatively with others or have what it takes to enjoy full, engaged and flourishing lives.

As a parent and a therapist, I have certainly modeled for my own children the value of education and professional achievement. I hope that I have imparted more than that, though. I hope my kids have learned that friendships are rewarding, that hobbies matter and that a commitment to ideals and to personal goals can bring rewards that no “right numbers” can provide. I hope they know that there are multiple paths to success, some of which have little or nothing to do with external evaluations, and that growing up includes fostering relationships and engaging meaningfully with the community just as much as it includes finding satisfying work.

We have an interesting juggling act as parents, guiding our children to understand and meet demands from the outside world while helping them avoid temptations that can derail them. By recalling where we have found our own deepest personal fulfillment, we may remember to foster passion, connections, laughter and love alongside the more clear-cut accomplishments gained through measurable academic and work achievements. Those areas of love and laughter don't have “right numbers,” but they keep our hearts open and our minds alive, things that matter a lot over time. ■

*Dr. Velkoff is a clinical psychologist in Vienna, Virginia who works with children, adolescents, couples and families. [patricia-velkoff.com](http://patricia-velkoff.com)*



# NOMINATIONS HAVE STARTED



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The winners are chosen by popular vote, so let your friends know it's time to cast their ballot. As a business, share with your audience to help you win the title of "Best" in your category!






**Nominations close March 10**

Voting for the winners starts on April 1. Winners will be contacted in June, and the results will be in the July issue of Washington FAMILY magazine.

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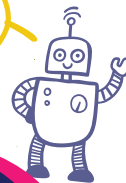
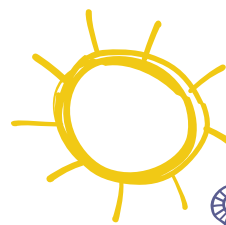
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# social beginnings



## Summer Program

LED BY BCBAS

July 5<sup>th</sup>  
thru  
August 18<sup>th</sup>



AGES  
3-17



Our Summer Program provides a curriculum based on a fun learning experience that immerses children into a social group of like aged peers to learn how to develop and utilize valuable social skills. Children will be with similar aged peers and similar social levels.



### Direct Instruction

Daily exposure to fun and engaging classroom a instruction

Progressive Curriculum provided by Board Certified Behavior Analysts

### Social Activities

Engaging in game play, art and science activities, and outdoor fun!

### Parent Training

Parent training is provided for families to support the continued development of social skills.

**8:30am-3:30 pm | Monday-Friday**

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Child must have ASD diagnosis.  
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