

A close-up photograph of a child's hands holding a single feather. The child is wearing a blue jacket with white stars and dots. The background is a soft, out-of-focus teal color. The text 'Mighty Roots Academy' is overlaid in white serif font at the top, and 'Winter Wonder' is overlaid in white serif font at the bottom left. At the very bottom, 'VOL. 4 | WINTER 2023' is written in a small, white, sans-serif font.

# Mighty Roots Academy

## Winter Wonder

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photo: cari schawo

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photo: cari schawo

Cover Photo: Cari Schawo

# mighty roots academy

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*Welcome!*



As the chill of winter begins to embrace us, we are excited to welcome you to the winter issue of our Mighty Roots Academy magazine! This season, we embark on a journey filled with learning adventures, creative pursuits, and the joy of coming together as a community.

Let the pages of this winter edition serve as a source of inspiration, encouragement, and a reminder that learning together is a vibrant and ever-evolving adventure. We want to celebrate the joys of learning and growing together as a homeschooling community. We encourage you to embrace the spirit of togetherness that this season brings. Share your experiences, connect with fellow homeschoolers, and let the warmth of shared stories and insights brighten your winter days!

Thank you for being a valued part of our homeschooling community! We hope this issue brings warmth and joy to your homes during these winter months. Wishing you and your family a season filled with wonder, laughter, and the magic of learning!

# A Message from our Director

I often hear people say that winter is their least favorite season. Usually, when I hear this from people, it is because they try to push against the nature of winter by packing their schedules full. Then, when snow blankets the earth in stillness, they can only see it as an inconvenience instead of an opportunity to slow down. When schedules become rigid, there is no room left to find joy. When one's body and mind tells us that we want to cozy up on the couch with a book, but the clock says it's time to complete the next task on the list, we can lose the bliss of winter.

In this edition of our Mighty Roots Magazine I welcome you to journey with us through the different rhythms that winter brings to our lives. I hope you find peace of mind to know that it is ok to take life a bit slower, hibernate a bit longer, and drink in the calmness of a long winter day. I hope you find inspiration to add fun and whimsy to your homeschooling and family life when it feels like another cold, brisk day may be the end of you. At Mighty Roots Academy we are thankful to be your partner in your family's educational journey and hope that this issue will inspire you with wonderful winter learning experiences.

~ Tracy Schroeder




photo: isaac schroeder



# WINTER'S EMBRACE

Autumn has bid us farewell and our days have grown shorter. The arrival of winter brings a variety of contrasts, blending the crisp chill in the air with the beauty of frost covered landscapes, the joy of outdoor activities, the comfort of indoor retreats, the warmth of holiday festivities, and time to savor introspective moments that come with the season.

We can find joy in the simple pleasures winter offers. Winter has a way of hushing the world. Trees stand bare, awaiting the promise of spring and animals hibernate or adapt to the changing conditions. The stillness that accompanies winter's embrace provides a unique opportunity for us to slow down and recognize the importance of embracing the small quiet moments.



Winter encourages us to seek warmth and comfort indoors. The crackling sound of a fireplace, the soft glow of candles, and the warmth of blankets create a cozy haven. As the cold wind blows outside, we find solace in the simple joys of hot cocoa, fuzzy socks, and the company of loved ones.

And if cabin fever sets in, winter offers a host of exhilarating outdoor activities. From the thrill of sledding down snow-covered hills to the joy of building snowmen and engaging in friendly snowball fights. The crunch of the frost and snow covered ground under our boots and the rush of cold air against our faces become the soundtrack of winter adventures.

The longer nights also provides us with the perfect opportunity for stargazing, allowing us to marvel at the cosmic wonders above. The cold air enhances the clarity of the night sky, offering a chance to witness meteor showers and the vibrant glow of constellations.

So let winter's embrace captivate your senses and fill your heart with the beauty that lies in its' simplicity and shared moments!

# Winter Retreat

## Slowing down and cozying up to homeschooling in the winter

by tracy schroeder

Each season brings a new rhythm and in our busy society we can feel pushed to go against the natural rhythms of winter, being told to stay in the hustle and bustle or complete all of our check lists, leading to a feeling that we are falling behind.

We might not be able to fully hibernate, but there are some days we may just feel like we need to embrace the slower rhythm of winter. This is true for homeschooling too! On the days that you wake up and it is gloomy again or you hear the cold frosty wind whipping through the trees, know that it is ok to stay inside and cuddle.

### Introducing Cozy Schooling

What is Cozy Schooling? Cozy schooling is where you break away from your normal routine to snuggle in and learn a little bit differently for a few days, bringing much needed rest and comfort to the soul by doing activities that create the feeling of warmth, cheer, magic, and whimsy. Cozy schooling is when you set aside the day's tasks, even if just for an hour or two, and take your learning down a slower path.

*(continued)*







### Cozy schooling ideas:

Snuggle up in the living room for a good family read along. My kids have a 5-year age gap from the oldest to the youngest, so we pick a book that will appeal to a wider age and interest range. We often choose shorter, lighthearted, feel good stories with a four to eight hour reading time so that we can finish them in just a few days.

Audio books are a great way to maximize your snuggle time and take the pressure off you as the parent to have to read for hours on end. We fill the floor with drawing supplies and sketch out the scenes or characters as we see them in our mind as the narrator shares their story. We pause every few chapters to discuss our thoughts about the book or predictions on what may happen next.

Incorporate tea, hot chocolate, or a delicious wassail recipe that we share later in this issue. This can be with your family read along, while you share some winter poetry together, or even as you work through a math or spelling lesson. There is just something about feeling warmed from the inside on a cold winter day that brings that inner cozy feeling. Picking up a tea pot with cups at a thrift store or having a special hot cocoa mug can make the ordinary feel extra special.

*(continued)*



Change the lighting. If you walk through my house in winter, you will find that every light is on, shining bright with high powered daylight bulbs to help us feel energized on the short, gray days. This is one of my tips for getting through the month of February, which has always been a struggle for me personally. But on a cozy school day or even random moments, we will turn off a few of the lights and light some candles, string up some fairy lights, or do our work by the light of the Christmas tree. Throw in a fuzzy blanket and that Algebra problem doesn't feel so cold and daunting.

Fill the air with cozy aromas. There are just some smells that bring us comfort. Though they may be different for different people, try out a few in your home and see how it changes everyone's mood and brings on feelings of contentment. The wassail recipe on page 31 is a great start. Let it simmer on the stove for a few hours as it fills your home with inviting scents. Set some cinnamon or spice scented pinecones on the table, use scented candles, or bake some bread or cookies and let the delightful fragrance fill your home.

Play a game or work on a puzzle. It is ok to put aside the typical daily activities and spend some time playing a favorite game, defeating a cooperative board game, or taking on the challenge of a 500- or 1000-piece puzzle. Though this may not feel like learning or doing schoolwork, these activities help our brains figure out multi-step instructions, problem solve, and think creatively.

*(continued)*





Do your learning in a pillow or blanket fort. A change of scenery can do wonders, especially when you feel trapped inside by the weather. This was a favorite of my kids when they were younger. Not only is building an inside fort or tent a great opportunity for critical thinking, developing perseverance, and expressing creativity, it can provide extra motivation to complete a learning task when kids get to do that task in a fun environment. Dining room tables, sofas, beds, and bookshelves can make great structural supports. You can even set up a small tent inside your house and bring camping and adventure indoors. So grab your couch cushions, blankets, or sheets and get building!

Put on your slippers, grab a cup of tea while you light that candle and I hope these ideas inspire you to find your own ways to incorporate cozy schooling with your family this winter.

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Tracy is the Director and founding member of Mighty Roots. She lives in Grandview with her husband and three children.

As winter wraps its frosty fingers around the world, the allure of coziness and hibernation beckons many indoors. However the monotony of long, chilly days can leave even the most resilient souls yearning for a change of scenery. For those experiencing the restlessness of cabin fever, the call to venture beyond the four walls becomes irresistible. This is the perfect time to embark on a journey to discover the hidden gems that await beyond your doorstep. Bundle up and grab your kids and head on out and discover places around us that offer a great antidote to cabin fever this winter.

# venture out

## NATURE CENTERS

### LAKESIDE NATURE CENTER

4701 E GREGORY BLVD,  
KANSAS CITY, MO 64132

### BURR OAK NATURE CENTER

1401 NW PARK RD, BLUE  
SPRINGS, MO 64015

### ANITA B. GORDMAN

4750 TROOST AVE,  
KANSAS CITY, MO 64110

## FREE SPACES TO EXPRESS CREATIVITY

### KALEIDOSCOPE

2500 GRAND BLVD  
CROWN CENTER,  
KANSAS CITY, MO  
64108

### THE HALLMARK MUSEUM

2450 GRAND BLVD,  
KANSAS CITY, MO  
64108

### KANSAS CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY (DOWNTOWN)

14 W 10TH ST,  
KANSAS CITY, MO  
64105





# MESSY MASTERPIECES

words and photos  
by cari schawo

## Unleashing Creativity with Process Art

Process art is an important part of a child's development. What does process art mean? It means giving children the art tools they need to be able to create on their own, with little to no guidance. This allows children to explore, plan, and implement their ideas while exploring with different art mediums.

*(continued)*

Through process art, children create art that is their own. There is no determined end product. Children are not given examples of what their art should look like. Instead, they are encouraged to explore their creativity and express themselves freely, fostering a sense of individuality and imagination. This approach allows children to develop their unique artistic voice.

Children learn by **DOING!**  
Through process art, they plan, design, and execute their ideas.



The many benefits of process art include: improving confidence, developing creativity, and decision making skills as well as enforcing language development.

It helps improve fine motor development, fosters exploration, helps children become more independent and allows them to work on spatial reasoning.

*(continued)*



How can you help support and add process art to your own home-schooling journey? It will be messy and that is ok! Start small. Create a space in your home that can be a dedicated art space or even a cabinet where supplies can be easily access by your child.

Give your child clear and precise directions and expectations of how and when supplies can be used. Add crayons, scissors, glue and paper for children to use freely. As your child becomes more comfortable with those items, you can begin to add more supplies such as paint, stickers, children's clay, cookie cutters and any other item that children can create with.

If you are afraid of the mess that will come with adding process art into your home, take it outside! Children love to create and explore outside and get messy at the same time.

Find a space in your home that can become their gallery. Children love looking at the work they create and talking with your child about their art helps to improve their language skills.

(continued)





### **Some ideas for process art projects are:**

- Paint with items found outside in nature
- Paint with colored ice cubes
- Wet chalk on sidewalk
- Paint brushes with water and paint on sidewalk
- Make sidewalk chalk paint
- Paper collages
- Create art on cardboard boxes
- Finger paint
- Paint on bubble wrap and make a print
- Explore clay
- Create a mono print on a cookie sheet
- Make your own finger paints and paint
- Paint a stick or rock
- Make a wood sculpture using popsicle sticks
- Paint on a white sheet
- Paint on crumpled up paper
- Weaving with yarn and sticks

Most importantly, allow your child to explore and have fun!



# The Weight of Winter

## Overcoming Seasonal Depression with Practical Tips

by krystle willmore

It seems almost natural to feel gloomy when it's gloomy outside. It's cloudy, a little cold, maybe even wet from rain or snow, so your desire is to stay inside and cozy up. Which if that was only one day here and there it wouldn't be so bad, but when it's multiple days in a row or even weeks, you realize that this is an entire season of feeling depressed. You might be thinking, do I have to continue suffering through this? The answer is no! From a past sufferer of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) I am going to share some tips on how to get through it and also how to prevent it in the future.

Let's first talk about why someone suffers from SAD. It all comes down to a lack of vitamin D, which we get from sunlight. That's why gloomy days can affect us so much; we don't have enough sunlight. If we aren't getting proper exposure of UVA/UVB rays of sunlight then it depletes our bodies of vitamin D. When this happens year after year, well, it gets worse for us. Now right now, even with sunlight, the sun isn't producing enough UV rays for us to even absorb any vitamin D anyways, in fact it isn't until mid January that the sun will be strong enough for us. Living here in the Kansas City area, there are about 2 whole months of not enough UV exposure. It's really no wonder that many people suffer from SAD.

(continued)



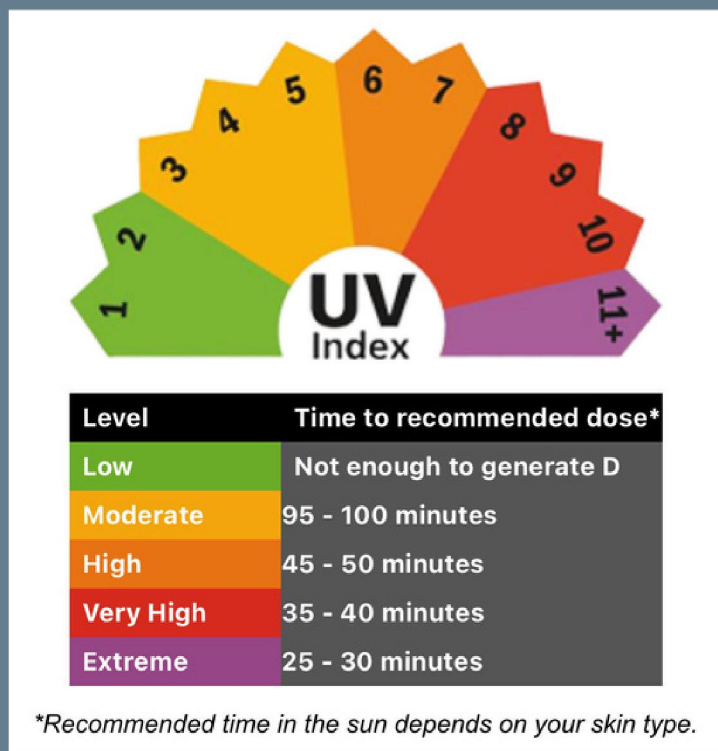
What can you do right now? My favorite piece of advice is to buy yourself a light bulb that has both UVA/UVB rays and sit under it at least a couple times a week. I prefer to shine the light onto my back or stomach so my eyes are not blinded by the bright light. These light bulbs are often sold as “reptile” lights, aren’t too expensive, and last a long time. This will help your body absorb vitamin D, it isn’t as good as sunlight, but when you don’t have any, you need to improvise. Most people might think supplementing with vitamin D pills are helpful, however, the vitamin D from light versus food is completely different. Our bodies don’t absorb it the same and therefore it doesn’t play the same role in our body as we need.

Because a lack of sunshine affects our mood, even if we are vitamin D deficient, we can increase our mood in several ways. Spending time in nature, breathing deeply, will help us to absorb phytoncides and negative ions from living plants. Phytoncides help us to relax and lower the autonomic nervous system activity, which reduces stress and cortisol levels and increases our quality of sleep. When we absorb negative ions either through breath or our skin (by touching plants), our cell metabolism revitalizes and many things happen. Our nervous system and immune system are enhanced, inflammation is reduced, sleep improves, depression and anxiety are alleviated (over time), energy increases, and more. Even though the temptation to stay indoors during winter is strong, going outside is one of the best ways to combat SAD.

Did you know that photos and paintings of nature also reduce stress and increase our mood? Part of this is because nature is relaxing and part of it is because colors do affect us in a psychological way. I noticed a huge difference when we painted over our gray living room walls with a beautiful mustard yellow. Honestly my yellow walls just bring me so much joy, especially in the winter! So get creative and put up some paintings or photos of nature, paint your walls, or create artwork you love, hang them up and look at them!

*(continued)*

Once mid January comes and the sun is producing enough vitamin D, start spending more time outside when the sun is strong. A fantastic app to help you understand the sun and its UV rays is called **dminder**. You put in your skin type, where you live, age, weight, etc.. and it helps you know how much time in the sun you need to get your fullest potential of vitamin D. Healthy eating habits play a big role in this, eating food that is close to nature and sourced from regenerative farms will help your body to be able to absorb vitamin D.




“Food” such as seed oils actually disrupt your body and can cause sunburns from improper absorption. The chart I have here shows that you don’t need to be outside all day, just the right amount depending on the sun. Utilize the app to help you properly “dose” the sunlight. The reasoning for this protocol is because your body can store vitamin D long enough to last throughout the winter. So the more you bank up during the other 10 months of the year the better!

### Quick tips for more phytoncides and negative ion absorption:

- Burning beeswax candles
- Smelling essential oils
- Taking a warm shower
- Salt (Himalayan salt lamps or go visit a salt cave)
- Barefoot walking
- Meditation
- Stay active

Remember to be gentle with yourself! Allow yourself to feel your emotions and don’t try to bury them. Just like the earth, we aren’t sunny every single day. It’s not bad to cry like the rain, as that helps us to grow. It’s not bad to stay inside and cozy up, even storms remind us we need to shelter. We are beautifully complex and the more we allow ourselves to be who we are, the more beautiful we become!

A child wearing a dark winter jacket with a fur-lined hood, pink snow pants, and a light-colored hat with pom-poms is walking away from the camera on a snowy path. The child's feet are visible in the snow, and the path is slightly indented. The background is a soft, out-of-focus snowy landscape.

Encouraging a child to go  
outside in all weather  
builds resilience, but  
more importantly it saves  
them from spending their  
life merely tolerating the  
“bad” days in favor of  
a handful of “good” ones  
- a life of endless  
expectations & conditions  
where happiness  
hinges on sunshine.

- Nicolette Sowder

# Savor the Season

WINTER RECIPES  
THAT WILL WARM  
YOUR HEART



When the winter chill settles in, there's nothing quite like the comfort of a hearty, warming meal to lift your spirits and keep you cozy. These winter comfort food recipes are sure to warm your soul and bring joy to your table during the colder months.

Whether you're craving a classic creamy soup, a comforting noodle bake, or a sweet classic seasonal treat, these recipes offer a delicious way to embrace the season and create lasting memories with loved ones. So, gather around, savor the flavors, and enjoy the comfort that these dishes bring to your winter days!





## Creamy Tomato Basil Soup

### Instructions:

#### 1. Sauté Aromatics:

In a large pot, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add chopped onions and sauté until they become translucent, about 5 minutes. Add minced garlic and cook for an additional 1-2 minutes until fragrant.

#### 2. Prepare the Soup Base:

Pour in the whole tomatoes with their juices and the crushed tomatoes. Break up the whole tomatoes using a spoon. Stir in sugar, dried oregano, dried basil, dried thyme, salt, and black pepper. Mix well. Pour in the vegetable or chicken broth and bring the mixture to a simmer. Allow it to cook for 15-20 minutes, stirring occasionally.

#### 3. Blend the Soup:

Using an immersion blender, puree the soup until smooth. If you don't have an immersion blender, carefully transfer the soup in batches to a blender and blend until smooth. Remember to vent the blender to allow steam to escape.

#### 4. Add Cream:

Return the soup to the pot and stir in the heavy cream. Simmer for an additional 5-10 minutes to allow the flavors to meld. Adjust salt and pepper to taste.

#### 5. Garnish and Serve!

### Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 cans (28 ounces each) whole tomatoes, undrained
- 1 can (14 ounces) crushed tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- Salt and black pepper to taste
- 3 cups vegetable or chicken broth
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/4 cup fresh basil, chopped (for garnish)

Optionally, you may drizzle a bit of olive oil or add a dollop of sour cream for extra richness and don't forget to serve your creamy tomato basil soup hot with crusty bread or yummy grilled cheese!

## Baked Macaroni and Cheese:

### Ingredients:

- 2 cups elbow macaroni
- 4 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese
- 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 3 cups milk
- 1/4 cup butter
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon paprika
- 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg (optional)
- 1/2 cup breadcrumbs
- (optional, for topping)

### Instructions:

- Preheat your oven to 350°F (175°C) and grease a baking dish.
- Cook macaroni according to package instructions; drain and set aside.
- In a saucepan, melt butter over medium heat. Stir in the flour until the mixture becomes paste-like and light golden brown.
- Gradually whisk in the milk so that no lumps form. Continue cooking and stirring until the sauce thickens.
- Add salt, pepper, paprika, and nutmeg (if using) to the sauce. Stir in 3 cups of cheddar cheese and the Parmesan cheese until melted and smooth.
- Combine the cooked macaroni with the cheese sauce, ensuring the macaroni is well coated.
- Pour the macaroni and cheese mixture into the prepared baking dish. Sprinkle the remaining cheddar cheese on top and, if desired, add a layer of breadcrumbs.
- Bake in the preheated oven for 30 minutes or until the top is golden and bubbly.
- Allow it to cool for a few minutes before serving.





# Winter Red Sauce

## Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 carrot, finely chopped
- 1 celery stalk, finely chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, finely chopped
- 1 can (28 ounces) crushed tomatoes
- 1 can (14 ounces) diced tomatoes
- 1/2 cup red wine (optional)
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1/2 teaspoon dried rosemary
- Salt and black pepper to taste
- 1 pinch red pepper flakes (optional, for some heat)
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 1 teaspoon sugar (optional, to balance acidity)

## Instructions:

### Saute Vegetables:

- In a large saucepan or Dutch oven, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add the chopped onion, garlic, carrot, celery, and red bell pepper. Cook until the vegetables are softened, about 5-7 minutes.

### Add Tomatoes:

- Pour in the crushed tomatoes and diced tomatoes with their juices. Stir well to combine.
- Include Wine (Optional):
- If using red wine, add it to the sauce and stir. Allow it to simmer for a few minutes to cook off the alcohol.

### Season:

- Add dried oregano, basil, thyme, rosemary, salt, black pepper, red pepper flakes (if using), and the bay leaf. Stir to combine.

### Stir in Tomato Paste:

- Add the tomato paste and stir until it's well incorporated into the sauce.

### Simmer:

- Reduce the heat to low, cover the saucepan, and let the sauce simmer for at least 30 minutes to allow the flavors to meld. Stir occasionally.

### Adjust Seasoning:

- Taste the sauce and adjust the seasoning if necessary. If the sauce is too acidic, you can add a teaspoon of sugar to balance the flavors.

### Remove Bay Leaf:

- Before serving, don't forget to remove the bay leaf.

### Serve:

- Use the winter red sauce with your favorite pasta, as a topping for pizza, or in any other dishes that call for a rich and hearty red sauce.





## Sugared Pecans

### Ingredients:

- 12 oz. pecan halves
- $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1c turbinado sugar or white sugar
- 1 Tbs. cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup water

### Instructions:

Heat a large skillet over medium high heat. Mix the sugar, cinnamon, and water in the skillet until sugar is dissolved. Add pecans and stir continuously, coating the pecans in the sugar mixture. Continue to stir pecans and turn them over as the sugar coats the pecans and forms a sugary crunch on the outside of the pecans. If needed turn heat down to medium to prevent sugar from burning. Once all sugar appears dry and not shiny, dump pecans onto a baking sheet to cool.

Note: Your skillet will be coated in the extra sugar crystals. Once it cools, soak in warm water for 10-15 minutes and all the sugar will dissolve making for easy clean-up.





UNWRAP THE GIFT OF WINTER  
AND DISCOVER THE MAGIC  
THAT LIES WITHIN!

# Whispers of Winter

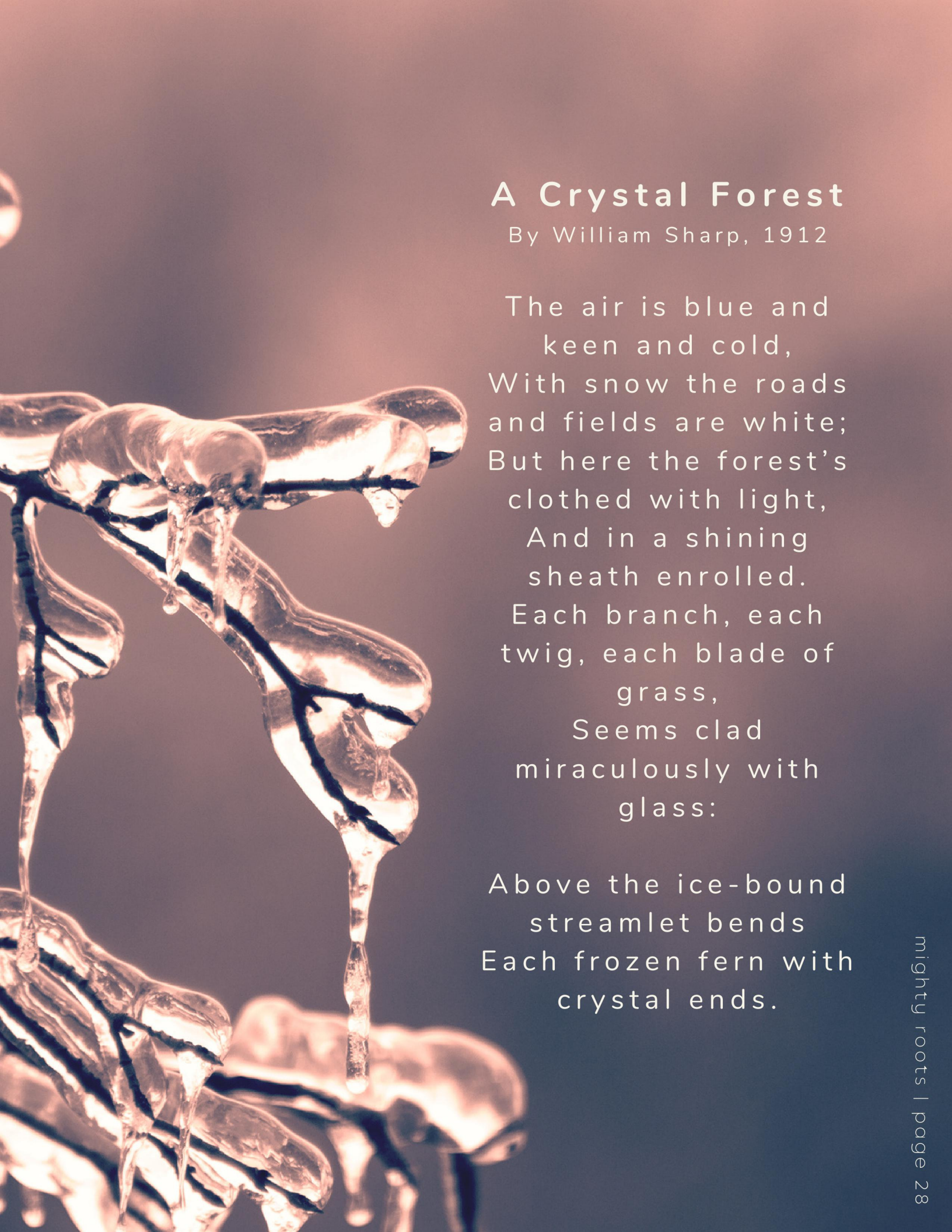
## Poetry in the Season of Chill

Enveloped by the quiet of winter, poets find inspiration in the enchanting beauty that transforms the landscape.

Winter poetry captures the essence of the season's hushed stillness and weaves verses that dance like swirling snowflakes, evoking the magic and melancholy that is unique to winter's delicate embrace.

Come along with us as we sample the captivating world of winter poetry, exploring how poets have harnessed the power of words to convey the unique emotions stirred by the chill of winter's breath.





# A Crystal Forest

By William Sharp, 1912

The air is blue and  
keen and cold,  
With snow the roads  
and fields are white;  
But here the forest's  
clothed with light,  
And in a shining  
sheath enrolled.  
Each branch, each  
twig, each blade of  
grass,  
Seems clad  
miraculously with  
glass:

Above the ice-bound  
streamlet bends  
Each frozen fern with  
crystal ends.

# It sifts from Leaden Sieves

By Emily Dickinson, 1862

It sifts from Leaden Sieves -  
It powders all the Wood.  
It fills with Alabaster Wool  
The Wrinkles of the Road -

It makes an even Face  
Of Mountain, and of Plain -  
Unbroken Forehead from the East  
Unto the East again -

It reaches to the Fence -  
It wraps it Rail by Rail  
Till it is lost in Fleeces -  
It deals Celestial Vail

To Stump, and Stack - and Stem -  
A Summer's empty Room -  
Acres of Joints, where Harvests were,  
Recordless, but for them -

It Ruffles Wrists of Posts  
As Ankles of a Queen -  
Then stills it's Artisans - like Ghosts -  
Denying they have been -



# Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

By Robert Frost, 1922

Whose woods these are  
I think I know.

His house is in the village though;  
He will not see me stopping here  
To watch his woods  
fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer  
To stop without a farmhouse near  
Between the woods and frozen  
lake

The darkest evening of the year.  
He gives his harness bells a shake  
To ask if there is some mistake.  
The only other sound's the sweep  
Of easy wind and downy flake.  
The woods are lovely, dark and  
deep,

But I have promises to keep,  
And miles to go before I sleep,  
And miles to go before I sleep.

## Winter Trees

By William Carlos Williams, 1921

All the complicated details  
of the attiring and  
the disattiring are completed!

A liquid moon  
moves gently among  
the long branches.  
Thus having prepared  
their buds  
against a sure winter  
the wise trees  
stand sleeping in the cold.

# A Toast to Tradition

## CRAFTING A CRANBERRY WASSAIL TRADITION

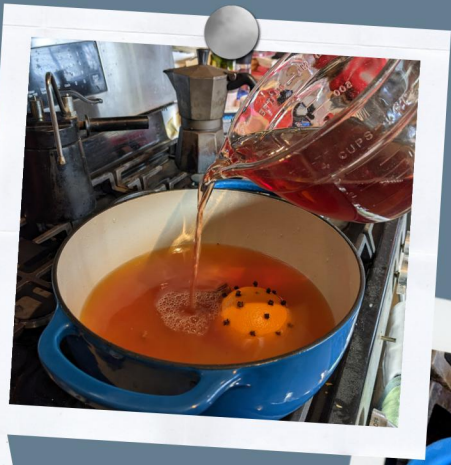
words by renee bichel  
photos by joshua bichel



Wassail, an ancient holiday drink of mulled apples, has many varieties. This one is mine. As a child, I knew of it as spiced cordial, served iced. It was one of my very favorite family traditions at Thanksgiving. Aficionados, I'm sure, could point out all the differences between the two! (I can't.)

Wassail is a delicious and nutritious treat for winter months. Next time, I'll be adding dried elderberries for a boost of immunity. You can't steer wrong with this recipe. Add any spices your family loves, and measure them with your heart. We love this specific cranberry wassail recipe. This time I used store-bought apple cider; in past years, I've made my own apple cider with the apples from my own apple tree.






**Ingredients:**

- 4 cups apple cider
- 2 cups 100% cranberry juice
- 1 cup cranberries
- 1 orange
- 4 cinnamon sticks
- 12+ whole cloves
- Star anise (optional)
- Allspice (optional)
- Ginger root, peeled and sliced (optional)

**Instructions:**

Pour cider and juice in a dutch oven, saucepan, or in your slow cooker. Slice your orange in half. Use one half as an anchor for the whole cloves, poking them in the orange peel. Slice the other half into whole circle slices. Add cranberries, orange slices, orange half with cloves, cinnamon sticks, and any other desired fruit and spices. Simmer slowly (making sure not to boil) for at least 2 hours, the longer the better. I simmer all day to make sure it's spiced well. Sugar or honey can always be added if desired, but I find the fruit juices to be plenty sweet for me. When done, it's up to you to strain out the fruit and spices, or leave them in. Serve hot with a new cinnamon stick. Refrigerate leftovers. Wassail is delicious cold or warm!





“Memorable &  
momentous  
occasions  
rarely  
announce  
themselves  
ahead of time,  
but often  
tiptoe quietly  
into the  
corners of our  
lives & yet  
leave a  
profound  
influence”

- Sally Clarkson  
*“Awakening Wonder”*

# MEET OUR LEARNING GUIDE

CARI SCHAWO

## ~ Capturing Wonder ~

In this issue, we meet one of our learning guides who goes above and beyond to shape the minds of our young learners. We are thrilled to introduce you to Cari Schawo! She not only guides our early elementary students but also imparts the art of photography to our older students in a captivating way. Cari brings a unique blend of passion, enthusiasm and creativity as well as years of expertise to our team here at Mighty Roots. She makes the learning experience a delightful and enriching adventure for every student fortunate enough to be under her guidance.

Cari joined our team in August of 2021 and leads most of our early elementary courses and photography. We are honored to have her with us! Join us as we get to know Miss Cari.

### **What inspired you to get into teaching?**

As a young child my Nonnie was a kindergarten and first grade teacher. I loved being able to go to visit her while she was teaching and afterwards would get to play with all the items in her classroom and read the books she had out for her students. When she cleaned out her classroom at the end of every year, she would give my sister and I extra supplies she had as well as workbooks, I remember my sister and I would play school in our bedroom with those supplies when we were little. She taught until she was in her 70's and I admire her for that! Will I teach that long? Only time will tell.



*(continued)*

As I progressed through my education, I took an early childhood class that was offered through my high school and fell in love with the preschool ages. Throughout that class we learned about child development and got to work and plan lessons for the preschool that was connected to the high school. From there I took early childhood classes in college and when my own children were young, it was the best of both worlds as I got to do something I love, teaching in an early childhood setting and having my young children with me at the same schools.

Becoming a Learning Guide for Mighty Roots has invigorated my passion for play and nature based learning. I have continued to educate myself in this area by taking many online classes focused on the subject. I follow many nature based social media accounts that further help me to implement many different learning experiences for my students.

I have taught for over 25 years, all which have been in early childhood settings. I was a director and assistant director for awhile but truly in my heart knew I always belonged in the classroom. I am fascinated by the changing of practices in early childhood and am constantly researching better methods, which has led me to the benefits of outdoor play and learning.

#### **How did you find out about Mighty Roots?**

Tracy is my sister-in-law. Whenever we would get together for family get togethers the subject of education would come up. We have very similar teaching philosophies, and I always loved my conversations with her and my other sister in laws and mother in law about education and the ways it was changing. I enjoyed hearing about the start and development of Mighty Roots Academy.

When I was first asked to join the Mighty Roots team I was very excited and I have not looked back since. I feel at home at Mighty Roots, like I was meant to be there all along!

#### **What do you love best about teaching at Mighty Roots?**

Teaching at Mighty Roots has been life changing for me. I love being able to be creative in my teaching. I love creating a cozy classroom environment which fosters a love of learning and being kind to one another. Being in a nature setting has been a learning curve for me but in the best possible way. Children need to be outside exploring and not confined to the walls of a classroom hour upon hour.



(continued)

I also love that Mighty Roots supports all kinds of learners and learning styles. Not everyone learns the same way and I am able to teach in many ways to help accommodate the different learning styles of my students. I love that there is a sense of family too!

### What inspired you to get into photography?

My father was always dabbling in photography. He would take our photos all the time and did nature and urban photography. He traveled overseas for work and always took amazing photos of his travels; he still travels and documents where he has been.

He taught me the basics when I got my first DSLR when my kids were little, and I have been into photography ever since.

I had my own portrait photography business for the better part of 10 years. My favorite subjects to photograph were children and high school seniors.

I now do photography as a hobby and teach the photography class at Mighty Roots. Teaching photography had never been on my radar, but I am so glad I teach it now! I love working with the older students and have loved the relationships I have been able to develop with them. I also love seeing their passion for photography grow.

My favorite type of photography now is macro. I find when I shoot macro shots, I can be very creative, and it is very calming to me.

I also feel as though Mighty Roots has given me a voice in photography. I love capturing the quiet moments of childhood while we are exploring the grounds. It has given me an eye into the world of young children how they explore, work together and exist in nature. It has taught me to step back and let children be children and to enjoy the stillness of the forest as they explore.



(continued)

**“DON’T BE AFRAID TO TRY THINGS. YOU MIGHT FAIL, BUT THEN AGAIN, YOU MIGHT JUST SOAR!”**



**What do you enjoy doing in your free time?**

I enjoy taking photos and spending time with family. This is a little silly to admit, but I also enjoy researching play based and outdoor leaning ideas and coming up with ways to implement them into my classes at Mighty Roots. Honestly, I miss being at Mighty Roots on my days off.

**Do you have any advice you would give to a family just starting out on their homeschool journey?**

Just like I do in my classroom, I would say create a safe, calm, cozy space for your children. All children learn differently and seek to find ways to embrace those different learning styles. It is ok to take breaks and revisit what you were working on at a later time.

Something I have learned while being in such a nature driven environment, is that it is good to get outside and often helps to take learning out. There are teachable moments everywhere and to look for them, often your children will actually teach you something!

**Any advice you want to offer to someone interested in teaching and/or photography?**

For anyone interested in teaching I would say to take some Early Childhood classes at a local community college or find some ways or places to volunteer and help with children.

If someone is interested in photography, I would say to start simple. I always tell my photography class that the best camera you have is the camera you have with you. Learn to look at the things in a different way and go from there. Photography is all about seeing in a more creative way. Start with the basics and you will grow from there.



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Cari Schawo studied early childhood development at Harper Community College as well as attended University of Central Missouri. She has over 25 years of early childhood teaching experience some of which includes as a Director and Assistant Director of an early childhood center. She lives in Lee's Summit with her husband and son. Cari also has daughter who lives in the Kansas City area.

# Snow Much Fun!

Bundle up and uncover the magic of winter with these activities that promise to turn ordinary snow days into extraordinary memories for your family!

by tracy schroeder

**Icicle scavenger hunt:** Grab a yard stick or a tape measure and go in search of the longest icicle your family can find. This is great to do on a warmer day as the snow is melting.

**Calculate your sledding speed:** The formula for speed is *distance ÷ by time = speed*. Make a start and finish line. Measure it out then use the stopwatch feature on your phone as you race through the snow. It can even be fun to try different sledding techniques or sleds to see how they effect speed.

**Snow spelling:** Fill squirt bottles with colored water or those left over water squirters from summer work great too. Take your spelling outside by painting the spelling words in the snow with the colored water.

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**Engineers sled analysis:** Try out different sleds, techniques, and terrains to figure out what makes the best sledding combo. Discuss pros and cons as well as adaptations that can be made to change the experience. If you go sledding multiple times, discuss how the different conditions change the experience. For example, sometimes sledding becomes faster as the snow is packed down or slower as grass starts to show through. Some snow is fluffy, powdery, or icy. How does that affect the sled? Do different conditions make one sled preferred over another style?

**Snow Cream or Snow Cones:** Snow cream is a winter classic. By using measuring cups or ratios as you mix up the yummy treat is a great way to add in some math. Add a bit more complexity by having your student figure out measurement substitutions for your recipe. For example, if it calls for 2 cups of snow, how can they measure that same amount using  $\frac{1}{3}$  or  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup measuring cups?

## Snow Ice Cream

### Ingredients:

- 8 cups of fresh, clean snow
- 1 cup of milk (any kind, including non-dairy alternatives)
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon of vanilla extract

### Instructions:

1. Collect clean, fresh snow in a large bowl. Make sure it's free from any debris.
2. In a separate bowl, mix together the milk, sugar, and vanilla extract until the sugar is dissolved.
3. Gradually pour the milk mixture over the snow, stirring as you go. Continue adding the liquid until you reach your desired ice cream consistency.
4. Serve immediately and enjoy!





**Colored Ice Globes:** This can be done when it is snowy for a fun contrast or just during any cold weather stretch. Fill balloons with water and food coloring. Don't fill them too full to prevent them from bursting. Place them outside overnight and let them freeze. The time it takes for them to freeze will depend on the temperature. Great opportunity for discussion about the science behind how things freeze, freezing points of different substances, Celsius vs. Fahrenheit, wind chill factors, etc. Once the balloons have frozen solid, cut the balloon from the outside of the ice globe with scissors or a razor blade.

**Build and Measure a Snowman:**

After you have had fun building a snowman, see how it measures up. Check the height of your creation. How tall is each section? You can even measure the circumference of your snowman by using a non-stretch yarn or rope to wrap around each section if you don't have a flexible measuring tape. Then measure the total length. Take it a step further by using that information to determine the radius or width of your snowman. Formula:  
*Circumference ÷ by pi (3.14) = diameter.*

Expand your learning over multiple days by taking and charting the same measurements each day as your snowman melts.

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**Frozen Bubbles:** Now, I hope that it doesn't actually get cold enough for this activity, but we do live in the Midwest. If the temperature is about 9–12 degrees Fahrenheit or colder you can try freezing bubbles. Using a good quality bubble solution, blow bubbles up into the air away from surfaces in an area with little to no wind. This allows the bubbles more time in the air to freeze before landing. Or you can try blowing them directly onto a surface coated with the bubble solution. You will notice that the bubbles will have 3 layers and can sometimes see the crystals form before your eyes.

Using the following recommended bubble mixture if you want to make your own. 35ml (2 ½ Tbs.) corn syrup, 200ml (¾ cup) of warm water, 35ml (2 ½ Tbs.) dish soap, 2 Tbs sugar to aid in crystallization. Stir well then cool solution in the refrigerator. It can take several tries to get bubbles to freeze without bursting so have patience with yourself.

Having a challenging time getting your student to focus because of the anticipation of a coming snowstorm? Try using schoolwork as a motivator for a snowball fight! For example, for each math problem, spelling sentence, page read or subject completed, your child will get to make that many snowballs to have in their arsenal for a snowball fight. Set a parameter to determine how many snowballs you receive or make it a fun game among siblings. Then have a blast pelting each other with snowballs! Bring the snowball fight indoors by using giant marshmallows or pom-poms.



# YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS!



Every day, we witness the potential that nature-based education at Mighty Roots Academy unleashes, and it's nothing short of inspiring.

In just 4 years we have expanded our reach from 19 kids to 134 through homeschool education. Our 2-10 year plan is to make nature education accessible to more homeschool communities as well as, private and public school students through program, curriculum, and facilities development. The demand for our programs is growing rapidly, and this takes the help of those like you who believe our kids need active, cross-curricular, nature-rich education to thrive. We need your help now more than ever!

Every donation, big or small, makes a difference!

Your support is the heartbeat of Mighty Roots Academy, and your generosity helps us make a difference in the lives of each of our students.

Thank you for being a part of our community!

## Final Thoughts



As we turn the final pages of this winter issue, let us carry the warmth of shared moments, the spark of newfound knowledge, and the inspiration drawn from each other into this season of our educational journey. Winter, with its chilly embrace, encourages us to seek the warmth of connection and understanding.

In this issue, each article has been a snowflake contributing to the unique landscape of our educational experience.

May the lessons learned during these winter months serve as a foundation for the blossoming of curiosity, resilience, and lifelong learning. Let the bonds forged within our homeschooling community be a source of strength as we await promise of spring, where new beginnings await.

With gratitude for the shared experiences, and anticipation for the chapters yet to unfold, we extend our warmest wishes to every homeschooling family in our academy. Until we meet again in the pages of our next issue, let the spirit of winter linger in our hearts, and may the magic of learning continue to illuminate us on our homeschooling journey!

## **Our Mission**

**The mission of Mighty Roots Academy is to provide active, multiage learning in a nature-rich environment.**

## **Our Philosophy**

**At Mighty Roots Academy, we believe it is most important to develop the skills of independent learning that equip students for a lifetime of inquiry and growth. A true education builds the skills needed for becoming a lifelong learner. We believe that students benefit most when skill-building is the focus, no matter the subject.**



Mighty Roots Academy

[mightyrootsacademy.com](http://mightyrootsacademy.com)