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December 2020

# CONTENTS

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12

How To Show Support for Small Businesses This Holiday Season

## COLUMNS

**14 / The Learning Curve.** Holiday Celebrations From Around the Globe

**20 / Lifelines.** Make Safety a Priority When Choosing Kids' Holiday Gifts

**22 / Family Matters.** When Grandparent Gifts Are Too Grand

**24 / Just for Grins.** O' Christmas Tree(s)

## calendar

Find our December calendar online at [austinfamily.com](http://austinfamily.com) for the latest in-house and virtual events.

## In every ISSUE

**5 / Play It Safe.** Recalls on Consumer Products

**6 / Around Austin.** News and Notes

**23 / KidZone.** Gingerbread Wonderland

## extras

**1 / Holiday Photo Contest**

**10 / Young Writers Contest Winners**

**16 / Holiday Camp and Fun Guide**

## en español

Read online at [www.austinfamily.com](http://www.austinfamily.com)

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Catch Austin Family magazine live on "Good Day Austin" every Thursday morning.



## FILM REVIEW

By Jack Kyser

### Dear Santa

Read online at: [www.austinfamily.com/films](http://www.austinfamily.com/films)



Griffin is excited about helping Santa get the presents out of the bag this season. Photography by Jordan Ashley Photography.

Please support our advertisers.

This winter holiday issue celebrates so many good things! As we continue the work of looking out for others, this year especially, we provide new twists on how to maintain connections with friends, family and community.

So many people have resolved to expand their awareness of the world outside of their own experience. In support, we offer holiday cultural customs and traditions you can celebrate alongside your own.

For your holiday shopping, why not choose small businesses over big box stores to give your neighbors a needed boost? We show you how to make it just as convenient to shop locally while upping the uniqueness of your gift giving!

While businesses have had to rethink ways they can connect, we consider how families can do the same. How can you honor long-held holiday traditions while reinventing them to keep each other safe? Many of us will miss face-to-face interactions this winter, but you can bet we will find memorable, creative ways to celebrate together.



## EDITOR'S NOTE

ANNETTE LUCKSINGER

*Lucksinger is a mom of two and author of the guidebook and app Exploring Austin with Kids.*

This may also be the year that finally makes us all slow down during the usually harried holidays and live more deeply, with less. We feel grateful for the things that matter the most and don't come wrapped in a box.

Wishing you all happy holidays,

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# Play it **SAFE**

product recalls

## Government Recalls Cribs, Toddler Boots and Scooters



Serena & Lily is recalling about 260 **convertible cribs** because the leg can partially detach from the headboard or footboard and cause injury. The crib has a white finish with oak trim and can convert to a toddler bed. The cribs being recalled are the Nash Convertible Cribs that bear a label with one of the following PO numbers and manufacturing

dates: PO 10320091, 06-2018; PO 10327234, 08-2018; PO 10361800, 07-2019; or PO 10365097, 08-2019. Affected units were sold at Serena & Lily stores nationwide, through the Serena & Lily catalog and online at serenaandlily.com from September 2018 through April 2020 for about \$900. Consumers should immediately stop using the recalled cribs and contact Serena & Lily for a repair, replacement or refund.



Jakks Pacific is recalling about 162,000 **scooters** with "Y" handlebars because of the potential for the handlebar joint to break and pose a falling hazard. The Morfboard Skate & Scoot Combo skateboard system has interchangeable parts that convert into a scooter. The scooter is created by inserting the "Y" handlebar into the base board. Included in the recall are any scooters with one of the following manufacturing date codes located on

the bottom of the skate deck: 0049VE01, 0128VE01, 0238VE01, 0328VE01, 0598VE01, 0718VE01, 0878VE01, 1068VE01, 1168VE01, 1278VE01, 1458VE01, 1508VE01, 1598VE01, 1858VE01, 2068VE01, 2328VE01, 2398VE01, 2478VE01, 2548VE01, 2508VE01, 2568VE01, 2958VE01, 3198VE01, 3258VE01, 3537VE01 or 3628VE01. Affected units were sold at Walmart, Target, Toys R Us, Meijer, BJ's Wholesale Club stores nationwide, and online at amazon.com and morfboard.com from February 2018 through August 2020 for about \$100. Consumers should immediately contact Jakks Pacific to receive a free replacement "T" handlebar.



Target is recalling about 29,000 **toddler boots** because the unicorn horn on the boot can detach and pose a choking hazard. The recall involves Cat & Jack "Lilia" toddler unicorn rain boots in sizes 5-12. The boots are fuchsia with a white unicorn. The recall applies to the following model numbers, located on the inside tag of the boot: 093-10-4311, 093-10-4312, 093-10-4313, 093-10-4314, 093-10-4315, 093-10-4316,

093-10-4317 and 093-10-4318. Affected units were sold at Target stores nationwide, online at target.com and on Google Express from January 2019 through April 2019 for about \$20. Consumers should immediately take the recalled boots away from children and return them to any Target store for a full refund.

*The US Consumer Products Safety Commission works to protect the public from unreasonable risks of serious injury or death from more than 15,000 types of consumer products.*

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# AROUND

# Austin

GO TO [AUSTINFAMILY.COM](http://AUSTINFAMILY.COM) FOR WEEKLY UPDATES OF AROUND AUSTIN NEWS

## Holiday Tradition Continues

The Downtown Austin Alliance will hold its 26th annual Downtown Holiday Stroll. This year's event is designed to allow the community to enjoy the holiday season downtown in a safe and socially distant manner. The month-long festivities extend from now through the end of the year.

Free, family-friendly activities will take place throughout downtown and include a holiday shopping experience, curated weekend artisan markets, photo opportunities, pop-up activations, holiday-themed window displays, drive-in rooftop movies and the signature 45-foot holiday tree located in front of the Capitol at 11th Street and Congress Avenue.

A new addition this year is the Holiday Passport, a pocket-sized guide filled with deals, discounts and activities for the month of December to make it fun and easy to explore downtown and support local shops and restaurants. Participants can also earn prizes.

Events like the Downtown Holiday Stroll are a key part of helping businesses downtown recover from the hardships many have faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and offer a way for Austinites to support their local economy.



For details and a calendar of scheduled activities, visit [DowntownHolidayStroll.com](http://DowntownHolidayStroll.com).

## Must-Do This

# December

1-31

**Downtown Holiday Stroll**  
*Throughout Downtown Austin*

1-Jan. 1

**Bastrop River of Lights**  
*Fisherman's Park*

1-Jan. 3  
**Luminations**

*Lady Bird Johnson  
Wildflower Center*



Enjoy lights, goodies and live music to celebrate the holiday season at Mozart's Coffee Roasters. Photo courtesy of Annette Lucksinger.

## Lakeside Light Show

For months now, owners of Mozart's Coffee Roasters on Lake Austin have worked with state and city governments and their own technology, production and service teams to create a glorious and socially distant 2020 "COVID Cautious Christmas Light Show" that will run through Jan. 6.

From parking and special entries to eating, drinking and special effects, this year's light show is completely COVID-compliant. To curtail the usual crush, Mozart's is launching a reservation-only ticketing system that will allow revelers to book a socially-distanced table or standing place for \$10 for one of six hour-long shows that run nightly from 6 p.m. to midnight.

Enjoy live musical entertainment with the show. To save time and have treats waiting for you, you can preorder bottomless hot chocolate and coffee drinks, Bavarian pretzels, fresh-baked brownies, holiday cookies and other goodies.

"Just weeks before the pandemic began, we had already begun our journey around the world to find pieces of joy to share with Austin," says Light Show Director Katrine Formby. "It has been organized with a thorough health and safety precaution plan, and I can guarantee that it will be absolutely beautiful, as well."



## We're Looking for a Few Good Kids ... To Brag On!

If you know a young person deserving of recognition or a youth group working to positively impact our community, let us hear about it. They just might end up in next month's "Around Austin" section of Austin Family magazine! Send details and a photo to [editor2003@austinfamily.com](mailto:editor2003@austinfamily.com).





Donations from the Give-A-Thon will help secure needed resources for youth and families in the foster care system. Photo courtesy of Austin Angels.

## Austin Angels

Austin Angels, part of a national organization that serves children and families in the foster care system, will be hosting their first ever Give-A-Thon from Dec. 1-3. Funds raised will help the area nonprofit:

- continue to serve children and families by meeting practical needs and fulfilling emergent requests,
- reach more children than ever with opportunities for health, healing, normalcy, stability, relationships, mentorship and extracurricular activities that help these youth feel supported and empowered to reach their fullest potential,
- serve more families than ever with community, financial and emotional support and resources, so they feel encouraged and equipped to continue fostering.

To make a contribution toward the Give-A-Thon to help meet these goals and better serve the foster care community in Austin, go to <http://austinangels.com/give-now>.

## Social Innovation

- Impact Austin voted to award its 2020 Social Innovation Grant in the amount of \$40,000 to Black Mamas REACH (Racial Equity and Access for Collaborative Healthcare) Manor, a collaboration between Black Mamas ATX, The University of Texas Foundation, Austin Regional Clinic, People's Community Clinic and Manor ISD.



Black Mamas ATX will use grant money to expand health services to Manor area women. Photo courtesy of Impact Austin.

- The grant goes to a Central Texas collaborative working on a high-impact project or initiative aimed at advancing equity for women and/or girls of color.

- Black Mamas REACH will bring Black Mamas programming to Manor, which has one of the highest Black populations in Central Texas but lacks OB/GYN clinics. The goal of Black Mamas is to ensure Black women survive and thrive before, during and after childbirth. This program will provide support groups, doula services and midwifery clinic services as well as case management and psychotherapy services.

- "This grant will provide Black women and girls in Manor with the support they need to ensure that the sacred experience of pregnancy and childbirth, as well as the months leading up their baby's first birthday is positive, healthy and safe," said Nakeenya Wilson, Executive Director, Black Mamas ATX. "Central Texas has the highest Black maternal mortality rate in Texas, and Impact Austin funding has the potential to be life-changing for the Black women in Manor."

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Since the scholarship's inception in 2005, more than 600 Central Texas students—including 47 new scholars inducted earlier this year—have pursued health care careers and many have brought their skills and expertise back home to Central Texas.

## Health Care Scholarship

As of Nov. 10, applications are being accepted for the 2021 St. David's Neal Kocurek Scholarship. This program awards monetary and comprehensive support to the bright young minds impassioned by the opportunity to tackle health care's most pressing issues.

The St. David's Neal Kocurek Scholarship is the largest health scholarship program in Texas and focuses on advancing the education of our Central Texas youth by providing them with a holistic support structure including wellness coaching, mental health services, financial assistance and mentorship.

High school seniors across Bastrop, Caldwell, Hays, Travis and Williamson counties are encouraged to apply for the program if they have an interest in a health care career and are considering a university or college in the state of Texas. To learn more, visit <https://scholarships.stdavidsfoundation.org>.



Illustrator Don Tate is a contributor to *The Brown Bookshelf*, a website that brings greater awareness of Black writers to young readers.

## New Picture Books

William Still and His Freedom Stories, written and illustrated by Don Tate, is the first picture-book biography of the man considered the Father of the Underground Railroad. The book, published last month, has garnered starred reviews from both Kirkus Reviews and School Library Journal.

Don Tate also illustrated the new picture book release, *Swish! The Slam-Dunking, Alley-Ooping, High-Flying Harlem Globetrotters*, written by Suzanne Slade. This exuberant nonfiction picture book is a celebration of the Globetrotters' breathtaking basketball moves and a history of their groundbreaking work to integrate professional basketball.

# by the numbers



**3.5x** more wealth stays in the local economy when you buy locally instead of from a chain store

Source: [www.huffpost.com](http://www.huffpost.com)



**155 feet** height of the Zilker Holiday tree

Source: [www.austintexas.gov](http://www.austintexas.gov)



**33 million** the number of Hershey's Kisses made each year

Source: [www.familyeducation.com](http://www.familyeducation.com)

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The Round Rock Area Serving Center, a Texas non-profit corporation, also known as the Serving Center, carries out a community-wide mission of churches, other organizations and individuals serving human needs in the City of Round Rock and surrounding areas.

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## Park Improvements

As a part of their Austin City Limits Music Festival Grants Program, Austin Parks Foundation (APF) granted a total of \$130,000 in funding to enhance various Austin parks and outdoor community spaces.

“Through all the change our city has seen over the past several months, parks have proven to be more vital than ever. The commitment of Adopt-A-Park leaders and community members to improving and maintaining our green spaces over the years has allowed for everyone to enjoy those very parks this year,” said Ladye Anne Wofford, Chief Mission Officer at APF. “Park equity is always top of mind for us, and we’re honored to financially support community-initiated projects across our city.”

The fall 2020 Community Grants, designed to support large, community-initiated improvement projects, were divided between four Austin parks across the city:

- Gus Garcia District Park in Northeast Austin: \$50,000 for the construction of a new basketball court
- Kendra Page Neighborhood Park in Southeast Austin: \$40,000 for the creation of a new perimeter trail and water fountain
- Perry Neighborhood Park in Northwest Austin: \$25,000 to match funds for the construction of a new artificial turf soccer field
- Patterson Neighborhood Park in East Austin: \$5,000 for improvements to their baseball field

APF is also proud to announce they will provide Pease District Park with \$10,000 for the installation of signage in a new contemplative space that Pease Park describes as “acknowledging our history of slavery, segregation, and exclusion in order to create a public space that is welcoming to all.”

## Santa Photos

Santa Claus is coming to town! For safe and socially-distanced Santa visits and photo ops for families, you can find him and his elves at Barton Creek Square Mall, The Domain, Lakeline Mall and Round Rock Premium Outlets until Christmas Eve.

For everyone’s safety, visiting Santa will be a socially-distanced experience. Reservations and masks will be required. Santa and his helpers will be wearing masks throughout the duration of each visit. Reservations can be made at <https://www.simonsanta.com/#Texas>.



Visit Santa at area shopping malls, now until Christmas Eve!

## Librarian Heroes

Whether your neighborhood library has opened its doors yet or not, librarians have been busy finding ways to keep readers with their noses in books. They’re also doing amazing work at keeping their communities engaged. Just take a look at our calendar at [www.austinfamily.com/](http://www.austinfamily.com/) events for virtual and in-person story times for all ages, musical activities, crafts, game days, Spanish circles and Friday films with popcorn!



Check out library programming on our online calendar.



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## 2020 YOUNG WRITERS CONTEST **Winners!**

This year's topic: Describe your favorite day during the COVID-19 quarantine.

Each fall, Austin Family magazine holds its annual Young Writers Contest for fourth and fifth graders. This year, students submitted pieces about "My Favorite Day During Quarantine." The winners and runners-up in each grade received plaques and signed copies of judge Carmen Oliver's picture book, *A Voice for the Spirit Bears: How One Boy Inspired Millions To Save a Rare Animal*, and judge Bethany Hegedus's picture book, *Alabama Spitfire: The Story of Harper Lee and To Kill a Mockingbird*. The winners also earned gift certificates to Amazon and BookPeople.

We thank all of the amazing writers who entered and made it such a challenge for the judges to decide on the winning essays. Thanks to parents and teachers for your support as well. We expected creativity and good stories. What we didn't expect was to read so many celebrations of life, so much positivity and such a resounding, newfound respect for the things that really matter. It was a real treat. Their voices and stories - full of life, wonder and ingenuity - will add warmth and cheer to your day. Take a look!



**4TH GRADE  
WINNER  
ELWOOD  
SENTILLES  
Blanton Elementary**

My best day in quarantine was when

I went fishing with my brother, dad and my dad's friend Dobbie. We started off in a tiny but deep and slow fishing hole. Dobbie was going to start with helping me roll cast into the deep water with a Copper John which is a nymph. (I had to earn that nymph by cleaning the house). Once I got the nymph into the water I casted it out so that I could get it farther out onto the very smooth dark water. Then I kept doing that for five or six times. After I casted it in that one spot for a while I moved up the river a few steps. Still no fish. I kept rotating until Dobbie finally started fishing on his own. Now that Dobbie started fishing on his own, I could do it my way. I went back

to where I started and put on a different fly. I put on a dry fly so that it would not sink. Then immediately after I casted out the new dry fly a fish took a nibble at it. So I stayed with that fly for a long time. I moved way up, and I moved way down, still, no fish. In fact nobody had caught a fish yet.

But then my dad (who was working with my brother) said that there was five minutes till we moved up to the next spot. So I quickly put back on the Copper John, and the second I put the Copper John on the thick glowing river, a fish takes it. The fish that I had on the hook was a good twelve inch fish. I slowly pulled in the fish so that we could look at it.

And that is how I caught my first fish.





**5TH GRADE WINNER  
AVINASH KUMAR**  
Clayton Elementary

It is 2020, a year I will never forget. A destructive pandemic named Corona put us all in quarantine. With schools and parks

closed and nowhere to go, my family and I resorted to watching our favorite show, The Great British Baking Show! However, one episode after another was boring so I decided to spice it up a little (literally). I proposed starting our own family baking show. Once a week, we would all gather around our kitchen and bake smackalicious (meaning lip smacking delicious) treats. I named the show "Bake Up." On the morning of the show I would scream "BAKE UPPPPPPPP" instead of wake up so we could start the extravaganza. It was challenging as the rules called for us to make something we had never made before. After a few hiccups like missing ingredients and scheduling conflicts, we were ready for the show. On the day of the competition my family whipped up a positive attitude. This was the first show I had seen where the contestants were also the hosts, producers, and judges. My grandparents joined us on FaceTime and BOOM, we had an audience! I had never baked before, not even for a rehearsal. I baked vanilla cupcakes with chocolate frosting from scratch. My cupcakes were soft in the middle and the chocolate frosting had that swirly look that all cupcakes have with beautiful sprinkles gleaming in the light. This was my best day during the quarantine. Since then, we all looked forward to the weekend for another Bake Up. My favorite part about Bake Up is that we get to spend family time where we crack jokes, listen to music, try different recipes, and have fun. Now COVID won't only be remembered as the destructive pandemic but as the rise of a new idea.



**4th Grade Runner-Up  
MAYA BERGER Blanton**  
Elementary

The best day of COVID-19 was when I was at the beach in Galveston. It was so beautiful and amazing at the beach. The endless

sea sparkled in the sunlight. I found pretty shells and rocks to decorate my sandcastle. I played in the water and the waves rocked me back and forth. I could hear sea birds cawing to each other. As I watched, a little baby bird stuck his beak into the sand, and pulled out a coquina clam. He swallowed it whole! Then I heard cracking sounds. He spit out the broken shell parts, and chomped down the tiny animal inside. I floated there, thinking for a moment, and then I let the waves push me back ashore.

I got up and walked over to my sandcastle. I asked my mom if we could take a picture. She said "sure"! So I posed next to the sandcastle and smiled. When mom was done, I went over to my dad and brother, Bear. They were practicing fishing. I tried to cast my fishing pole but it did not go very far. I didn't want to do any more fishing, so I sat and watched. It seemed like dad had caught something. I walked forward to get a closer look. What I saw amazed me and surprised me!

It was a stingray! It was medium-sized and was a faint orange on the bottom. On the top it was a dull, light-grey. Mom and grandma came rushing over to help dad, because the stingray was stuck in the hook. Dad used pliers to cut the stingray free, and prodded it back into the water. As we watched it go, I said to everyone, "I think we have had enough trouble for today!"



**5th Grade Runner-Up  
SYDNEY GRISER Holy**  
Family Catholic School

It was a radiant day when my life seemingly changed. The sun had already rose above the horizon triumphantly, and was beginning to

shine through the darkness. I leapt out of bed and darted to the windows.

My dog, Bentley, and I gazed out the window, waiting for everything to change. Quarantine life seemed slow, but this day dragged on profoundly as I toggled between excitement and nerves. Every minute that day seemed like hours, and every hour stretched on like eternity. Still staring out the window, a van skidded to a stop at our driveway.

"He's here! He's here!!" I proclaimed, jumping up and down with joy. My mom, dad, and I all pulled our face masks on and strode through the doorway.

We huddled on our driveway, as the man joyfully leapt out of the van.

"Hello," he greeted. He crawled into the van and pulled out a tiny Australian Shepherd puppy.

"Oh my gosh! He's so cute!" I exclaimed. The man carried the puppy over to us, and plopped him down. Immediately, the puppy galloped towards us. His face revealed a big smile from floppy ear to floppy ear.

I knelt down on the driveway and stared at the little puppy. "Welcome home, Henley," I whispered. My mom handed me a collar and I fastened it onto the pup.

The collar was blue and red, with a glistening tag that had "Henley" engraved in it. Henley had prominent brown eyebrows and the sweetest face. He had a white blaze that stretched down his adorable complexion. His black fuzzy back had a snow-white heart, seemingly painted onto him.

Then, Henley smiled, looked at Mom, Dad, and I, and hugged each and every one of us. At this, I knew that our family had a new little buddy.

## Judges:



**Carmen Oliver**

Carmen is the author of a picture book series, founded the Booking Biz, teaches writing at The Writing Barn and The Highlights Foundation, and speaks at schools, conferences and festivals. See our website for more details.



**Bethany Hegedus**

Bethany is a children's picture book author, former educator, keynote speaker, workshop leader and mentor on writing. She is founder and creative director of The Writing Barn and host of Courage to Create podcast. See our website for more details.

# how to show support for small businesses this holiday season



BY JANEEN LEWIS

**A**ccording to the Small Business Administration, there are over 30 million small businesses in America, and about half of all American workers either work for a small business or own one. More important than these numbers, however, are the people behind them. Local small businesses are often at the heart of communities, giving customers individualized attention and unique products.

With the challenging year most small businesses have had, sales from this holiday season are more important than ever. Delivery, curbside pickup, FaceTime orders and virtual classes are a few creative ways small businesses have connected with customers since social distancing began in March. Here are some ways you can support the small businesses you love while doing your holiday shopping.

## BUY FROM THE MOMS AND POPS

If you need something, think twice before you start clicking away at big box store websites. They will weather financial storms better than smaller shops. This holiday season, make a conscious effort to give business to small stores that you would visit during more normal times.

## SHOW UP BIG FOR SMALL BUSINESS SATURDAY

Since 2010, the small business counterpart to Black Friday has been Small Business Saturday. It falls on the Saturday after Thanksgiving and gives customers a way to support small businesses in their neighborhoods while getting great deals on merchandise and services. This year Small Business Saturday fell on Nov. 28., but many businesses extend deals beyond the date. If you missed the event, choose an



*think twice  
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effort to give  
business to  
small stores.”*







alternate date to shop local. Check in with your favorite shops to see what specials they might be offering for the holidays.

## SPREAD THE WORD

If you hear of art shows that support local artists and artisans, share the news with others. Use social media to connect your community to your favorite local shops and get word out about great gift ideas or specials. Shopping close to home keeps funds within the city and strengthens the local economy.

## ORDER FROM CHAINS IF THE LOCAL STORE GETS THE SALE

If you are limiting face-to-face shopping this year, buy online from your favorite small business. However, if the local store is part of a bigger chain, make sure the local proprietor gets the sale. If not, find another way to purchase items, such as curbside pickup.

## TAKE ADVANTAGE OF DELIVERY

Some local stores are taking orders and payment over the phone and will deliver to your doorstep. This not only stops face-

to-face contact but gives you a break from physically shopping during a season that is normally hectic.

## PURCHASE GIFT CARDS FOR FUTURE USE

Purchasing gift cards is an easy way to support a small business. Some are able to send a gift certificate virtually, so there is no contact in the gift exchange. If there is a business that you frequent throughout the year, why not purchase more than you normally would for this season? It will give the business a boost and save time later when you need a quick gift.

## CHECK OUT MERCHANDISE VIRTUALLY

If a store is using social media and FaceTime to give customers virtual tours or customized shopping experiences, take advantage of those services. Call in or email your order to the store and then use curbside pickup or delivery.

## REACH OUT AND REQUEST

Want to do even more to support local small establishments? Call to find out ways you can give them your business during this unusual holiday season. Small business

owners are getting creative, and they will probably be happy to share ways you can support them during this challenging time.

## PURCHASE A VIRTUAL CLASS

Does your child's favorite music instructor or sports coach offer virtual classes? Sign up for one now. Are there any virtual subscription services you can order that will support a local business? Try them out! Some owners offer a discount if you buy several lessons in advance.

## LEAVE A POSITIVE REVIEW

If you buy a local product and it's amazing, leave a glowing review. If you get friendly, efficient customer service, talk it up on social media. People often make purchases because a trusted friend has recommended a business. Be that friend to small businesses this holiday season.

## CONTRIBUTE TO GO FUND ME

Some small businesses have started Go Fund Me pages to help pay employees and stay afloat. Consider donating to one of these to keep your favorite enterprises operating through this challenging season.

In the spring, many small business owners were blindsided by the challenges that social distancing created for their businesses. In the spirit of the season, support them during the holidays so they can remain a vibrant part of your local neighborhood.

---

*Janeen Lewis is a freelance journalist, teacher and mom of two. She is a nationally published writer.*





## THE Learning Curve

ALISON BOGLE

*Bogle is an Austin-based freelance writer and mom of three.*

# 5 Holiday Celebrations From Around the Globe

December is a special time filled with holiday activities and memory-making. Most families have a working knowledge of Christmas and Hanukkah, but there are other special winter traditions and holidays that take place this month. Consider introducing some of these holidays to expand your family's exploration of other cultural traditions and beliefs. Doing so encourages finding common ground that can lead to connection with and empathy for others.

### **Our Lady of Guadalupe – Dec. 12**

Every year, Catholics celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, also known as Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary is the patron saint of the Americas, but she holds a special place in the heart of the Mexican people. Her feast day recalls Mary's appearances to St. Juan Diego, requesting that a church be built on the site where she appeared.

In Mexico, public celebrations are held, with traditional music, dances, parades and food. Many people display statues of Our Lady of Guadalupe in their homes and decorate them elaborately in the weeks leading up to the feast day.

### **Try this:**

- Sing or listen to "Las Mañanitas," a song typically sung on this day
- Make papel picado (punched paper), a simple, traditional decoration that can be made out of tissue paper
- Enjoy traditional Mexican food such as tamales, beans and rice

### **St. Lucia Day – Dec. 13**

St. Lucia Day is celebrated in Sweden, Norway and parts of Finland as a way to honor St. Lucia, one of the earliest Christian martyrs. Different communities have their own customs, but a procession is at the heart of each celebration. One child, chosen to represent St. Lucia, is followed by other children dressed in white. Girls wear lighted wreaths on their heads and all the children sing traditional songs. The festival marks the beginning of the Christmas season and is meant to bring hope and light to the darkest time of the year.

At home, the eldest daughter dresses up in a white robe and candle crown to serve coffee and lussekatter, a saffron bun, to her parents for breakfast.

### **Try this:**

- Read "Lucia Morning in Sweden" by Ewa Rydaker
- Make a candle head wreath out of paper or wire, greens and battery-operated candles
- Make homemade lussekatter or deliver sweet breads and cookies to those in need



**Expand your family's exploration of other cultural traditions and beliefs."**



### **Yule/Winter Solstice - Dec. 21**

Yule is a celebration of the winter solstice and began as a pre-Christian celebration of the turning point when days gradually become longer and the darkness of winter recedes. Certain customs, such as the yule log, wassailing and tree decorating come from this celebration of nature. The Winter Solstice occurs on the shortest day and longest night of the year.

#### **Try this:**

- Read "The Longest Night" by Marion Dane Bauer
- Create a yule log centerpiece from a log and other outdoor items, or make pinecone bird feeders
- Take a walk outside to appreciate the beauty of nature

### **Kwanzaa - Dec. 26-Jan. 1**

Kwanzaa is a weeklong celebration of African-American culture and heritage. Each family commemorates Kwanzaa in its own way, but celebrations often include songs and dances, storytelling, poetry reading and a large traditional meal. Each day of the celebration is dedicated to a different principle: umoja, or unity; kujichagulia, or self-determination; ujima, or collective work and responsibility; ujamaa, or cooperative economics; nia, or purpose; kuumba, or creativity; and imani, or faith. A special candleholder called a kinara is used. Each night, a candle is lit and one of the seven principles is discussed.

On Dec. 31, a karamu, or large feast of traditional African dishes is held. On the last day, family and friends exchange gifts, often homemade.

#### **Try this:**

- Play Kwanzaa music and encourage everyone to dance
- Make a kinara and light a candle on each night of the holiday
- Invite kids to make their own gifts to exchange on the last day

### **Omisoka - Dec. 31**

Omisoka is the Japanese New Year's celebration. On this day, families clean the whole house in order to start the new year with a clean slate, a process called osoji. Decorations are placed inside and outside the home to welcome the new year. A large

meal is shared with friends and family, with a final meal of toshikoshi-soba, or noodles, served at the end of the day. This tradition comes from the belief that eating long noodles will grant a long life and help cross from one year to the next.

Omisoka is also considered a spiritual event for many Japanese. At midnight, temples ring a large metal bell or strike a gong 108 times to signify the desires that create human

suffering. It is a symbolic way to drive these thoughts away to purify for the new year.

#### **Try this:**

- Clean the house to prepare for the new year
- Ring a bell 108 times to symbolize entering the new year with a purified heart and mind
- Eat the traditional meal of soba noodles



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**LIFELINES**

BRENDA SCHOOLFIELD

*Schoolfield is a freelance medical writer based in Austin.*

# Make Safety a Priority When Choosing Kids' Holiday Gifts

What fun it is to imagine your loved ones' excitement as they open special holiday gifts. Yet many children end up harmed from gifts that are dangerous. About 225,000 children a year go to the emergency room due to toy-related injuries.

As you create your holiday gift list this year, make safety your first priority in gift selection. Consider the entire family. A great gift for an older family member could be dangerous for younger children if they can access it.

Two gifts that are particularly dangerous for families with small children are small high-powered magnets and products containing button batteries.

## Avoid Small High-Powered Magnets

Injuries caused by small high-powered magnets have risen over the past few years. These magnets, about the size of a BB pellet, are eight times stronger than

ordinary magnets used in toys. Sale of this type of dangerous magnet was prohibited several years ago but courts later eased restrictions. The law now requires that products containing these magnets be labeled for sale only to "ages 14 years and up."

High-powered magnetic sets may contain over 100 pieces. Some are marketed as "fun stress relief desk toys." Other advertisements show robots, sculptures or creatures that can be built with these magnets. Marketing that claims these products are educational or creative may entice consumers to buy them for children. Older children and teens are at risk from magnets that look like jewelry, such as silver magnetic balls. They may use them to simulate nose or tongue piercings and then accidentally swallow or inhale the magnets.

If someone swallows more than one magnet, the magnets attract each other inside the body. This can cause tears

and damage the stomach or intestines. Emergency surgery is often needed. The American Academy of Pediatrics advises families with children not to have high-powered magnet sets in their home.

## Evaluate Products Containing Button Batteries for Safety

Button batteries can cause serious injury or even death if swallowed. Batteries about the size of a nickel are the most dangerous because they often get caught in a child's esophagus. Anyone who has swallowed a button battery should seek immediate emergency medical care.

Products that contain button batteries and are marketed to children must have secure battery compartments that require a screwdriver or other tool to open. However, not all products on the market containing button batteries are designed for safety. Check for easy access to button batteries on any powered item. Don't overlook flashing clothes or shoes, jewelry,



key chains and toothbrushes. Cameras, watches and toys designed for older children may have easily accessible battery compartments. Singing greeting cards, talking book and flameless candles are often powered by button batteries. Contact the National Battery Ingestion Hotline at 800-498-8666 for more information.

### Think Twice About Stocking Stuffers

Items used for stocking stuffers are often choking hazards. Choking is the fourth leading cause of death among preschool children. Take steps to protect younger family members. Even if choking hazards aren't directly given to younger children, stocking stuffers may end up on the floor or other places where younger children can get to them.

Common choking hazards include toys with small parts, toys that fit entirely into a child's mouth, small balls, marbles, latex balloons and tiny figures. A young child can choke on small hair bows, barrettes, earrings and rings. Keep office supplies, such as pen or marker caps, erasers and rubber bands, away from small children. Children younger than 4 years old should not be given nuts and seeds, hard or sticky candy, popcorn or chewing gum.

### Safeguard Your Child From Injury

If you give a child a gift that requires protective equipment, such as a bicycle or scooter, include it as part of the gift. You can't expect a child with a shiny, new bike not to ride it for lack of a helmet.

For children and teens who go to concerts, ride a farm tractor or participate in shooting sports, colorful hearing protectors make a great gift. If you are giving headphones to a child, choose those that have volume controls.

To protect your child's eye health, don't give projectile toys, such as darts and missile-firing toys. Don't give pellet or

BB guns to children. These are extremely dangerous and are now classified as firearms, not toys.

**Buyer beware.** Just because a toy is on the market doesn't mean that it is safe. The American Academy of Pediatrics

recommends thinking about how the toy might be used (or abused) and how much you will need to supervise or help the child play safely with the toy.



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## FAMILY MATTERS

BETTY RICHARDSON

*Richardson, PhD, RN, CS, LPC, LMFT, is an Austin-based psychotherapist.*

# When Grandparent Gifts Are Too Grand

**Q** My wife and I have three children, two daughters and a son. The girls are fiercely competitive about who gets the most or the best gifts for birthdays and holidays. Our oldest daughter is 17 and has always been my father's favorite grandchild. She can get anything she wants from Grandpop, even when we have said "no" to certain things. She rubs this in with her two younger siblings. How can we stop her grandfather from giving her whatever she asks? What can we do to stem this self-serving behavior of going to her grandfather for whatever she wants? How can we help her to be more considerate of others, especially during this time when people are hurting in the pandemic and don't get everything they want, much less the things they need, such as shelter and food?

**A** Grandparents frequently engage in gift-giving behavior that parents object to, such as giving so many gifts that the parents don't have room for all of them. Sometimes a grandparent will bring a gift for every visit. Children can begin to see a grandparent as a source of gifts and not as someone to love and interact with. Grandparents may be trying to show their

love through gifts rather than by spending time with their grandchildren.

Here are some suggestions of helpful things to do to change both a grandparent's excessive gift giving and the behavior of your child.

1. Have a serious talk with the grandparent. Share with your dad how your oldest has touted her ability to get whatever she wants from him. Explain how his behavior interferes with your ability to parent. When you say "no" to something, ask that he respect your decision as a parent, or ask him to talk with you before giving your child something that she has asked for or hinted at. Share with him the values you are trying to instill in your children.

In a Parents magazine 2020 study of over 1,000 moms and dads polled, 73% chose kindness as the quality they most want to instill in their kids. You might also teach your kids gratitude, or appreciation for the worth of a big item, by encouraging them to earn part of the money for it and not expect that everything to be given to them.

2. Have a discussion with your children about curbing competitiveness around gifts and the joy of giving to others as well as receiving.

3. Convey to grandparents that the greatest gift they can give a child is their time. For a long-distance grandparent, time could be shared through video chats, letters, cards or reading together via Zoom.

4. Encourage your children to send letters, drawings, pictures and thank-you notes to grandparents.

5. Involve your children in activities that help them learn that some people may have far less than they have and may truly need things. There are so many opportunities to volunteer in ways that develop empathy, such as adopting a family at Christmas, collecting items for a toy drive or volunteering to pack meals for people in need.

6. Develop some rules around presents. This could be in the form of a price limit for each child's gifts. Let your kids know the spending limit, so they can make their wish lists with this in mind. Some parents use a formula: one present to read, one to wear and one for fun. Another option is to buy a limited number of individual presents and then a big gift for the whole family to share.



# KIDZONE



## Gingerbread Wonderland

The countdown to Christmas is on! While you're decorating your home with twinkling lights and towering trees, we've got the recipe for creating the ultimate festive classic — gingerbread houses! Gingerbread houses are an iconic holiday craft, dating back to the 16th century in Germany. These days, gingerbread houses are a great way to bring family and friends together. Create a friendly competition to see who can build the jolliest home of all! Here are seven simple steps to make a gingerbread masterpiece:

### MATERIALS:

- Graham crackers
- White icing
- Quart-sized plastic bag
- Scissors
- Paper plate or cardboard
- Assorted candy (chocolate chips, gumdrops, peppermints, marshmallows, candy canes)
- Powdered sugar

### INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Scoop icing into a quart-sized plastic bag and seal tightly. Squeeze all the icing into the bottom corner of the bag. Use scissors to cut a small hole at the tip. This is your piping bag!
2. Create the base foundation of your home by lying an even number of graham cracker sheets in a flat square or rectangular shape on the paper plate. Use frosting to stick the graham crackers together.
3. Use large graham cracker sheets to build the walls of your home, using the same icing method as before. Make sure that the graham crackers really stick together!
4. Place two sheets of graham cracker squares diagonally on the top edge of your walls to make the roof. Secure your roof with icing.
5. Use your wildest imagination to decorate the outside of your gingerbread house with assorted candies!
6. Sprinkle powdered sugar on top to give your house a snowy look.
7. Enjoy your yummy masterpiece!

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## JUST FOR GRINS

CATE BERRY

*Berry is an Austin-based children's book author and mother of two. She also teaches writing workshops for young people at cateberry.com.*



### O Christmas Tree(s)

When I married my hunky Jewish husband, he had no idea I was such a Christmas-head.

We've had our holiday issues. Said hunk wasn't that into my Christmas tree. In fact, not at all, bless him.

But as our years together seasoned, my tree collecting accelerated. There was the teal one I found on sale for my son's room when he was born. And the subsequent white one for my daughter when she burst on the scene. There was the small forest of gold ones for the mantle, in varying sizes, and the fabulous one with fiber optics. Yes, the broken strobe effect potentially caused seizures, but it still seemed worth it.

And of course, my holiday magnum opus crested with the annual lighting of my live tree. I'd hunt and gather a blue noble so large that we once had to unhinge the front door to get it inside our modest bungalow, scraping off sheet rock as we wedged it into position.

But lo, how all these trees delight and fill me with joy! Sitting up late on a December

evening, I reminisce. My dad cursing with the tree stand. A glass ornament combusting, too close to a green twinkle light. That unforgettable year our dog, Noodle, peed on the extension cord and started an electrical fire. It's about the memories, beautiful and tragic and familiar.

It's tradition for the hubs to ask, "Do we really need another tree?" as I drag the latest one into a bare nook.

And I always retort, "It's Christmas," snuggling under his arm, batting my flocked eyelashes. "It's not about needs, hon, it's about ..."

"I just like 'em," I admit.

And being the mensch that he is, he whispers back, "I know," with a wink.

We don't get snow. Or fun faux-fur boots. But here in our house, I get a hunky Jewish husband who understands my silly, jolly folly. May you all have someone who lights you up this season. And may you all enjoy the holiday lights of your choosing.

Especially the eleventy-billion twinkling from my tree(s).

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