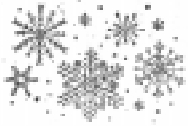
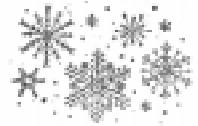


# Ideas for Homeschoolers



February 2008



One of the things I like about February is that the days are getting noticeably longer. At least they are in my neck of the woods here in Victoria, BC. And “as the days lengthen, the cold strengthens.” (For a scientific explanation of this adage go to [www.ccmr.cornell.edu/education/ask/index.html?quid=1120](http://www.ccmr.cornell.edu/education/ask/index.html?quid=1120)) For more weather proverbs - [www.wxduke.com/proverb.html](http://www.wxduke.com/proverb.html)



I became fascinated with weather adages in my early twenties when I became a self-sufficient farmer in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. I really noticed the days lengthening in February. I could get to the barn for evening chores in the last light of the day. Doing evening chores was a delight on clear nights. The sky sparkled with stars as I walked back to the house in the very cold air after taking care of my horse and goats. February’s sun and sparkling days balanced the cold that seemed to get colder as the sun got brighter. The sunshine brought me renewed energy and joy. I spent the evenings with my feet in the oven of my cook stove reading. I enjoyed reading Eric Sloane’s Weather Book - filled with weather adages and descriptions of weather predictions. He’s written a number of books about life in pioneer days.

I don’t have specific memories of February weather from childhood. It all blends together as winter weather. (I grew up in a suburb of Chicago in the mid 50’s.) My brother and sister and I built houses and snowmen on the deck above the garages in the back of our apartment building. We went skating on a very large pond that had a shed for putting your skates on and where hot chocolate was sold, managed by the town. I loved skating. Skating outside was wonderful! I’d start out with a jacket over my sweater and snow pants, and after about 15 minutes, I was down to my sweater, no mittens or hat, hot from all the exercise. There was also a hill built especially for sledding. I can still feel the cold/hot sensation of snow melting on my hands as I climbed up the hill to go sledding down again. My feet freezing cold, but the rest of me too hot, so I’d undo the zipper on my jacket.

Because of my own experiences with winter, certain poems and stories about winter appeal to me more than others. The stories I like build on my own experiences or remind me of them. So come sit beside me with a cup of tea or hot chocolate and we can read together. Enjoy!

Age appropriateness for the books I list are suggestions only. Some children may not like the stories I recommend until they are older and some may love them when they are much younger. You know your children best.

### Two stories in poem form for 3-4 year olds and up



Jack Prelutsky *It's Snowing, It's Snowing*. The poems can stand alone but together they offer a concise and moving picture of what's it like to be a young boy in the winter. The hard cover library version is illustrated with lovely graphite drawings by Jeanne Titherington. The paperback version is illustrated by Yossi Abolafia and is listed as an early reader level 3. The poems in this book can certainly be appreciated by much older children and perhaps inspire them to write about snow or snowflakes

Karen Gundersheimer *Happy Winter* This book about two sisters is illustrated with such delightful drawings incorporated into the words, that it's a graphic novel as well as a story in verse. The illustrations are done by the author and together with the words describe such a cheerful, delightful relationship between the sisters and their fun in the winter. Unfortunately this book is out of print, but there are used copies available for sale online. Check your library, too.

*Learning At Home: A Mother's Guide To Homeschooling*, has a number of ideas about how to encourage children to write. Acrostic poems using words such as winter, snow, snowman, snowflake, etc. can inspire you and your children to try your hand at writing poems. Here's an example:



So quiet  
Now that everything  
Outside is  
White!



## Chapter books – 5 year olds and up

Carolyn Haywood has two chapter books about winter. Both stories start before Christmas. *Snowbound with Betsy* is about a big winter snowstorm. Betsy's father is stuck in snow on the highway and brings home a family – a mom and two children, to stay with Betsy's family until the roads are cleared. *Betsy's Winterhouse* describes the activities of Betsy and her friends as they play together in the winterhouse her father makes for them in the basement. Both of these books describe life in the 1950's and yet when I read these to my daughter in the 90's, she enjoyed the stories. The writing is simple enough for a developing reader who has moved beyond the early I can read books and is ready to try longer chapter books to read on his or her own.

Once you have read a story to a child, you can refer to it when a similar situation occurs in your family life. Perhaps a snowstorm closes the roads in your neighborhood. How would it feel to ask a stranger to come stay with your family in a storm? I loved these kinds of conversation where my children would share with me their thinking process and observations. Their insight was astute. Conversations are not listed as a learning tool in curriculums, but I think they are one of the best learning tools around. Take time to have conversations with your child. You'll be delighted and amazed by their observations. That's one of the benefits of homeschooling, you have time to discuss and converse and think things through out loud.



*Snow Treasure* by Marie McSwigan for children 9 and up. Published in 1942 while the Second World War was still raging, this book is about children in Norway helping to move \$9,000,000 worth of gold bullion out of their village to a waiting ship. My two oldest enjoyed this story very much. I, too, found it exciting to reread aloud to them. I remembered reading it as a child when it made quite an impression on me.

*The Long Winter* by Laura Ingalls Wilder – an incredible story of hardships during a very cold and snowy winter in South Dakota. I remember how moved I was by this story when I read it as a child. I imagined being Laura when I played in the snowhouses my brother and sister and I created. I recalled the story when I was living in Cape Breton and chopping my firewood, and then later putting it in the stove and feeling the heat. I tried to imagine weaving and braiding straw together to use as firewood. And then I visited the scenes again as I read this and the other Little House books three times over a 10 year period to my children.

Both *Snow Treasure* and *The Long Winter* can be the start of exploring a number of issues related to social studies. In fact all of the books that I mentioned can. That's one of the great things about stories. They can provide a lens through which we can see a time or place or situation in a new way, bringing us new insight and understanding. Rereading books over time is one of the best ways I've found to see how much I've changed and too see how my perspective has shifted. Books that bear up to being reread aloud many times are what I consider to be classics. They may not be on anyone else's list of classical children's literature, but they're on mine.

## Science Books

Two Magic School Bus books about winter – *Lost In The Snow* and *Sleeps For the Winter* present factual information in palatable and fun ways.

Snowflakes make me think of the man who became known as Snowflake Bentley. There are two books for children written about him, *Snowflake Bentley* by Jacqueline Briggs Martin and *My Brother Loved Snowflakes: The Story of Wilson A Bentley, the Snowflake Man* by Mary Bahr Fritts. Bentley photographed snowflakes and there is also a book of his photographs available *Snowflakes in Photographs* by W. A. Bentley.



There is also a biography *The Snowflake Man: A Biography of Wilson A. Bentley* by Duncan C. Blanchard that older children may enjoy. Wilson Bentley and his brother Charlie were homeschooled by their mother. He taught himself how to photograph snow and ice crystals. His photographs of snow crystals have never been equaled and are in great demand today.

There are lots of sites on the web that offer snowflake patterns. One I especially enjoyed is Dave's Snowflake Page. He has some free patterns as well as examples of all of his snowflake patterns for cutting that you can purchase.

To round out the winter, you might enjoy singing songs about winter. I have five songs on my children's music CD, *Brighten the Day - songs to celebrate the seasons*, about winter. Sound clips available [here](#). My particular favorite at the moment is *Winterwalk* – “Let's go on an evening walk, do, do let us go...” I use this song as a slow down song in my winter classes for babies and their parents. I wave my ribbons around and the babies are mesmerized by the music and the ribbons. Each of the songs on my CD are about the natural world from a child's point of view.

Enjoy!

*Marty*

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