LEARNING AHEAD
Cultural Itinerary for Western Massachusetts

Seasons
Nov & Dec

HilltownFamilies.org
Community-Based Education Network
Learning Ahead:
Cultural Itinerary for Western Massachusetts
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Learning Ahead:
Cultural Itinerary for Western Massachusetts
Seasons: November & December

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Hilltown Families, Inc.
www.HilltownFamilies.org
“In winter
all the singing is in
the tops of the trees
where the wind-bird
with its white eyes
shoves and pushes
among the branches.”
- Mary Oliver, White-Eyes

Who am I? Where am I? These are the fundamental questions proposed by the humanities. Inquiries related to local history, literature, and education inspire us to think deeply about the places where we live and how our identity fits into the context of our community and the seasons.

Looking through a seasonal lens, a November and December cultural Itinerary for Western Massachusetts includes:

- Learn about FOOD preservation: Harvest, Butchers & Museums
- Veterans Day as a CATALYST for learning: Literature, History & Music
- Looking through the LENS of Thanksgiving: Poetry & Painting
- VALUE based engagement: Handmade, Non-Commercial & Sharing
- Local HABITAT connects us to myth & nature: Christmas Tree Farms
- PLACEMAKING with annual events: Holiday Strolls & Caroling
- Experience other CULTURES through the holidays: Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa & Three Kings Day
- Mark the SEASON by sharing & connecting: Winter Solstice & Storytelling
- Engage in New England TRADITIONS: First Night & First Hikes
Heritage Turkey in Buckland, MA
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield

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It’s that time of year when the fall harvest begins to wane and a golden light fills the landscape, shining on the incredible bounty that is about to enter our homes and be served on our tables.

Nothing marks New England more than its seasonality. A sudden chill in the air and the warming spices of pumpkin pie and hot cider take over our hearths and palates as we prepare to embrace the beginning of winter - only just around the corner now!

Traditionally, the harvest season was seen as a way to prepare for the oncoming colder months when the land hibernates and the growing season becomes dormant. This is the season of food - a time to gather, prepare, preserve and share in many ways. Whether it’s the gathering of the harvests or the gathering of family and friends to eat together, this season is about self-reliance, community, fortitude, and the preservation of cultural heritage through the culinary arts. It’s a beautiful season, one to relish and enjoy in the spirit of friendship, sharing of abundance, and preserving and processing our crops and animal food sources.

Preservation: Curing

Canning and preserving the season’s produce is a wonderful way to enjoy the harvest year-round. In Western Massachusetts, canning and food preservation has become a part of our cultural identity given the incredible amount of farms and local CSA’s that allow community members to purchase local food and support agriculture at a grassroots level. While it’s a part of our modern culture today, food preservation is actually an ancient practice rooted in our human history. In fact, one of the oldest forms of food preservation is the drying of food. In addition to drying, there are many methods of food preservation used throughout the world, including: freezing, fermenting, pickling, curing, jam and jelly, and canning.

Take prosciutto for example. You might have tried this Italian cured meat on a sandwich, on pizza or as a part of a cold cut platter. Prosciutto is made from ham, and the process to cure it is quite laborious. The most famous prosciutto is Prosciutto di
Parma from Parma, Italy. The ham is not cooked like a baked ham in the oven. Instead, it is cured raw. The sodium from the salt helps to slow down bacteria growth and prevents the meat from going rancid. Curing meat has been around for thousands of years and is still a common practice today. In Parma, Italy, curing the leg of pork requires a lengthy salting process. The ham absorbs the salt, thereby drying it out and preserving it.

In New England, a common cured meat was dried and salted cod. Isn’t it amazing how cultures have so much in common through the universal need of food? Like the prosciutto in Italy, the cod in New England was traditionally dried and salted. When the cod was ready to be used, the fish was placed in cold water to be rehydrated with the water being changed every few days.

A classic New England dish is Salted Codfish Balls. You can find the recipe online. Google “New England Today Salted Codfish.”

Looking for local places where you can explore food and meat preservation? Curious to taste cured meats? Check out these Western Massachusetts farms and butchers.

**Hettie Belle Farm** - Warwick, MA
hattiebellefarm.com
100% grass-fed meat CSA.

**Pekarski’s** - South Deerfield, MA
pekarskis.com
Family owned business specializing in homemade sausage and smoked meats.
**Sutter Meats** - Northampton, MA  
www.suttermeats.com  
Traditional butchery, classes and local meats.

**The Meat Market** - Great Barrington, MA  
www.themeatmarketgb.com  
Local traditional butcher shop at which their own charcuterie is cured in-house.

**Preservation: Jams & Butters**

A common form of preservation is making jam! It is a traditional way to preserve those delicious summer fruits (blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, peaches) and the fall harvest (pumpkin butter and apples).

Making jam can be an intergenerational activity that allows for skill-sharing between family members and across generations. It’s a tradition that can be passed between friends, or passed down from grandparents to grandchildren or parents to children. It encourages self-reliance and harmony with the seasons.

Remember Lydia Maria Child, the author featured in the Sept/Oct 2016 edition of Learning Ahead? Her book, *The American Frugal Housewife*, includes many recipes for jams and preserves. By preserving the fruits and vegetables from the harvest, you are also preserving a piece of cultural history here in Western Massachusetts by participating in this traditional heritage.
Preservation: Community-Based Resources

Curious to learn more about food preservation techniques and their history? Explore local history through food and culture at Western Massachusetts museums. Local living history museums in Western Massachusetts often celebrate the harvest season by reenacting the preservation traditions used in years past. Here are a few living history museums that showcase the art of food preservation:

- **Historic Deerfield** - Deerfield, MA
  www.historic-deerfield.org

- **Old Sturbridge Village** - Sturbridge, MA
  www.osv.org

- **The Stone House Museum** - Belchertown, MA
  stonehousemuseum.org

- **Hancock Shaker Village** - Hancock, MA
  hancockshakervillage.org

Remember that food preservation is a great way to support local agricultural traditions too! Check out [Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture](http://www.buylocalfood.org) online at www.buylocalfood.org to locate farms where you can pick pumpkins and apples for canning and making pumpkin and apple butter! Other places to look for support in learning how to preserve the harvest include workshops and classes offered by local businesses, libraries, granges, COA’s, community colleges, and cooperative markets.

Think about this:

How did the early American diet change according to the seasons?

What kind of food preparation techniques can you use to eat and live more seasonally?

How are these techniques rooted in historic traditions from centuries ago?

Any similarities between us and our ancestors regarding lifestyle and living seasonally?
November 11th is Veterans Day, a national holiday that honors American veterans of all wars. The original date has great historical significance - the armistice that ended World War I was on November 11th, 1918.

Today, Veterans Day honors all of those who have dedicated themselves to serve our country in the armed forces. Given Massachusetts' rich history and role in the formation of the United States from colonial and Revolutionary War times to our contemporary society today, this is a day to remember the soldiers from the past as well as those today who serve our nation. As a result, there are many ceremonies and parades that happen on Veterans Day in Western Massachusetts, such as the Springfield Veterans Day Parade as well as parades and ceremonies in Greenfield, Holyoke, Northampton and Pittsfield. The celebration and recognition of Veterans Day is a reminder of our local history, our region’s historic past, and all of the women and men who served and continue to serve our nation.

Read more about the history of Veterans Day on the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs web site: www.va.gov/opa/vetsday/vetdayhistory.asp

Exploring Military History through Music
The Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps in the armed forces is a part of the 3rd U.S. Infantry Regiment (The Old Guard). It is stationed at Fort Myer, VA. This unique military unit performs in uniforms based on those worn by the musicians of General George Washington’s Continental Army. Uniforms from this time included black tricorn hats, white wigs, waistcoats, colonial coveralls, and distinct red regimental coats.

The corps features two historical music ensembles. Watch this video and listen to The United States Army Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps play historical music: www.youtube.com/user/ArmyFifeAndDrum

This interesting regiment recalls New England’s historic past through its music. As mentioned earlier, our state and region were a central part of the United States’ early formation. Massachusetts was one of the original colonies and many of the patriots that participated in the Revolutionary War were from Massachusetts. The music that the United States Army Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps plays is the same music that once inspired the patriots serving in the Revolutionary War. As you participate in
Veterans Day ceremonies, take a moment to listen to this early music and remember those who served this nation.

Learn more about this interesting regiment online:
   Watch: www.fifeanddrum.army.mil/history.html
   Read: www.fifeanddrum.army.mil/about.html

Living History

Living history programs and events in Western Massachusetts happen all year round and include local historical re-enactors portraying the life of New Englanders centuries ago at encampments and school programs. They often showcase the skills and activities of people during war time periods such as the American Revolutionary War or the Civil War. Participating historians help to preserve the heritage of our region’s past and the study of American history. In addition to encampments, some units engage in battle reenactments which are rehearsed recreations of actual battles.
10th Mass Volunteer Infantry
This living history group based in Franklin County hosts local skirmishes at public events, including Veterans Day Observances. Honoring those who served in the Civil War, the 10th Mass Volunteer Infantry preserves history through living history events, reenactments and parades throughout Western Massachusetts and New England. Visit them online for their schedule of events at 10thmass.com.

Old Sturbridge Village - Sturbridge, MA
Every August, Old Sturbridge Village hosts Rebels & Redcoats. This event is one of the largest re-enactments in New England. The village becomes a large military camp from the Revolutionary War. Visitors can walk through the camp, witness mock battles and skirmishes, see historic training exercises and learn about the different uniforms and fashions of the time for both militia and military. Also features cannon and musket demonstrations, and a battlefield hospital.

Historic Deerfield - Deerfield, MA
In April, Historic Deerfield hosts their annual Patriots Day Revolutionary Muster & Parade, offering a full day of activities, including a colonial-era encampment, fife and drum music, a re-enacted skirmish, and period activities for a hands-on integrated experience that supports learning about Revolutionary times.
Literary Lens: Walt Whitman and the Civil War

During the American Civil War, poet Walt Whitman spent time visiting hospitalized soldiers wounded on the battlefield. He traveled with soldiers from one hospital to another and visited wounded soldiers daily. As the war continued, Whitman resolved to stay in the Union and serve the wounded as they recovered from their injuries. It was a critical moment in his life and greatly affected his poetry later.

Recommended Reading
Read Whitman’s The Wound-Dresser on the Poetry Foundation’s web site: www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/53027

In this poem, Whitman recounts his experience nursing the soldiers and dressing their wounds. Read closely the last stanza, shared here:

Thus in silence in dreams’ projections,
Returning, resuming, I thread my way through the hospitals,
The hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing hand,
I sit by the restless all the dark night, some are so young,
Some suffer so much, I recall the experience sweet and sad,
(Many a soldier’s loving arms about this neck have cross’d and rested,
Many a soldier’s kiss dwells on these bearded lips.)

Why do you think Whitman describes the experience as both “sweet and sad”?

Think about this:
Why did Whitman become a soldier’s missionary during the Civil War?

In his poem “The Wound-Dresser” there are many verses in (parenthesis) - why are these lines significant and why does Whitman uses this punctuation to separate them?

Many people choose to serve our country in different ways such as public service (public school teachers), community service (AmeriCorps) and the Armed Forces. What do you think inspires someone to serve their country?
As mentioned in the Sept/Oct 2016 edition of Learning Ahead, food connects us. The gathering of community, family, and friends around the table for a shared meal is a meaningful way to spend time together in the spirit of sharing and collaboration through food. The Thanksgiving season is one that inspires us to reflect on the people and places for which we are thankful. It’s an opportunity to express gratitude collectively.

Today, the traditional Thanksgiving meal is a celebration of the harvest season. The dinner table features the autumn bounty produced by local farms. Customary foods often included in Thanksgiving meals include corn, turkey, cranberry sauce, and fall vegetables such as squash and pumpkin pie. In fact, the traditional New England dishes often included at the Thanksgiving table have even inspired poets in their literary musings.

**Recommended Reading**

Langston Hughes, a poet of the Harlem Renaissance in New York City, wrote the poem *Thanksgiving Time*. Read the poem online at [www.poemhunter.com/poem/thanksgiving-time-2](http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/thanksgiving-time-2). Do you notice its rhythm and energy? How does the poet use words to convey the excitement and bounty of Thanksgiving?

How does Hughes describe the Thanksgiving preparations? What particular things happen in the environment and at home that signify Thanksgiving’s arrival? What do you notice in your own home or surroundings that let you know that it’s time for Thanksgiving?


**Thanksgiving: Living History**

Ever wonder what a traditional Thanksgiving meal looked like in 19th century New England? At [Old Sturbridge Village](http://www.oldsturbridgevillage.org) (Sturbridge, MA) visitors can witness the costumed interpreters preparing a traditional Thanksgiving meal and sit down
together to recreate a typical Thanksgiving meal in rural New England. You can learn about early dining etiquette and about wedding preparations that often took place during the Thanksgiving holiday! Take a look at the museum’s slide show online of their Thanksgiving activities and celebrations. Google “Thanksgiving OSV Gallery.”

**Thanksgiving: Art & Literature**

The Thanksgiving meal has also inspired artists in their work. Stockbridge, MA painter, Norman Rockwell, painted *Freedom from Want* in 1942 during wartime in Europe. This painting is a part of Rockwell’s *Four Freedoms* series. The painting, *Freedom from Want*, was painted during war time in Europe. The series was inspired by Franklin D. Roosevelt’s famous “Four Freedoms” speech. The three other paintings are entitled *Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Worship*, and *Freedom from Fear*. Rockwell spent six months creating these paintings and in 1943 they were published in the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Read Franklin D. Roosevelt’s speech *Four Freedoms* from January 6, 1941, on the Voices of Democracy: The U.S. Oratory Project web site (Google “Voices of Democracy Four Freedoms Speech”). After reading it, consider visiting the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, MA. There you can see Rockwell’s entire series, *Four Freedoms*.

After reading FDR’s speech and viewing Rockwell’s paintings, explore connections! What do you think was Rockwell’s intent? What about the paintings, their images, the way the figures are seated or are painted point to FDR’s speech and Rockwell’s inspiration? How does this important moment in political history affect art that was consumed by the masses? What is the relationship between politics and art? What is Rockwell trying to convey to his viewer?

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**Think about this:**

What traditional recipes do you prepare for Thanksgiving that are unique to your family’s heritage?

Like Whittier and his pumpkin pie, if you were to choose one dish from the Thanksgiving table to write a poem about - which would it be?

After reading FDR’s speech and observing Rockwell’s paintings, what is your opinion of the painter’s message? What do you think Rockwell hoped to impart?
Non-Commercial Gift Giving: The Art of Sharing

During the holiday season, gift-giving is considered a traditional aspect of our seasonal celebrations. Instead of purchasing a gift, gift givers can also look to the domestic arts, crafts, and visual arts for inspiration in making handmade gifts that encourage originality and thought.

Shop Local & Handmade!

Take the challenge this year by shopping local and non-commercial during the holiday season. The abundance of craft fairs and open studios happening in the area featuring handmade products by local artists and artisans make it easy to find that special something when looking for a gift of any kind. A few annual events for finding local and handmade gifts include:

- **Arts and Industry Open Studios** in Florence
- **Cottage Street Studios Open Studio and Holiday Sale** in Easthampton
- **Crafts of Colrain** in Colrain
- **Hartsbrook School Holiday Fair** in Hadley
- **Little Drummer Craft Fair** in Turners Falls
- **Seconds Sale at Snow Farm** in Willamsburg

While browsing, take the time to stop and talk with the arts and artisans. Be curious and ask them questions. Discover how they learned their craft skill, what the history is behind their craft, how long they have been making their art, and where they find...
their inspiration. A purchase not only supports the artist and artisan, but your gift now comes with a story to share with the person with you you will give your gift.

After talking with local crafters, use your inspiration to discover a new skill and make your own holiday gifts. **Local libraries** offer many resources for handmade gift giving. Craft sections feature many do-it-yourself gift giving ideas. There’s a library located in nearly every town in Western Massachusetts. Here are just a few local libraries to visit:

- **Berkshire Athenaeum** - Pittsfield, MA
- **Meekins Library** - Williamsburg, MA
- **Forbes Library** - Northampton, MA
- **Jones Library** - Amherst, MA
- **Emily Williston Memorial Library** - Easthampton, MA
- **Westfield Athenaeum** - Westfield, MA
- **Holyoke Public Library** - Holyoke, MA
- **South Hadley Public Library** - South Hadley, MA
- **Springfield Public Library** - Springfield, MA

**Write a Zine!**

Zines (short for *magazine* or *fanzine*) are self-published books that include different media forms: collage, illustrations, comic strips, and words. A zine can be a book of poetry or a story, it can be a guide book or a collection of fairy tales - the sky’s the limit! Zines can also be photocopied and bound so that you can produce multiple copies. Making a zine is a rewarding, creative process and can certainly be a part of your gift giving plans for the holidays.

Need some inspiration for your zine-making adventures? Check out the **Flywheel Arts Collective** in Easthampton, MA. The Flywheel Arts Collective has a community Zine library and cafe with over 3,000 zines, featuring many from Western Massachusetts! Flywheel is a collective of art and poetry that allows people to share their work with others in their local community. It’s a great community resource for those looking to feel inspired through grassroots art and literature that aims to inspire, provoke thought and engage the community. flywheelarts.org

**Go to a Makerspace!**

Makerspaces inspire creativity! These community places provide the space to combine science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM!) in order to make and create. They are like an artist’s studio but also include digital making as well as physical making. Activities include woodworking, electronics, computers, 3D
printing, knitting, screen printing, sewing, and more! Western Massachusetts has a number of community maker spaces to start brainstorming your do-it-yourself gift giving ideas.

**Westhampton Public Library**
Young makers, who may be drawn to the idea of exploring makerspaces without commitment, can meet up with other maker-minded youth at the Westhampton Library’s monthly Maker Club. Begun in 2016, this maker group offers materials for themed making, but leaves participants somewhat limited in what they can create. While the first meeting focused on circuitry, there are many ways to light up a bulb - making the possibilities nearly endless. Future meetings are intended to have a similar structure, and will explore topics like woodworking, electronics, and computers.

**Greenfield Makerspace Meet-Up**
Older makers may find community amongst participants in the Greenfield 3D Printing and Maker Space Meet Up, a group catering to folks working in 3D modeling and printing but not limited to participants who have their own resources for doing so. This Franklin County group was created in order to build community in preparation for a future makerspace, so watch for its appearance in the future!

**Amherst Media**
In Amherst, makers can find like-minded folks at Amherst Media’s weekly drop-in makerspace. These community events welcome makers of all kinds, whether they’re working on computer code or a knitting project. Open to all ages and experience levels, this weekly event encourages youth to visit out of curiosity, if only just to learn what makerspaces are all about.

**Makers’ Mill**
In addition to community maker meet-ups, permanent makerspaces offer classes, events, and membership-based access to tools and materials. In North Adams, the Makers’ Mill encourages creative collaboration and learning opportunities in a historic building in a central location. Offering weekly meet-up events for a variety of makers, classes teaching specific skills, as well as memberships for even more making, the Makers’ Mill is serving as a hub for the growth of the creative community of the Northern Berkshires.
Shire City Sanctuary
In Pittsfield, Shire City Sanctuary offers making opportunities in a former church. With space for studios, offices, and meetings, as well as more exciting features like a sewing lab, a screen printing shop, and a commercial kitchen, Shire City Sanctuary likens itself to a gym for creative types. The sanctuary periodically offers community events and classes, and also offers both daily and monthly memberships for short- or long-term access to tools and space for making.

Knit Something!
Remember the knitted items you saw during the Agricultural Fairs last month? Get ready for next September’s aggie fairs while working on gifts for others this season! At www.ravelry.com, you to search for free knitting patterns that can help you come up with your next project gift idea. Perhaps a one-skein hat? A pair of mittens? Or a hand-knitted cowl? Knitting is not only a fun activity and great way to hand-make a gift, but it’s also a wonderful way to get together with fellow knitters of all ages and knit together! Who knows what new stitches you’ll learn and the new friends you’ll meet!

In addition to libraries, there are many local yarn stores in the area that offer free drop-in knitting hours or classes to help you get started.

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Bake/Preserve Something!

We explored food preservation earlier in the Itinerary - now it’s time to put those skills to use! Pumpkin or apple butter make great holiday gifts and are something the recipient can enjoy for the entire season! Jams and jellies are also a nice gift idea!

Want to help the gift recipient get ready for sugaring season? How about preparing a ready to go pancake mix in a jar? Finally, freshly baked cookies and pies are always a great gift idea.

Not sure if you have enough time to bake this season? Support local bakeries and give the gift of local food & craft! Here are a few Western MA bakeries to check out:

**The Hungry Ghost** - Northampton, MA
hungryghostbread.com

**Bread Euphoria Bakery** - Haydenville, MA
www.breadeuphoria.org
In December, Bread Euphoria prepares bûche de Noël, a traditional holiday dessert that resembles a yule log. They even have a gluten-free version!

**La Fiorentina Pastry Shop** - Northampton & Springfield, MA
www.lafiorentinapastry.com
During the holiday season, La Fiorentina prepares traditional Southern Italian desserts such as Struffoli. *Struffoli* are small pieces of dough fried and then arranged like a wreath on a plate. They are then drizzled with honey and topped with colorful sprinkles. This dish is a typical Christmas time treat in Naples and the region of Campania. Be sure to order one in advance!
Folklore & Myth of Christmas Trees

What is folklore? Folklore includes the traditions and stories of a culture or community that are passed down for generations. Typically, folklore is passed on through word of mouth in the form of a narration. Over time, stories can change, morph, and transform depending on the place, culture, context and the storyteller. That’s the beauty of a folktale; it has many added layers as the story moves from narrator to narrator, place to place. Storytelling is an art, both the narration and the listening.

Some of our traditions today are a result of folklore and myth. For example, the contemporary Christmas tree has an interesting past with a story and history that has been passed down from generation to generation. From its original form with the ancient Norse pagans to its present day form in the houses of those who celebrate
Christmas, the Christmas tree, like many folktales, has changed shape and meaning as it has been adapted to new cultures, people and places.

**Where does the Christmas tree come from?** Did you know that the origin of the Christmas tree has roots in ancient Norse paganism from Northern Germany? Evergreens were seen as magical entities due to their ability to withstand the frigid, cold winter and stay green. During the winter solstice, Norse pagans, who celebrated the Norse god Jul (pronounced Yule) brought entire evergreens into their homes. These trees were called Yule Trees and were believed to protect the home during the darkest times of the year.

Participate in the annual Yule celebration in Turner’s Falls! **Welcome Yule: A Midwinter Celebration** features songs, carols, puppets, and a mummers play, along with the passing of the Yule log and the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance. welcomeyule.org

**Recommended Reading**
Discover Norse Myths. Find these titles at your local library:

- **Cassell’s Dictionary of Norse Myth and Legend** by Andy Orchard
- **D’Aulaires’ Book of Norse Myths** by Ingri and Edgar Parin D’aulaire; preface by Michael Chabon
- **Myths and Civilization of the Vikings** Hazel Mary Martell; illustrated by Francesca D’Ottavi & Ivan Stalio, Alessandro Cantucci & Andrea Morandi

You can read more about how the Norse celebrated yuletide and the origins of the Christmas tree online. Google “Norse Myths” for many great resources.

**The Mighty Evergreen**

Henry David Thoreau wrote:

> Walked through that beautiful soft white pine grove on the west of the road in John Flint’s pasture. These trees are large, but there is ample space between them, so that the ground is left grassy. Great pines two or more feet in diameter branch sometimes within two feet of the ground on each side, sending out large horizontal branches on which you can sit. Like great harps on which the wind makes music. There is no finer tree.

- “A Beautiful Pine Grove” in *The Writings of Henry David Thoreau*
In Western Massachusetts there are many places one can explore the beautiful evergreens and winter pines that create our enchanting forests. Like Thoreau, bring along a nature journal to jot down a few inspiring notes along the way.

**Notchview Reservation, The Trustees** - Windsor, MA
A great place for nordic skiing, snowshoeing and hiking, Notchview is a beautiful place to enjoy year round outdoor explorations and to discover the evergreen forests. The reservation’s forest includes red spruce and northern hardwood and fir. Interested in cutting your own Christmas tree? Every year, Notchview hosts a Christmas Tree Sale where families can come and cut down their own balsam or Fraser fir tree at the reservation!

**Bradley Sanctuary, Hilltown Land Trust** - Williamsburg, MA
Thoreau’s declaration of white pine as the finest tree can certainly be believed at this beautiful hiking spot in Williamsburg. Managed by Hilltown Land Trust, the Bradley Sanctuary features a beautiful hilltop grove of white pine.

**Old Growth Forest - Rivulet Trail at William Cullen Bryant Homestead, The Trustees** - Cummington, MA
This incredible trail features old growth forest with some seriously ancient trees! They include hemlock, cherry and a pine loop with some of the tallest pine trees in the Northeast! A wonderful trail.

Does your annual family tradition include erecting an evergreen in your home? Support local agriculture and cut your own Christmas Tree!

**Pieropans Farms** - Ashfield, MA
pieropantrees.com

**Justamere Tree Farm** - Worthington, MA
www.justameretreefarm.com

**Itty Bitty Tree Farm** - Windsor, MA
www.ittybittyfarm.com

**Cranston’s Christmas Tree Farm** - Ashfield, MA
www.cranstonschristmastreefarm.com
Think about this:

What passed down stories exist in your own family?

Why are these stories important to retell?

Why do you think so many folklore traditions, stories and myths in different cultures view trees as magical?

What other myths can you discover that highlight trees as magical, spiritual beings?
During the holiday season many communities and neighborhoods host special events that gather everyone together in the spirit of friendship, community and wonder. It’s a great way to discover the unique identity of a place and its traditions. In Western Massachusetts, each community has a distinct character and its own way to commemorate the holiday spirit. By participating in these events, not only do you have the opportunity to engage your community, but you also help to preserve local history and culture.

**Holiday Strolls**

Towns across the region host an extended evening of activities with shops open late to encourage support of local merchants while connecting with neighbors as the days get shorter.

**Moonlight Magic - Shelburne Falls, MA**

A way to celebrate the holidays on Black Friday while supporting the local community. Families with hot drinks in hand can visit vendors set up along the street, watch a holiday parade, and discover tasty treats and artisanal craft items indoors. Shops and galleries stay open late for this event!

**Main Street at Christmas - Stockbridge, MA**

Stockbridge comes alive with holiday magic for Main Street at Christmas. Made famous by Norman Rockwell’s iconic paintings of Stockbridge’s idyllic downtown, the town’s Main Street at Christmas event is a recreation of a Berkshire holiday
long ago, complete with decorations of all kinds and vintage cars lining the streets. Other highlights of Main Street at Christmas include holiday readings, house tours, caroling, and a special holiday concert.

**Holiday Walk - Williamstown, MA**
Old-fashioned caroling, horse-drawn carriage rides, ice carving, and a visit from the jolliest of holiday icons, Santa Claus. Past festivities during this annual event have included a special Reindog Parade, a Run with the Reindeer Fun Run at 9:30am, holiday crafts, Souperbowl Chili and Soup Cook-Off featuring local restaurants, gingerbread cookie decorating, and an ice carving demonstration.

**Carolining**
A fun holiday tradition, caroling events are wonderful intergenerational events that explore choral music with your family and friends. With many songs sung during the holiday seasons rich in history, there is much to learn! Did you know that the English lyrics to Deck the Halls were written in 1862, however the melody is Welsh and dates back to the 16th century?

From vespers services to community caroling, December is full of opportunities to sing. Get inspired by taking in annual concerts and performances.

- Northampton Community Center Holiday Choral Festival
- Williamsburg Congregational Church Caroling on the Green
- Berkshire Concert Choir
- First Church of Deerfield
- Mount Holyoke College’s Annual Christmas Vespers

**Think about this:**

Where do you think the tradition of caroling door to door comes from?

How is singing a form of storytelling?

How do songs pass down stories of the past within a community or culture?
Museum Explorations of Christmas

Local museums are an experiential way to explore the history of New England holiday traditions and how our present customs were influenced by the cultural practices of the past. Whether you’re interested in learning about food traditions from the past, historic decorations or customary festivities, museum exhibitions and demonstrations provide us with tangible examples in their exploration of history and culture.

Specifically, living history museums and events are engaging ways to witness firsthand how holidays were celebrated in early New England. Hands-on activities and demonstrations create unique experiences for visitors to learn about different holiday festivities. It’s also a great opportunity to see how the season was celebrated in a non-commercial way; many decorations and gifts were handmade!

**Historic Deerfield** - Deerfield, MA
Historic Deerfield’s Heritage Holiday offers hands-on demonstrations that explore how the holidays were prepared for and celebrated from 1730 to 1850. They offer activities such as hearth cooking, gift-making, lectures, games and other special events.

**Storrowton Village** - West Springfield, MA
Every year, the 18th and 19th century buildings of Storrowton Village are seasonally decorated by garden clubs, florists and decorators. There are performances, music, storytelling, old-fashioned craft demonstrations, ice sculpting, a sweet shop and more!

**Old Sturbridge Village** - Sturbridge, MA
Christmas by candlelight. Tour this 1830’s village by candlelight and celebrate the holidays the old-fashioned way. Gingerbread, roasted chestnuts, music, dance, and a sleigh ride!

**Discover Hanukkah**
Hanukkah is the Jewish holiday known as the Festival of Lights. For eight days, Jewish families light one more candle of the eight that create the menorah each evening. In Western Massachusetts there are many places to explore the traditions of Hanukkah.
and Jewish culture through community events and local museums.

**National Yiddish Book Center - Hanukkah Celebration** - Amherst, MA
A day of activities for all ages that explores Yiddish language and culture through holiday songs, a sing-a-long, readings, and crafts and a scavenger hunt!

**Springfield Jewish Community Center** - Springfield, MA
Past events have included a community wide lighting of the first light of the menorah with games, music, latkes and the largest menorah in Western Massachusetts!

**Congregation B’nai Israel** - Northampton, MA
Celebrations in the past have included a Latke vs. Hamantashen Debate/Throw-Down and Chanukah Party as well as a communal lighting of the menorah, songs and stories.

**Kwanzaa**
In 1966, Dr. Maulana Karenga established an African American and Pan-African holiday, Kwanzaa, based on traditional African “first fruit” (harvest) celebrations. Organized around seven principles (unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith), Kwanzaa aims to preserve, continually revitalize, and promote African American culture. A week-long celebration observed from December 26 to January 1. During this time, look for annual community-based celebrations in which to participate.

The **Malcolm X Cultural Center** at UMass in Amherst hosts an annual Kwanzaa Celebration. Other annual Kwanzaa celebrations take place in Springfield and
Pittsfield. Learn more about the symbols, values, and history of Kwanzaa online at www.officialkwanzaawebsite.org.

Three Kings Day
On January 6th in many hispanic countries, the Day of the Three Kings, or Los Reyes, is celebrated. This day marks the biblical adoration of the magi or the three kings that came to visit the newborn baby Jesus. Each king comes bearing a gift. Traditionally on this day gifts are exchanged and, on the island of Puerto Rico, another sweet and interesting tradition occurs.

In Puerto Rico, children write a letter to los reyes asking for gifts. Then, on the night before the Day of the Three Kings, children gather cut grass and place it in a box underneath their bed. The grass is meant for the kings’ camels to eat. In exchange for the grass, and in gratitude, the kings leave a special little gift for the children!

Culinary Spotlight: Puerto Rican Pasteles
In Puerto Rico, pasteles are a common dish to prepare and eat on Christmas Eve. Pasteles consist of a filling wrapped in banana leaf. The filling can include pork, shredded green plantain, shredded potato, and calabazas (pumpkins); it is seasoned with bay leaves, tomato, annatto oil, adobo seco, and sofrito. Pasteles are quite labor-intensive and are usually prepared ahead of time and then frozen. When they are ready to be eaten, they can be boiled.

Interested in tasting a pastel? The city of Holyoke is full of authentic Puerto Rican restaurants that serve traditional cuisine of the island. Make sure to try arroz con gandules (rice with pigeon peas) too!

Think about this:

Where do our holiday food traditions come from?

What kind of typical dishes do you prepare for the holidays?

What other cultural holidays are celebrated during the winter season?

What are noncommercial ways to celebrate the holidays at home?
Winter: A Time for Sharing Stories and Connecting with Community.

The Winter Solstice marks the shortest day of the year. From this day forward the days become longer, offering more light as the months continue. Earlier in the Itinerary we explored old Norse traditions which are connected to the celebration of the winter solstice. This time of the year was known in old Norse as Yule - sound familiar? The expression “yuletide” refers to this season and has been adopted to signify the holiday season.

The winter solstice is an introspective celebration for reconnecting with nature and community. As we begin to stay indoors more and spend time with families and friends, the winter season is an opportunity to disconnect from technology and reconnect with neighbors. Storytelling fosters this connection through intergenerational dialogue and shared experiences.

Children are, of course, experts in storytelling and in the art of imagination. Being cooped up inside during the winter provides ample opportunity for creative free play and storytelling. Stories can be inspired at home through toys, craft materials, favorite books, photographs and art images. Stories are the lifeblood of the deep, dark winter.

Storytelling in Literature

Naturally, literature is a form of written storytelling; many novels have a narrative structure built into their form. What does this mean? It means that some writers have chosen to convey a story through a frame story. A frame story is a story within a story, in which characters mimic the same type of conversation that occurs in the telling of a story between a narrator and listener. As a result, you have two stories: one is the “frame” and then the actual story of the novel or poem.

One writer who did this was Italian short story writer Giovanni Boccaccio who wrote the Decameron in the 1300's during the bubonic plague. This medieval writer set his collection of short stories within a frame story. Remember, a frame story is like a narrator. In Boccaccio’s frame story, the narrator tells the tale of a group of men and women who escape the city of Florence during the bubonic plague. They flee to the
countryside where they tell stories and play games. The stories they tell are actually the short stories that make up the *Decameron*. Each character has a turn telling a tale, and the short stories that the reader reads are the tales these characters share with each other.

Another narrative device used by writers is placing the reader in the seat of the listener. The writer speaks to you the reader directly and is about to tell you a tale. Many times, fairy tales start off this way with the famous “Once upon a time…” Just by using that initial phrase, a story becomes a narration - a story shared between teller and listener. Storytelling is social, it requires a shared conversation between two people. It’s this quality that makes it different from a traditional written story in a book.

**Winter Solstice Community Events**

Annual community celebrations for the Winter Solstice spotlight storytelling as part of their event, giving guests the opportunity to both listen and tell. Get your stories ready for these annual solstice community events!

**Winter Solstice Celebration - Center for Cultural Evolution** - Colrain, MA
Stories, socializing and tasty treats during this solstice tradition in Colrain! There is also music, puppets and juggling!
www.roundhouseculture.com

**Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary Winter Solstice Celebration** - Easthampton, MA
An annual solstice celebration with a bonfire. People are invited to warm themselves by the fire with hot cider and listen to music as they gather with family and friends. The perfect opportunity to share stories!

**Solstice Fire & Stories - Town Common** - Ashfield, MA
Singers, storytellers, music, Morris dancing, a bonfire and more!
Think about this:

What ways can you celebrate the solstice at home through storytelling with family and friends?

Storytelling/writing prompts:
Describe your first day of school.
Describe a favorite day. Where were you? What did you do?
What’s the best gift you ever received?
Where was your favorite trip?
What is your favorite place to visit?
What does warmth mean to you?
What is your favorite smell? Why?
Describe your favorite taste or your favorite meal.

Gingerbread Houses in Hadley, MA.
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield
Many family-friendly New Year’s celebrations offer a range of opportunities to not only celebrate, but also to explore by inviting families to visit many locations or landmarks in their local communities. These celebrations include performances, art shows, hands-on activities, ceremonies and sometimes food! Such events encourage Western Massachusetts residents to engage their local community and experience it from new perspectives. The exploratory aspect of such events provides a place-based element to the cultural learning that New Year’s celebrations foster. Participants can solidify their sense of place as they learn about and become a part of a local culture, tradition and heritage. Moving through the local landscape offers insight and understanding of home, place and the meaning of local identity and culture.

**First Night**

A contemporary New England tradition, First Night is celebrated throughout the region but began in Massachusetts with Boston hosting the first First Night in 1975. Today, towns all over New England celebrate the new year with community festivities including live music shows, gallery openings, art activities, performances and more. In Western Massachusetts, several towns host First Night celebrations as a way to connect community, support the local economy, and preserve the local history that makes this region unique and special. Northampton, in particular, organizes a large First Night celebration that includes a full schedule of events and activities.

During a First Night celebration, participants usually pay for a button to wear that allows them to discover all that
the festival has to offer. You can expect to explore the local character of a town through its art community and civic organizations. Many First Night festivities include live performances of dance and music as well as gallery show openings of local artists’ work. Attending First Night events helps to support the arts in a community while connecting interests with the repeating patterns of seasonal celebrations.

**First Night Northampton** - Northampton, MA
In downtown Northampton, First Night Northampton is host to a variety of venues, performances, art and activities. Afternoon activities are family friendly with fireworks at 6pm and an evening filled with activities for an older audience.  www.firstnightnorthampton.org

**First Night Jr.** - Holyoke, MA
An afternoon event on New Year’s Eve for families. Past activities have included magic shows, world class juggling, face painting, balloon sculpture and special craft activities. - www.holyoke.org

**Starry Starry Night** - Orange, MA
Annual celebration throughout Orange that includes live performances, outdoor activities, and fireworks. - starrystarrynight.org

**First Hikes**
Another popular event to ring in the New Year is a first hike. Many local **land trusts** and **conservation organizations** organize these hikes as a way to engage folks outdoors in the winter season. Starting off the new year by connecting to nature is refreshing and energizing. Below are a few local organizations that offer first hikes on January 1st. When enjoying your first hike, consider taking a notebook with you. Typically New Year’s is a time of reflection, contemplation and setting intentions for the new year. While outdoors in the woods, consider spending some time to journal and reflect.

**Organized First Hikes**

**Williamsburg Woodland Trails** - Williamsburg, MA
Hike along the Petticoat Hill Reservation/Locke’s Loop Trail. The hike goes through 100-year old forest and shows signs of past land use - there are stone walls, cellar holes and old foundations of early farmsteads.
DAR State Forest - Goshen, MA
Department of Conservation and Recreation hosts this hike. Meet at the Warming Hut and hike along the edge of Upper Highland Lake. All ages are welcome on this free 1.5 mile hike. Start off the new year with healthy habits, like exercising and spending time outdoors.

Great Falls Discovery Center - Turners Falls, MA
Join the Great Falls Discovery Center and the Department of Conservation and Recreation for a free, leisurely two-mile stroll along the canal. Explore the natural, culture and historical signs around Turners Falls.

Kestrel Land Trust - Amherst & Northampton, MA
www.kestreltrust.org

First Hikes: Nature Writing & Journaling
The New Year is often seen as a moment of reflection and intention-setting. While on your first hike, consider taking your journal with you. Nature can be inspiring and provides a place for contemplation and meditation. A few writing prompts to help you get started:

• What is a new skill you would like to learn this year?
• Describe one of your favorite memories from last year.
• Make a list of the favorite places you visited in your community last year.
• Make a list of places you would like to explore further this year.
• What is a new skill that you learned last year?

Think about this:
How was New Year’s Eve celebrated at home in the past in New England?

How many years has Northampton been hosting first night?

How did people of the past stay active during the winter months in New England?
ABOUT HILLTOWN FAMILIES

Who am I? Where am I? These are the fundamental questions proposed by the humanities. Inquiries related to local history, literature, and education inspire us to think deeply about the places where we live and how our identity fits into the context of our communities and the seasons.

Hilltown Families’ mission is to support the common good of our community through the development of a sense of place by a shared understanding in the value of self-directed learning through community engagement. These learning values are referred to as “community-based education” and are accessible and inclusive to an intergenerational audience. This process of learning unites community members through shared interests, establishes a shared history, and deepens a connection to place.

Hilltown Families believes in creating resilient and sustainable communities by developing and strengthening a sense of place in our children and citizens through community-based education and engagement. Established in 2005 by Sienna Wildfield, Hilltown Families identifies, curates, and shares community-based learning opportunities that reflect back to the community its potential while impacting the culture. Community members of all ages are encouraged to engage in repeating social and environmental patterns that support interests, building upon seasonal cycles to support learning found in the intersections of food, habitat, and culture within community resources, events, and opportunities.

Funded in part by Mass Humanities, Learning Ahead: Cultural Itinerary for Western Massachusetts is a bimonthly publication produced by Hilltown Families that sheds light on embedded learning opportunities found in cultural resources that exist within the geography, history, and cultural traditions of the Hilltowns and surrounding area.

With these seasonal itineraries, self-directed teens, lifelong learners and families are encouraged to engage together in cultural opportunities that support similar interests, resulting in a shared history and a strengthened sense of place.

By emphasizing place-based exploration through humanities inquiry, these cultural itineraries connect residents of all ages to their place, helping to shape a more comprehensive understanding of our cultural identity, heritage, and history. This contributes to establishing meaningful relationships between young people, elders, and more active citizens.

Hilltown Families is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. www.HilltownFamilies.org