Learning Ahead:  
Cultural Itinerary for Western Massachusetts  
Copyright © 2016 by Hilltown Families, Inc.  
All photos copyright © Sienna Wildfield  
All rights reserved.

This program is funded in part by Mass Humanities, which receives support from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and is an affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Special thank you to the sponsors of this issue, including The Trustees of Reservations and Springfield Museums.
Learning Ahead:
Cultural Itinerary for Western Massachusetts
Seasons: January & February

Andrea Caluori-Rivera
Edited by Sienna Wildfield

Hilltown Families, Inc.
www.HilltownFamilies.org
“But Winter has yet brighter scenes—he boasts
Splendors beyond what gorgeous Summer knows;
Or Autumn with his many fruits, and woods
All flushed with many hues. Come when the rains
Have glazed the snow and clothed the trees with ice,
While the slant of sun of February pours
Into the bowers a flood of light. Approach!
The incrusted surface shall upbear thy steps,
And the broad arching portals of the grove
Welcome thy entering.”

- William Cullen Bryant, *A Winter Piece*

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 January and February cultural Itinerary for Western Massachusetts includes:

- **NATURE-BASED** activities connect us to the land: Nordic skiing, alpine skiing, ice skating, & snowshoeing
- **VALUE** based engagement on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day: Service-Based Learning Events & Civic Engagement
- Learn about New England **TRADITIONS**: Ice Harvesting
- African American History Month as a **CATALYST** for learning: Poetry, History & Art
- Mark the **SEASON** by sharing & connecting: Winter Festivals & Placemaking
- **INTERGENERATIONAL** engagement for Valentine’s Day: Handmade, Non-Commercial & Creative-Free Play
- Looking through the **LENS** of Presidents’ Day: Freedom & Literacy
- Discover seasonal **FOOD**: Winter Farmers’ Markets
- Local **HABITAT** connects us to ourselves: Writing & Mindfulness
Page 6 ...................... Embracing the Winter Landscape
Page 14 ...................... Martin Luther King Jr. & Civic Engagement
Page 17 ...................... Ice Harvesting
Page 20 ...................... African American History
Page 25 ...................... Winter Festivals
Page 28 ...................... Valentine’s Day
Page 31 ...................... Presidents' Day
Page 34 ...................... Winter Farmers’ Markets & Seasonal Foods
Page 38 ...................... Winter Silence & Mindfulness
For some, winter is greeted with a sense of reluctance – gone are the bright sunny days of summer filled with lush deciduous trees, rushing streams, colorful wildflowers, and easy temperatures. Instead, the natural landscape changes completely as do our routines and recreational activities. Whereas summer is boisterous and full, winter is quiet and still - similar to how snow quietly builds on the ground during a storm - it’s a part of what makes wintertime feel so magical.

How do we experience the outdoors during a time of year when we are often so inclined to stay indoors, looking at the outside world from the window?

Winter Explorations of Local Places: Winter Sports

There are many ways to remain active and engaged with the outdoors during the winter season. Nordic skiing, alpine skiing, ice skating, and snowshoeing are a few examples of different activities that encourage New Englanders to get outside, stay fit, and maintain a healthy lifestyle while connecting them to local places during the cold winter months. Although the equipment for these winter sports has changed since their original inception due to advanced technology and contemporary materials, the basic principle has stayed the same. Additionally, many of these winter activities have a history deeply rooted in New England’s past thereby connecting them to our local traditions and culture!
Nordic Skiing

Accessible to skiers of all ages and abilities, nordic skiing is a favorite winter activity locally. Skiers young, old, inexperienced, and expert can take advantage of local trail systems, equipment rentals, classes, and special community events in order to experience the magic that nordic skiing adds to a Western Massachusetts winter.

Originating in snowy Scandinavia, nordic skiing has been a competitive sport since the 18th century. It provides access to nature during the winter as well as the chance to explore local outdoor places and trail systems in Western Massachusetts. Many of the nordic ski centers in our region offer lessons to beginners to help inexperienced skiers learn the basic techniques of cross-country skiing. In addition to being a fun winter sport that maintains physical fitness, it is also a way to connect with friends, neighbors and the local community whether out on the trails or warming up in the ski lodge!
Visit these **Nordic ski centers** this winter and explore their trails and snowy landscapes:

**Notchview Reservation, The Trustees** - Windsor, MA  
Over 3,000 acres of conservation land. Groomed trails. Cross-country skiing lessons and rentals for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.  
www.thetrustees.org

**Stump Sprouts Guest Lodge and Cross-country Ski Center** - Hawley, MA  
Situated atop a high meadow. Lessons and rentals. www.stumpsprouts.com

**Northfield Mountain** - Northfield, MA  
Rental skis and lessons available. www.facebook.com/northfieldmountain

**Field Farm, The Trustees** - Williamstown, MA  
Bring your own skis. www.thetrustees.org

**Lime Kiln Farm, Mass Audubon** - Sheffield, MA  
Two miles of trails that include rolling hills, conifer forests, and a limestone ridge. Bring your own skis. www.massaudubon.org

**Bartholomew’s Cobble, The Trustees** - Sheffield, MA  
Bring your own skis. www.thetrustees.org
Alpine Skiing

Different from nordic skiing in equipment and technique, alpine skiing is about speed. In alpine skiing the entire boot is attached to your ski whereas in nordic skiing only the toe of the boot is attached. Nordic skiers slowly traverse a variety of terrain via trail system or off trail whereas alpine skiers go down a mountain at a higher rate of speed.

Interestingly, skiing has origins in ancient history. Wooden planks of various shapes and sizes preserved in bogs in Russia, Finland, Sweden and Norway point to a certain form of skiing used to traverse snowy terrain in colder countries. In fact, some fragments of these earlier skis have been carbon dated to around 8,000-7,000 BCE! However, what we now refer to as downhill skiing began with Norwegian Sondre Norheim (1825-1897), considered a pioneer in modern skiing. His contribution included a design of different bindings and skis with curved sides to facilitate turns; as well as the Telemark ski technique (named after the Telemark region of Norway) which combines elements of Alpine and Nordic skiing. Interested in trying out alpine skiing? Visit www.massvacation.com/skilocal for up-to-date conditions for the following ski centers:

- **Berkshire East** - Charlemont, MA
  www.berkshireeast.com

- **Blandford Ski Area** - Blandford, MA
  www.skiblandford.org

- **Bousquet Mountain** - Pittsfield, MA
  www.bousquets.com

- **Catamount Ski Area** - South Egremont, MA
  www.catamountski.com

- **Jiminy Peak** - Hancock, MA
  www.jiminypeak.com

- **Otis Ridge** - Otis, MA
  www.otisridge.com

- **Ski Butternut** - Great Barrington, MA
  www.skibutternut.com
Ice Skating

Ice skating is an activity that takes practice, but even for beginner skaters it’s still a fun activity to try with a group of friends! Rinks offer neighbors and friends a chance to come together and engage in a new or beloved activity. There are many rinks, outdoor and indoor, for ice skating in Western Massachusetts. Note that the conditions of outdoor rinks can vary daily based on the weather.

The earliest form of ice skating is thought to date back to about 3,000 years ago in Finland. The original skates used were constructed with lengths of animal bone strapped to the bottom of boots.

Skating as we understand it today originated when steel blades were added to the skates by the Dutch in the 13th and 14th centuries. The Dutch sharpened the edges of the blades to aid movement. In fact, the word “Skate” derives from the Dutch word “schaats” which means leg bone - referring to the original skate material that steel replaced.
Our local skating culture traces its roots to Scottish immigrants who brought skates with them when they resettled in the U.S. Whether you like to skate slow or fast, practice turns or hold onto the wall as you go, there’s fun for all to be had on an ice skating rink. During the winter months, the Massachusetts’ Department of Conservation and Recreation offers a Universal Access Program in the state’s parks providing adaptive ice skating to Western Massachusetts families. Open to individuals with disabilities and their families and/or friends, these events offer free access to adaptive technology (including sleds and walkers) and instruction for people of all abilities.

Find an ice skating rink near your family and get out on the ice for a winter activity that’s good for both your body and spirit! Call for open skate times and to inquire about rentals and costs.

**Indoor Rinks**

- **Amherst**: Mullins Memorial Center.
- **Chicopee**: Olympia Ice Skating Arena.
- **Easthampton**: Lossone Rink at Williston Northampton School.
- **Greenfield**: Collins/Moylan Skating Rink.
- **Holyoke**: Fitzpatrick Arena.
- **North Adams**: Peter W. Foote Vietnam Veterans Memorial Skating Rink
- **Pittsfield**: Pittsfield Boys & Girls Club Skating Arena.
- **Springfield**: Smead Ice Arena.
- **Westfield**: Amelia Park Arena & Garden.

**Outdoor Rinks**

Outdoor rinks, often set up by a town recreation department, are dependent on weather conditions. Here is a short list of outdoor rinks worth researching to see if they are being maintained this year

- **Blandford**: Watson Park on Main Street
- **Conway**: Ball Park
- **Florence**: Florence Civic Center Outdoor Ice Skating
- **Goshen**: DAR State Park Outdoor Ice Skating
- **Greenfield**: Beacon Field Outdoor Ice Skating Rink
- **Holyoke**: Community Field Outdoor Ice Skating
- **Northampton**: Paradise Pond at Smith College
- **Williamsburg**: Burgy Ice Rink
Winter Sport Spotlight: The History of Snowshoeing

Did you know that snowshoeing was practiced 6,000 years ago? The world’s oldest known snowshoe was discovered in September 2016 at an altitude of 10,280 ft on the Gurgler Eisjoch glacier close to the Italian-Austrian border.

While snowshoes are used recreationally in modern day New England, the original intended use of snowshoes was survival-based, allowing people to travel and hunt in the winter on foot, across snowy terrain. The Native Americans developed the traditional webbed design with some of the earliest snowshoe designs measuring over 7 feet long! Their design was modeled on the observation of particular animals who were able to swiftly move through deep powdery snow.

European settlers, hunters, and trappers observed the Native American snowshoes and began to use and produce them as well. Often these were made with white ash frames and untanned animal hide.

As industry continued to flourish in the 1900’s and cities began manufacturing more goods, the need to hunt and trap food in the winter became less of a necessity. As a result, the snowshoe’s role in human history shifted from being functional to recreational. Snowshoes became a way for winter hikers and walkers to experience the outdoors. The materials have also changed from wooded frames to aluminum, which allow the snowshoes to be lighter and more comfortable to wear.

Winter Trails Day

Winter Trails is a national annual event that offers children and adults new to snowshoeing and nordic skiing the chance to try out snowshoes and cross-country skis on local trails while showcasing the health benefits of these two outdoor winter activities. These low-impact aerobic sports incorporate strength and endurance training, and can help people stay active and healthy throughout the winter months when other sports are more difficult to pursue. In Western Massachusetts, Northfield Mountain in Northfield, Notchview in Windsor, and Hilltop Orchards in Richmond often participate. www.wintertrails.org
Art and the Winter Landscape

Winter sports are ways to experience nature during the cold months. The winter landscape and its natural beauty have inspired many artists to capture the enchantment of the winter season. Willard Leroy Metcalf, one of the American Impressionists and a Massachusetts native, painted many natural landscapes, including *The First Snow* (1906), currently held at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (Google “Metcalf First Snow” to see image online). How does Metcalf capture the quiet stillness of winter in his painting? How does it compare with your experience outdoors in the winter? Take your camera with you as you explore the winter landscape, and let the images you capture inspire you to paint, draw or write about the beauty waiting to be discovered this time of year. In doing so you will discover the quiet nature Metcalf captured in his painting.

Think about this:

It is amazing that our ancestors used snowshoes thousands of years ago! What other objects that we still use today have not changed over the centuries?

What are the differences you notice in the natural landscape when outside during the warmer months vs. the colder months? The obvious observations may be temperature and vegetation. But what about sounds, smells, wind or light?

The snowshoe has changed from being a functional object to a recreational tool that makes our natural environment more accessible. What other objects share the same story?
Martin Luther King Jr. spoke out against civil injustice and fought for the civil rights of black Americans. His work to create a just and peaceful society is a reminder of how important civic engagement and service is in sparking positive social change and the formation of ethical communities that champion diversity, openness, compassion, and solidarity. In honor of Martin Luther King Jr.’s work, many organizations and volunteers dedicate themselves to a day of community service in honor of his commitment to social justice.

Inspiration through Voice: Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” Speech

During the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom on August 28, 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called for an end to racism and the enacting of civil rights legislation. From the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., King’s speech was delivered to an audience of over 250,000 people. The speech, now known as “I Have a Dream,” is considered one of the most important moments in the American Civil Rights Movement (Google: “MLK MLKEC-INP”).

On Martin Luther King Jr. Day (3rd Monday in January), take a moment to read (or listen to!) Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream.” This speech is a defining example of the power of voice. It is a reminder of how words, voice, stories, ideas have the ability to inspire and enact positive social change to better our communities and make them more resilient and compassionate.

King’s speech speaks to the value and importance of kindness through civic engagement and community service. Finding ways to serve your local community also reveals opportunities to learn something new, meet neighbors and engage in intergenerational dialogue with others. Community service is an empowering action. Not only does it enrich our local communities, but it also enriches our own experience through the learning of new skills and activities.
Community Service Opportunities in Western Massachusetts

Follow King’s model by helping to create a more resilient, dynamic, diverse, and compassionate community in Western Massachusetts through meaningful community-based service. The **MLK Day of Service** empowers individuals, strengthens communities, bridges barriers, creates solutions to social problems, and moves us closer to Dr. King’s vision of a beloved community. The [www.nationalservice.gov/mlkday](http://www.nationalservice.gov/mlkday) website is a great resource for learning more about this national service and Martin Luther King Jr.’s commitment to civic engagement and social change.

There are many service-based learning opportunities that honor Dr. King’s work and lasting impact on our country. You can check the Hilltown Families website ([www.HilltownFamilies.org](http://www.HilltownFamilies.org)) for service events this year or contact local community colleges, animal shelters, land trusts, and food banks to learn about opportunities for community service on Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Here is a short list of local non-profits and organizations that value volunteer work:

**Local Food**
- Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture in South Deerfield.
- The Food Bank of Western Massachusetts in Hatfield.
- Grow Food Northampton in Northampton.

**Education & Literacy**
- Center for New Americans in Northampton.
- Juntos Collaborative in Holyoke.
- Springfield Public Library in Springfield.

**Land Conservation**
- Franklin Land Trust in Shelburne Falls.
- Hilltown Land Trust in Ashfield.
- Kestrel Land Trust in Amherst.
- Mass Audubon, Statewide.
- The Trustees, Statewide.
- Wild & Scenic Westfield River in Huntington.
Annual MLK Jr. Celebrations in Western MA

Springfield Celebrates Dr. King
Every year the city of Springfield hosts a Dr. King Day Celebration as a free event open to the public. This celebration honors the legacy of Dr. King.

Northern Berkshire’s MLK Day of Service
Part of a statewide effort to engage communities in service, this annual event offers families the opportunity to participate in one of 17 different meaningful service projects, both on the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts campus in North Adams and within the surrounding community.

Greenfield Community College
GCC offers free family activities in honor of Martin Luther King Jr.’s legacy.

Western Massachusetts division of the American Friends Service Committee
Annual Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Celebration happens in Northampton, featuring learning opportunities for community members of all ages. Past activities have included a walking tour of historic Florence, a children’s program integrating stories, songs and activities for peace and justice, and a banner raising to promote the Black Lives Matter movement.

Berkshire Community College
BCC hosts a day of service to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. with different community projects for volunteers to choose from, such as cooking and serving a community meal, volunteering with Habitat for Humanity, or assisting staff at a community center to run activities for kids.

Think about this:

How do you define “the power of voice?” How can a speech or words shape or inspire social change? How can rhetoric influence ideas?

What are ways in which you can exemplify the value of kindness everyday to help build a more resilient and dynamic community where you live?

What causes do you believe in? Where do you want to give your support as a volunteer in Western MA?
Historically, living without refrigerators in New England required strategies for prolonged food storage and preservation. In the November/December Seasons edition of Learning Ahead, we looked at different forms of food preservation such as curing, pickling and canning. Early New Englanders didn't have the luxury of refrigerators, but they did harvest ice from frozen lakes and ponds in order to keep food stored without spoiling. The frozen chunks of ice harvested were kept insulated by materials such as sawdust in a dark, cool place so that the ice would last beyond the winter months.

Local Living History & Ice Harvesting

The ice harvesting industry in Massachusetts even sent frozen chunks of ice all over the world. Ice would be shipped across the Atlantic to London and was one of America's biggest cash crop commodities, measured by weight.

Given New England's ice harvesting traditions, many local historical societies and museums demonstrate the tools and methods used when harvesting ice from frozen lakes and ponds. Witness firsthand how ice harvesting was done in New England through living history demonstrations. Further your learning about the local ice harvesting industry by utilizing an online resource made available by the Southwick Historical Society (Google “Southwick's Harvested Ice Empire”). Filled with photographs and informative materials, the web page chronicles the rise and fall of the booming ice harvesting industry in Southwick where, thanks to a nearby railroad, it was possible to harvest and transport ice straight to New York City.

Community Events & Resource: Ice Harvesting

The Noble and Cooley Center for Historic Preservation in Granville. Annual ice harvest. Visitors can walk out onto the pond and try out ice harvesting tools for themselves. It is a learning experience to witness firsthand how this task was done.

Old Sturbridge Village in Sturbridge. Fire & Ice Days is an annual celebration with ice harvesting demonstrations showing how 19th century Americans adapted their lifestyles to the cold New England winters.
Hancock Shaker Village in Pittsfield.
Hancock Shaker Village features a 19th century ice house that was used to store harvested ice to help preserve dairy foods. At Hancock Shaker Village, visitors can explore this ice house. Although the current ice house was built in 1894, the village had an ice house since 1844; the cold storage space was used to preserve food, including dairy. Designed to utilize the natural insulation provided by the earth, the building allows warm air to escape out of a cupola in its roof, while allowing ice-cooled air to flow over stored food. Images and an excerpt from the village’s manifesto are available for further learning online (Google “Hancock Shaker Village Ice House”).

Literary Explorations of Ice Harvesting:
Henry David Thoreau & “The Pond in Winter”

As you can see, ice harvesting is embedded within the history and cultural traditions of New England. So much so, in fact, that it also influenced the literary reflections of writers such as Henry David Thoreau who described the harvesting of ice in his
chapter, “The Pond in Winter,” from *Walden*. As you explore ice harvesting through living history demonstrations and artifacts from the past, read Thoreau’s chapter on “The Pond in Winter” for historical understanding from a literary perspective. Writing during the winter season, Thoreau describes how the pond is used during the cold winter months, including the practice of ice harvesting. He writes:

While yet it is cold January, and snow and ice are thick and solid, the prudent landlord comes from the village to get ice to cool his summer drink; impressively, even pathetically, wise, to foresee the heat and thirst of July now in January – wearing a thick coat and mittens! when so many things are not provided for. It may be that he lays up no treasures in this world which will cool his summer drink in the next. He cuts and saws the solid pond, unroofs the house of fishes, and carts off their very element and air, held fast by chains and stakes like corded wood, through the favoring winter air, to wintry cellars, to underlie the summer there. It looks like solidified azure, as, far off, it is drawn through the streets. These ice-cutters are a merry race, full of jest and sport, and when I went among them they were wont to invite me to saw pit-fashion with them, I standing underneath.

**Think about this:**

What were the challenges of ice harvesting that the modern refrigerator eliminates in terms of food preservation and food storage?

How did ice harvesting force New Englanders to think about their daily lives all year round? (Reread Thoreau’s passage for a hint!) How did harvesting ice connect people with the seasons and their natural environments?

Given early New Englanders’ dependency on natural resources, what challenges did New Englanders face that we no longer worry about given our modern technologies? What did they not worry about?
February is National African American History Month in the United States. It is a time to honor the work, achievements and contributions of African Americans. It is also a time to remember the struggle for civil rights and the importance of equality, civic action, social justice and solidarity.

Earlier we discussed the power of voice and words as illustrated by Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech. Continuing this exploration of the inspirational power of words, let’s take a closer look at two poems by African Americans that illustrate the power of voice and words.

Langston Hughes (1902-1967)

This month, we are revisiting poet Langston Hughes. In the Nov/Dec 2016 edition of Learning Ahead we featured Hughes’ poem “Thanksgiving Time.” In this edition we are featuring his poem, “I, Too.”

Hughes was a poet of the Harlem Renaissance, an explosion of social, cultural and artistic ideas that brought together black writers, artists, musicians, and scholars in the 1920’s and 1930’s. It brought to the forefront a new black cultural identity. Its cultural center was Harlem, a neighborhood of New York City. Langston Hughes was at the heart of the Harlem Renaissance and his poetry stands as a testament to this movement of creativity, philosophy and powerful voice (Google "I Too by Langston Hughes Poetry Foundation").

Audre Lorde (1934-1992)

Feminist, civil rights activist, and writer Audre Lorde is known for her poetic exploration of Black feminist identity. The poem “A Woman Speaks” is another example of how the power of voice explodes in poetic verse and demands the reader to pay attention and consider what is written (Google "Audre Lorde Poetry Foundation").
Art and The Civil Rights Movement: 
Norman Rockwell's *The Problem We All Live With*

Norman Rockwell's *The Problem We All Live With*, painted in 1963, is considered an iconic image of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States (Google “Norman Rockwell Problem We All Live With”). The painting depicts six year-old Ruby Bridges walking to school accompanied by four U.S. marshals. As part of desegregation, Ruby was the first African American student to attend the William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The fight for civil rights and desegregation was arduous and difficult. Many opposed desegregation during the 1960’s as Rockwell emphasizes in his painting. Across the wall is written a racial slur; a thrown tomato is on the ground near Ruby’s feet. Look at the painting closely online, or in person in Stockbridge at the Norman Rockwell Museum, a community resource for learning more about Rockwell’s involvement in the Civil Rights Movement.

From what perspective does Rockwell choose to place the viewer? How are the U.S. marshals depicted? Why does he choose to paint them this way? Rockwell shows a stark contrast between Ruby Bridges’ innocence and the violence of the racist epithet on the wall and the red of the tomato splattered on the floor. Rockwell uses this visual contrast, coupled with the viewer’s perspective as a spectator, to emphasize the brutality of racism. Rockwell highlights how segregation and racist violence affects the young and innocent.

African American History in Western Massachusetts:
Harriet Tubman & The Underground Railroad

In addition to your literary explorations of African Americans’ creativity and contributions to U.S. literature, explore African American History Month in Western Massachusetts through the different cultural organizations and institutions that educate the public on the history of African Americans in our region.

One of the most significant pieces of New England history is the Underground Railroad, a network of secret routes, stops, and places throughout 14 northern states that were established to help escaped slaves to freedom.

**Harriet Tubman (1822-1913)**
One famous “conductor” of the Underground Railroad was Harriet Tubman. An escaped slave herself, she risked her life to help approximately 300 slaves escape to freedom by making 19 return trips to the South through the Underground Railroad’s secret network of places and routes.

In April of 2016 Treasury Secretary Jacob J. Lew announced that the front of the new $20 bill will replace the image of Andrew Jackson with the image of Harriet Tubman. He also announced plans to feature the images of leaders of the suffrage movement including Lucretia Mott, Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Alice Paul. Additionally, the reverse of the new $5 bill will include other prominent women and people of color who shaped our democracy such as Marian Anderson, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King Jr. For further reading, see the New York Time’s article “Harriet Tubman Ousts Andrew Jackson in Change for a $20” (Google “Tubman Jackson NY Times”).

Connecting Local Places with National History:
Local Learning Resources on The Underground Railroad

The David Ruggles Center in Florence, MA.
For Early Florence History & Underground Railroad. www.davidrugglescenter.org

The David Ruggles Center features The Ross Homestead which is on both the National Register of Historic Places and the National Park Services Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. The center offers walking tours of Florence including the African-American history trail, Sojourner Truth’s house, and other abolitionist sites. Additionally, there is a memorial statue of Sojourner Truth in Florence, MA, to honor her life and work. A former slave, abolitionist and social activist, Truth lived in Florence from 1843-1856. The Sojourner Truth Memorial organization offers a free map on their website of a self-guided walking tour of Sojourner’s house and historic sites. You can download the map and/or the walking video tours at sojournertruthmemorial.org/walking-tour-map.
The Power of Voice: Sojourner Truth

Delivered in 1851 at the Women’s Convention in Akron, Ohio, Sojourner Truth’s “Ain’t I a Woman?” speech demands equality, asking to be seen as a full member of society, as a woman that deserves the same respect offered to white women. It’s a compelling speech that repeatedly asks “Ain’t I a Woman?” confronting the listener with the alarming injustice of which Truth speaks.

While there is no official transcription of this speech, watch actress Kerry Washington reading Sojourner Truth’s speech online (Google “Kerry Washington Truth Youtube”) and experience the power of voice in her dramatic recreation of Truth’s incredible proclamation “Ain’t I a Woman?

Think about this:

How does Lorde assert the power of Black women through their femininity?

Notice how Lorde’s poem builds to the final stanza in which history and mysticism/magic become intertwined to assert the powerful presence of Black women. How does this poem convey the power of their voice? What is Lorde’s intention with the last stanza and what does she hope to convey to the reader?

How does Hughes use the image of eating in the kitchen vs. at the table in his poem “I, Too” to talk about the importance of civil rights almost 30 years before King delivers his “I Have a Dream” speech?

“I, too, am America” is a powerful phrase. What does Hughes convey in this phrase about social justice and equality?

How do you think a poem like “I, Too” may have been influential in the shaping of the civil rights movement in the 1960's?
Trillions of microbes live inside our bodies, and we wouldn’t be able to survive without each other! Discover what our tiny companions are up to, how diverse they are, and their importance to our personal health. **January 21-May 14.**
In 19th century New England, the winter season was a time for gathering and socializing with family, friends, and neighbors. As the fields lay dormant in anticipation off the agricultural season, rural New Englanders used the cold season as a time for meeting friends, having conversations, and visiting with one another. Before the telephone or telegraph, visiting a friend’s home was a way to share news, gossip, and stories.

Besides visiting a friend’s home, other common gathering places were the general store, taverns, and town meetings. Home visits, encounters with neighbors and local businesses allowed New Englanders to strengthen their community ties and reconnect during a time of year that was generally quiet.

Today in Western Massachusetts winter festivals provide a gathering space for friends, families, and neighbors to get together, visit with each other, tell stories and share news… just as our predecessors in this region did before us. Winter festivals provide the space and occasion for community members to enjoy the winter season through art collaborations, fairs, and winter-themed activities. Additionally, these festivals are a way to explore different art forms, such as ice sculpting, share skills with others, and learn about local history and cultural traditions. Celebrate winter at these annual festivities and start a new family tradition!

**Northampton Ice Arts Festival**

This annual festival has brought temporary ice sculptures to the streets of Northampton since 2010. Offered as a part of the Northampton Center for the Arts’ February installment of Arts Night Out, the Ice Arts Festival offers the chance to
explore the art of ice carving. Artists work away while passersby can check out the different techniques and tools of the trade. Spectators can watch the participants throughout the day and then enjoy the glistening sculptures at night. Visit nohoarts.org to find out this year’s date, time and sculpture locations.

**Easthampton WinterFest**

Since 2013, Easthampton has been bringing together wintry celebrations that explore local history and the local landscape such as ice harvesting on Nashawannuck Pond, nature walks with community partners, wildlife talks and demonstrations, and other festivities such as dance parties, horse-drawn wagon rides and more! To learn about the latest program information for this year, check out: www.nashawannuckpond.org/winterfest.html

**Holyoke Canal District Winter Festival**

Holyoke’s Canal District Winter Festival offers a weekend of activities to bring to life the city’s historic Canal District neighborhood. Visitors can explore this interesting part of the city where the canals are evidence of Holyoke’s once thriving industry. Usually in collaboration with Gateway City Arts, past activities have included a Luminaria Parade, dog show, artisan market, musical performances and the annual firefighters vs. police officers rivalry hockey game! www.gatewaycityarts.com

**Amherst WinterFest**

Amherst WinterFest takes place at the Cherry Hill Golf Course, bringing much excitement to the otherwise quiet, wintry landscape. WinterFest offers fun in many forms. Sledding and cross-country skiing are annual favorites, while a cardboard sled race combines creativity, engineering, and daring for an exciting competition. Families can also use the event as an opportunity to learn how to engage with their natural surroundings during wintertime - for instance, bird watching walks teach
participants how to watch for winter birds common to the hills and forests of western Massachusetts. For more information find WinterFest Amherst on Facebook.

**Pittsfield 10 X 10 Upstreet Arts Festival**

Ten days of community-based cultural events that showcase music, theater, art, local food, play and creativity and celebrate the rich arts and culture found in the communities of the Berkshires. Past events have included a fireworks display, a kid-run farmers’ market, and performances in collaboration with the Berkshire Museum. [www.discoverpittsfield.com/10x10](http://www.discoverpittsfield.com/10x10)

**North Adams WinterFest**

Rounding out the winter festival season is North Adams’ WinterFest celebration. Including special events in the city’s downtown area, WinterFest offers families a chance to celebrate the coming end of the last of the wintriest months. A full schedule of events is forthcoming; highlights will definitely include ice sculpting, horse-drawn wagon rides, a chowder competition, and a community bonfire with hot chocolate for all. [explorenorthadams.com](http://explorenorthadams.com)

**Think about this:**

What are the tools used in sculpting ice? What are the challenges ice sculptors face that other sculptors of different media don’t?

How would families and neighbors gather in the winter before the invention of automobiles and highways? How did the inability to travel far distances impact communities and relationships?

How do winter festivals gather communities together? What types of activities do they host in order to foster connection and togetherness during the colder months?
Every year Valentines are sent to loved ones, family and friends as a gesture of kindness. Interestingly, this sweet act of thoughtfulness originated right here in Massachusetts!

The Art, History & Paper of Valentines

Mt. Holyoke College graduate, Esther Howland, started the American valentine industry with her beautiful paper valentines sourced through her father’s paper company in the mid-19th century. Howland, also a Worcester native, began her own business 5 years later in 1848: The New England Valentine Company.

Howland’s valentines featured lacy, cut paper with ornate and decorative images. At Mt. Holyoke College’s Archives and Special Collections there are many examples of Howland’s valentines with designs heavily influenced by Victorian style. By the 1860’s, Esther was selling $100,000 worth of valentines a year. (That’s over 2 million dollars today!)

In honor of this Mt. Holyoke alumna’s success and contribution to the history of paper goods and Valentine’s Day, the college’s Archives and Special Collections displays a student-curated exhibit case of valentines in the Library’s courtyard. Curious to see some of the collection’s valentines? Take a look online: www.pinterest.com/mhchainesspec/from-mhc-with-love

Esther relied on her father’s local paper company to start the business. In the mid-19th century these types of mills were more common. Which paper mill is the oldest? That would be Crane & Co. in Dalton, MA!

Local History Spotlight: Crane & Co.

More than 200 years ago a patriot named Stephen Crane opened up a paper mill to print patriotic newspapers and colonial currency in support of the colonists’ rebellion against England. In 1799, Crane’s son chose a new location for the mill along the Housatonic River in Dalton and Crane & Co stationery was born. Crane & Co. stationery still prints on 100% cotton and is still in Dalton, MA. They also print our American currency! The Crane Paper Museum is open to the public June-October.
For more information about the museum visit: www.crane.com/about-us/crane-museum-of-papermaking

- **Interesting Fact:** Did you know that Holyoke became the world’s largest center for papermaking with over twelve major paper mills? A walking tour of the city near the canal district still shows the architecture and remaining infrastructure of the city’s booming industry: wistariahurst.org/walk-holyoke

**Bringing Together History, Tradition, & Culture**

At the heart of valentine swapping is kindness. What better way to demonstrate thoughtfulness than to make your own valentines for those you care for and love?

Research Esther Howland’s various designs, visit local art stores and shops to source interesting paper materials, and make some handmade valentines to give to family and friends.

Looking to further your connection to community in a non-commercial way through art and kindness? Push back against the commercialization of yet another holiday!
Participate in **Hilltown Families**’ annual **Handmade Valentine Swap** for Western MA families! Started in 2007, anyone can participate in this intergenerational swap. It’s an opportunity to be creative and connect with neighbors, strangers, and friends in your community through the US Postal Service! Thousands of handmade valentines have been swapped over the years, supporting creative-free play while offering a non-commercial way to celebrate kindness and friendship.

Everyone who signs up for this annual tradition receives a list of people to whom they will send their handmade valentines in the mail. Participants will receive handmade valentines from neighbors they may know and others whom they have yet to meet. It’s an opportunity to engage with community members of different ages, towns, and backgrounds in a non-commercial and creative way!

For more information about this year’s Handmade Valentine Swap visit [www.HilltownFamilies.org](http://www.HilltownFamilies.org).

**Think about this:**

How has the Valentine card industry changed over the years?

In addition to participating in Hilltown Families Handmade Valentine Swap, what are other non-commercial ways you can celebrate Valentine’s Day with loved ones and friends? How can the giving of a handmade valentine be an expression of kindness?

When was the last time you sat down to write a letter on paper? Where did that paper come from? How did the manufacturing of that paper impact the community and environment from which it originated?
Presidents' Day celebrates the life and work of George Washington. It comes every year on the third Monday of February. Although Washington’s birthday is on February 22nd, the holiday is celebrated on the third Monday to allow us to enjoy a three day weekend.

The Four Freedoms

Presidents' Day is also a chance to explore the tenets of democracy and civil freedoms. As mentioned in the November/December Seasons edition of Learning Ahead, President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms, as outlined in his 1941 State of the Union address, emphasize the importance of the freedom of speech and expression, the freedom to worship, freedom from want, and freedom from fear. Remember that you can visit the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge to see Rockwell’s four paintings based on Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms speech from 1941.

Throughout this Itinerary so far, the power of voice has been a strong and present theme. Democracy, as FDR emphasizes in his four freedoms speech, rests on the freedom of speech, the ability to voice your thoughts and speak your mind. At the heart of the freedom of speech and expression is the freedom to use words, story, narrative and voice to share ideas. Some of the greatest literature has been used as a vehicle to voice an ethical philosophy or to act on behalf of social justice. The shared dialogue between author and reader through the written word also depends on the freedom to read. Literature and the power of voice is a shared exchange in which ideas are spoken or written to be heard and read.

The Right to Read

Interestingly, the freedom to read has not always been seen as a freedom. Citing the freedom to read as a part of our Constitution’s First Amendment, the American Library Association hosts a Banned Books Week every year to celebrate the freedom to read. As they write on their website, “Banned Books Week brings together the entire book community - librarians, booksellers, publishers, journalists, teachers and
readers of all types – in shared support of the freedom to seek and to express ideas, even those some consider unorthodox or unpopular.”

Here is a list from The American Library Association of the top 20 American novels that have been challenged. Have you read any of them?

1. *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald
2. *The Catcher in the Rye*, by J.D. Salinger
3. *The Grapes of Wrath*, by John Steinbeck
4. *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee
5. *The Color Purple*, by Alice Walker
6. *Ulysses*, by James Joyce
7. *Beloved*, by Toni Morrison
8. *The Lord of the Flies*, by William Golding
9. *1984*, by George Orwell
10. *Lolita*, by Vladimir Nabokov
11. *Of Mice and Men*, by John Steinbeck
13. *Brave New World*, by Aldous Huxley
14. *Animal Farm*, by George Orwell
15. *The Sun Also Rises*, by Ernest Hemingway
16. *As I Lay Dying*, by William Faulkner
17. *A Farewell to Arms*, by Ernest Hemingway
18. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston
19. *Invisible Man*, by Ralph Ellison
20. *Song of Solomon*, by Toni Morrison

To learn more about frequently challenged books, visit www.ala.org/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks.

**Local Presidential History**

Ever cross the bridge over the Connecticut River that connects Hadley to Northampton? That’s the Calvin Coolidge Bridge named after President Calvin Coolidge who attended Amherst College and later moved to Northampton. The Calvin Coolidge Presidential Library and Museum at the Forbes Library is also named for the U.S.’s 30th President.

Calvin Coolidge attended Amherst College. In 1896 he ran for public office in Northampton and won the election for city council. In 1898 he ran for City Solicitor, an
office he held for two years as a Republican. The following year he opened a private practice as a lawyer. In 1906 Coolidge was nominated as the Republican nominee for the state House of Representatives and won. Then, Coolidge was a part of a progressive Republican party voting for women’s suffrage and the direct election of Senators. In 1910 Coolidge ran for mayor of Northampton and won. After one term he ran for State Senate and served that office for three years and then as President of the Massachusetts State Senate for one more year before he ran for Governor. Coolidge was Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts from 1916-1919 and then Governor from 1919-1921 before he ran for vice president with Warren G. Harding. Coolidge became President of the United States after Harding’s death in August 1923. He held office until 1929 and afterwards returned to Northampton.

The Calvin Coolidge Presidential Library and Museum
Forbes Library, Northampton
This museum houses a collection of materials related to Calvin Coolidge’s life. These research materials are available to historians and researchers interested in the public and private life of Calvin Coolidge. The Coolidge Collection was established in 1920 when Calvin Coolidge was Governor of Massachusetts. Coolidge began giving documents and memorabilia to the Forbes Library. This collection also includes two portraits, one of Coolidge and one of his wife Grace created by painter Howard Chandler Christy. The museum is available during the library’s open hours and by appointment.

To learn more about this community resource, visit online at forbeslibrary.org/calvin-coolidge-presidential-library-and-museum

Think about this:

What books have you read that were once banned or on a challenged list?

What does the freedom to read mean to you?

What was the literacy rate among women in the United States in the 18th century?
   What was it later in the 19th century?

How can literacy, the right to read, and the value of reading literature help shape an ethical and compassionate democracy?
We’re spoiled in Western Massachusetts! Our summers are a bounty of local agriculture and food. We have the opportunity to eat seasonally most of the year and then winter arrives, the summer farmers’ markets disappear, and our kitchens feel a little lackluster. What do we cook without all of the colorful foods of summer?

Cooking Seasonally

The beauty of New England living is that each season offers a new way to learn and engage our communities. Food is an available tool that can help us understand how to connect to local agriculture even in the winter.

For winter cooking, it’s time to utilize the heat of the oven, something often avoided during the heat of the summer months. This is the season to bake, roast, and stew. It’s the time of year when the preserved and canned foods from the summer and fall harvests can be taken out of storage to enjoy. It’s a different way of eating – one that is intended to be hearty and warming - perfect for greeting the cold weather.

As mentioned earlier itinerary, winter is a time for gathering with friends - and what better way than with a home-cooked meal to be enjoyed together using locally produced ingredients? Preparing a meal together is an opportunity for intergenerational exchange (passing down recipes from older family members or neighbors) as well as for skill-sharing (what cooking technique are you interested in learning from a friend?). Start by visiting the local winter markets for inspiration and then gather friends and family for a warming meal shared together!
Winter Farmers’ Markets

Although the summer markets have ended, there is still fresh, local food to enjoy even during the blustery winter weather. Some of these foods include grains, potatoes, Swiss chard, mustard greens, kale, brassica (Brussels sprout, bok choy, tatsoi, cabbage, rutabaga, broccoli), root vegetables, garlic and onions!

In addition to perusing the array of local foods, shoppers can attend educational workshops scheduled during each market. Workshops range in topic from simple cheese-making and canning to growing grains and preparing herbal medicine. All the workshop leaders are local people who practice these skills at home.

Explore food through history

One way to get some inspiration for your next winter culinary adventure is to visit living history museums such as Historic Deerfield and Old Sturbridge Village. Both institutions offer hearth cooking classes. Additionally, a stroll through Old Sturbridge Village during the winter time offers you a peek into New Englanders’ daily living routines and food preparations from the 19th century. Visitors can see firsthand what types of recipes 19th century Americans were preparing during the cold months of the year.

Sample dishes that were prepared during the winter season include chicken pie, broiled sweet potatoes, stewed beets, soup, hot cakes, Indian Pudding, and breads. Be sure to remember hot chocolate and coffee too! 19th century New Englanders roasted and brewed coffee at home. It was a season for lots of baking, hearty soups/stews and meats.

Don’t forget to revisit Lydia Maria Child’s The American Frugal Housewife. Her section on vegetables explains how vegetables should be stored during different seasons. Read this excerpt to get a “taste”:

Parsnips should be kept down cellar, covered up in sand, entirely excluded from the air. They are good only in the spring.

Cabbages put into a hole in the ground will keep well during the winter, and be hard, fresh and sweet, in the spring. Many farmers keep potatoes in the same way.
“Onions should be kept very dry, and never carried into the cellar except in severe weather, when there is danger of their freezing. By no means let them be in the cellar after March; they will sprout and spoil. Potatoes should likewise be carefully looked to in the spring, and the sprouts broken off. The cellar is the best place for them, because they are injured by wilting; but sprout them carefully, if you want to keep them. They never sprout but three times; therefore, after you have sprouted them three times, they will trouble you no more.

Squashes should never be kept down cellar when it is possible to prevent it. Dampness injures them. If intense cold makes it necessary to put them there, bring them up as soon as possible, and keep them in some dry, warm place.” (p. 33-34)
Think about this:

Vicki Robin, author of *Blessing the Hands that Feed Us*, spent one month on a diet that consisted of foods that originated no further than 10 miles from her home. It radically changed her perception of eating local and cooking. How do you think your food consumption would change if you were to eat only foods from within 10 miles of your home? What foods would you not have access to and how would it impact your diet seasonally?

What similar recipes did 19th century New Englanders prepare that are still made in our kitchens? Are there recipes you prepare today that are contemporary versions of a traditional diet?

How does mass production and transportation impact our consumption of food and our sense of place? Are there foods you consume about which you do not know how they grow or how they are produced?

How could a farmers’ market support your interest in local food, sustainability and the culinary arts? Are there skills you could learn? Questions that could be answered? Recipes that could be shared?
While in the summertime it seems easy to explore a multitude of activities, the wintertime provides the space for quieter activities, new hobbies, or creative outlets that encourage reflection. The intense winter storms and their impact on travel keep us inside to discover new activities or pastimes. Winter days feel quiet and reflective as our time indoors beckons us to think more about how to spend our time intentionally.

The Art of Letter Writing

When was the last time you wrote a handwritten letter to someone? In the age of quick text messaging, instant emails and continuous communication, letter writing is beginning to feel like a lost art. Take paper (maybe made locally by Crane & Co.) and pen, and set time aside to write a letter to a friend, family member, or neighbor. Particularly when the weather is ferocious outside and a Nor’easter is upon us, seize the opportunity to sit down with pen, paper, and the backdrop of falling snow to compose a multi-page letter. Unlike computer keyboards, there is no backspace key or delete function. It’s the chance to move slowly, choosing words carefully and with care; to meditate on what you want to want to communicate. Letter writing connects people and lets the recipient hold onto the letter as a keepsake. The art of letter writing can preserve a fond memory or anecdote. It can be a record of friendship.

The Epistolary Novel

The Epistolary Novel is a genre of literature focused on letter writing. These books or novels tell their stories through letters the characters write to each other or sometimes even through diary entries. Some well-known epistolary novels to check out at your local Western MA library include:

- **The Color Purple** - Alice Walker
- **Les Liaisons Dangereuses** - Pierre Choderlos de Laclos
- **Lady Susan** - Jane Austen
- **Letters of Two Brides** - Honore de Balzac
- **Poor Folk** - Fyodor Dostoyevsky
- **The Tenant of Wildfell Hall** - Anne Brontë
Local Literary Musings: William Cullen Bryant’s *A Winter Piece*

Remember Cummington native William Cullen Bryant, who was featured in the Sept/Oct 2016 edition of Learning Ahead? After a career in New York, Bryant returned to his childhood home in Cummington when he was 71. Bryant’s early poetry is very much influenced by the landscape of the Western Massachusetts Hilltowns of his youth. In fact, Bryant’s *A Winter Piece* is a reflection on this time of year. Even though the summer is gone, Bryant notes in his poem how winter has an unexpected beauty that is still marvelous to behold. The poem is a meditation on this season, and one to read on a quiet winter’s day or perhaps before a winter walk in the woods (Google “Bryant Winter Piece Poetry Foundation”). The first part of Bryant’s poem refers to the woods where he hiked as a child near the Rivulet. Visitors can still go to this hiking spot, now a trail maintained by The Trustees of Reservations at the William Cullen Bryant Homestead in Cummington.

**Meditation**

Snow can make you feel as though the world has stopped around you. During snowstorms, travel is suspended, and, for a day or two, the quiet of the outdoors reminds us to simply enjoy the moment and to be mindful.

Meditation is a practice in which awareness is focused on the present moment. There are many different ways to meditate and be mindful of the present moment. It’s something you can practice in any space and at any time. The rhythm of snow falling and the slower pace of winter provide a contemplative setting for the practice of slowing down in order to focus on the moment.

Additionally, as the season of giving thanks has ended, wintertime is now an occasion to set the year’s intentions and reflect. Traditionally, intentions are set on New Year’s Eve; however, the pensive nature and silent voice of winter provide the atmosphere to connect with your inner self and meditate on personal intentions.
Curious to explore mindfulness and meditation? In Western Massachusetts there are many community-based resources and spaces for people to learn about and practice mindfulness:

**Resource Centers**

**The Insight Meditation Center of the Pioneer Valley** runs sitting meditation sessions for various ages, demographics, and experience levels. There are special sessions for parents, experienced meditators, people of color, and young adults between the ages of 18 to mid 30s. This organization is located in Eastworks in Easthampton, MA.

**Inward Bound Mindfulness Education** is a Massachusetts-based organization with many resources for learning about mindfulness on their web site, including a lecture on teen brain development and listings for adult and teen retreats.

Three Sisters Sanctuary in Goshen, MA.

Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield
Peaceful Places

Besides workshops, sitting sessions, and retreats, there are also beautiful, peaceful places in Western Massachusetts where you can go to practice mindfulness independently while strengthening your sense of connection to where you live. The Rivulet Trail at the William Cullen Bryant Homestead is a sacred place with old growth forest. The Peace Pagoda in Leverett, the Three Sisters Sanctuary in Goshen, the Bridge of Flowers in Shelburne Falls and the Chesterfield Gorge in West Chesterfield are just a few suggestions.

Yoga Classes

In addition to being a worthwhile way to improve strength and flexibility, and decrease pain, yoga practice can be paired with mindfulness practice too. Yoga sessions often ask participants to focus on their breath and the present moment as they hold postures. There are innumerable yoga courses available for purchase in the region, including free yoga classes often offered at public libraries, and group classes offered at community centers, including COA’s and YMCA’s.

New Pastimes or Creative Activities

Winter is a great time to pick up a new indoor hobby since we tend to spend more time inside. It’s also an opportunity to enjoy a new recipe, pursue creative writing, engage in storytelling, or make art. Here are ten suggestions to get started:

1. Knitting
2. Embroidery
3. Journaling
4. Woodworking
5. Poetry
6. Short story writing
7. Painting
8. Yoga
9. Genealogical research
10. Brewing

Wind Chimes in West Chesterfield, MA.
Photo Credit: Sienna Wildfield
Think about this:

What activities or hobbies are you interested in pursuing during the winter months? Have these interests changed over the years? Why?

How can you incorporate a mindful practice into your daily winter routine? How does the stillness of winter support a meditation practice?

How much was the first postage stamp in the United States? What is the origin and history behind the postage stamp?

When was cursive handwriting first developed? Is it still taught in school?

What types of skill sharing do you think happened in early New England during the winter months? What pastimes or skills were passed down from generation to generation?
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