

Birch Grove Community School & Community Service Weekly Newsletter

December 4, 2025

Monday-Thursday, December 8-11 ~ Scholastic Holiday Bookfair

Wednesday, December 10 ~ *Elfis and the Sleigh Riders* musical at 1pm & 6pm

Thursday, December 11 ~ K-5 Field Trip to Grand Marais, musical *The Witch's Princess*

Tuesday, December 16 ~ School Board Meeting at 4:00pm

Monday, December 22 – January 2 ~ Winter Break

Monday, January 5 ~ Return of K-5, Saplings and Seedlings

Mission Statement:

Birch Grove Community School will promote academic excellence utilizing our unique natural setting to prepare students to become socially and environmentally responsible, self-directed, life-long learners.

From Ms. Diane Blanchette:

School Director, Birch Grove Community School

Lead Coordinator, Birch Grove Community Service

It has been a whirlwind here with getting back in the swing of things after the Thanksgiving break, and preparing for an exciting and short December! Our entryway tree was put up before we left on break so that when children returned on Monday morning, they were greeted with a new festive scene.

The gym is in transformation for the upcoming musical, *Elfis and the Sleigh Riders*, with practice happening daily. It is quite a task to create a musical with children K-5 and everyone is doing great! There will be two performances next week on Wednesday, one at 1:00 and an evening performance at 6:00. The Saplings will be doing a few numbers to start the show and warm up the audience! Please have your K-5 and/or Sapling here on site at 5:45 and send your child directly to their classroom where your child's teacher will be waiting for them. Please don't arrive early – the doors will not open until 5:45. We are excited to perform for everyone!





Birch Buddies ~ ART! Afterschool program:

Friday, December 5 ~ *Solstice Lanterns*
Friday, December 12 ~ *Gingerbread Houses*
Friday, December 19 ~ *Twig Trees*



Birch Buddies ~ Board Games! Afterschool program:

Tuesday, November 25
Tuesday, December 2
Tuesday, December 9
Tuesday, December 16



Saplings and K-5 go outside everyday in all but the most severe weather. We feel it is important to get outside everyday for fresh air, movement and touching base with nature! Please ensure that your child comes with the following everyday – If you need help getting anything on this list, let us know as we may be able to help!

- Winter jacket
- Snowpants
- Winter Boots
- Gloves (water proof preferred)
 - Hat
- Facemasks are great!
- Scarves are great!

The Saplings room has new flooring! Thanks to an award from Parent Aware and support from Cook County's DEED grant, a new tile floor was installed over the Thanksgiving break - and yes, we are thankful for this!

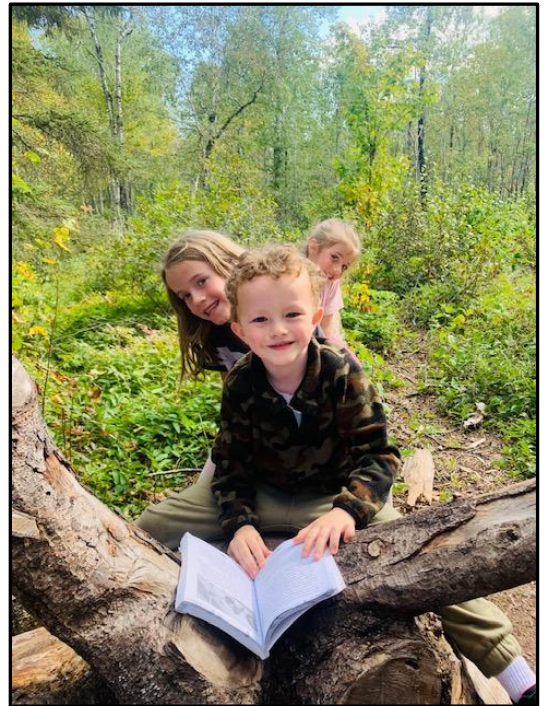


The Saplings made gingerbread houses this week - how festive! It was finger lickin' good fun!

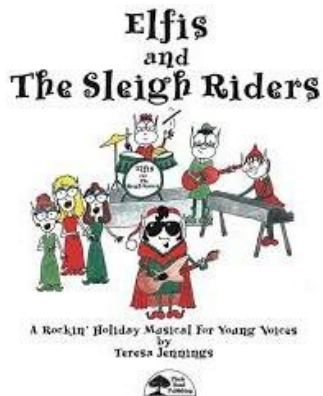
<https://www.birchgroveschool.com/Saplings-Program>



THANK YOU!!



Birch Grove received \$26,050 on Give to the Max Day! \$25,650 through GiveMN, and \$400 additional dollars came directly to BG on this day. Thank you so much for those of you that were able to donate to our school and for believing in what we do ~ your support means the world to us!



It's nearly here ~ the annual winter musical is on Wednesday, December 10th, with performances at 1pm and 6pm. The musical selected for this year is *Elfis and The Sleigh Riders*, a rockin' holiday musical for young voices by Teresa Jennings. The Saplings will be opening the show with a few numbers of their own!!

The evening performance will include cookies after the show, a treat from Ms. Claus, a photo op with Santa himself, and everyone may shop at the annual Scholastic Holiday bookfair, if you choose!
Books make great holiday gifts and promote READING! Yay!



Elfis and The Sleigh Riders



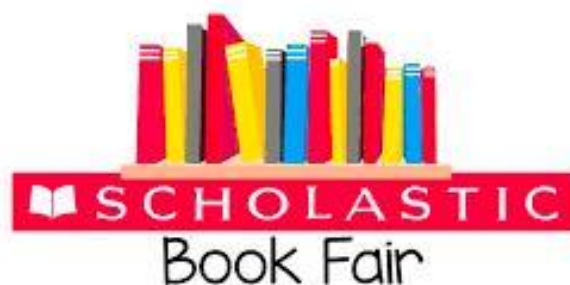
A Rockin' Holiday Musical For Young Voices
by
Teresa Jennings



K-5 students and Saplings should arrive at Birch Grove at 5:45 on Wednesday, December 10 for the evening performance that will start as close to 6:00 as possible. K-5 and Saplings should report directly to their classroom and parents/family can go directly to the gym to find their seats. The building doors will not open until 5:45.

We look forward seeing all of you!

Once again, Jon & Shirley Heinzen donated \$500 so that Birch Grove children can pick out a reading book of their very own at the annual Scholastic Holiday Bookfair! They also brought another \$500 donation from Jon's sister, Barbara Heinzen! Thank you so much! The bookfair is open next week, Monday-Thursday, December 8-11 – see hours below. You can also shop after the musical on Wednesday next week ~ shows at 1pm & 6pm! Books make great gifts for the holiday season!



The annual Scholastic Holiday Book Fair!

***Monday, December 8** 9:00am-3:00pm

***Tuesday, December 9** 9:00am-3:00pm

***Wednesday, December 10** 9:00am-3:00pm
And after the 6:00pm musical show

***Thursday, December 11** 9:00am-3:00pm

Please have your child read (or be read to) 20-30 minutes per day/night (or more!). If there is one thing that you can do at home that has a huge positive impact on your child's academic growth, this is it! Happy reading!



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www.birchgroveschool.com

School Spirit Store Link: <https://birchgrove.logosoftwear.com/> You can use GRAB15 for 15% off

Face Book: [Birch Grove Community School and Community Services #4145 | Facebook](#)



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### From Ms. Emily VanDoren

*Seedling Teacher, Birch Grove Community Service*

Let it snow! The Seedlings embraced winter this week with a focus on snow. Our sensory table was transformed into a winter wonderland filled with white felt, foam snowflake shapes, cotton balls, and white plastic cups that were decorated to look like snowmen. Fine motor skills were practiced as they pulled apart the cotton balls and filled the cups before dumping them out to make it snow. A sensory bottle filled with cotton balls and snowflake buttons was also a fun activity that the Seedlings enjoyed this week.

The older Seedlings created a snowman craft that doubled as a sensory activity. A circle was cut from a white paper plate and packaging tape was added to create a sticky surface. They were then given cotton balls to pull apart and stick to the tape. This activity worked their hand muscles, fine motor skills, and their hand-eye coordination. Once they finished adding the cotton, a snow man face was added to complete the project. We also worked fine motor skills by painting a snow scene on blue construction paper by using cotton swabs and white paint. We also colored a snowflake coloring sheet with crayons.



We read *I am Snow* by Jean Marzollo that taught the Seedlings about snow and snowflakes in an age appropriate way. We also read books this week that showed the Seedlings various fun activities that can be done out in the snow such as *Six Snowy Sheep* by Judith Enderle and *The Snowy Day* by Ezra

Jack Keats. We closed out the week by reading *There Was a Cold Lady Who Swallowed Some Snow!* by Lucille Colandro.

Since the temperatures are a bit too cold for the Seedlings to go outside, we decided to bring some snow inside by creating a taste safe snow recipe by mixing together baking soda, sugar, cornstarch, cream of tartar and some water. The mixture was then cooled down in the refrigerator to really enhance the experience. All the Seedlings enjoyed this fun sensory experience.

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From Ms. Pam Holm

Sapling Teacher, Birch Grove Community Service

Upon returning from Thanksgiving break, Saplings were greeted by the newly installed vinyl tile flooring. Although some finishing touches remain, the room boasts a refreshed look.

Saplings *ran, ran, as fast as they could* this week, exploring the timeless tale of The Gingerbread Man. Through their active participation, each Sapling representing a character, they brought the story to life. After the reading, we examined the characters' actions and quotes, fostering a deeper understanding of the narrative. Our literary adventure continued with Jan Brett's captivating Gingerbread series, including *Gingerbread Friends*, *Gingerbread Baby*, and *Gingerbread Christmas*.

Tuesday's STEAM project witnessed the creation of Gingerbread houses, filling the classroom with an uplifting aroma that sparked imagination. The following day, Saplings decorated Gingerbread people, unleashing their creativity. They practiced singing and dancing *The Gingerbread Cookie Dance*, developing their gross motor skills and confidence through outdoor activities, running like the gingerbread man.

Friday will be *Fizzing Candy Canes* as we conduct another STEAM experiment. Utilizing a chemical reaction between baking soda and vinegar to produce a fizzy, bubbling effect on candy canes. This experiment will serve as an engaging method to explore fundamental chemistry concepts such as acid-base reactions and chemical change, as well as gas production. Saplings will observe candy canes fizz, bubble, and pop as the reaction occurs.



Our academic focus this week was concentrated on the letters G and C, reinforced through a Gingerbread sensory bin activity designed to refine writing skills. They worked on early math skills by counting and sorting gingerbread buttons, making patterns with gingerbread men, and practicing their shapes to build gingerbread houses. Additionally, numerous gingerbread and candied themed matching and counting puzzle activities were available. Thank you for ensuring your children are warmly dressed for this winter.

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**From Ms. Sara Knottski**  
*K & 1<sup>st</sup> Grade Elementary Teacher*

It has been a crazy, busy week. The musical took up a lot of our afternoons this week. It will be a very successful performance, and the students are excited and happy to perform for their families next week!

This week, kindergarten practiced reading CVC stories and writing sentences. We focused on handwriting and writing complete sentences. There have been a lot of improvements lately! We also practiced breaking down teen numbers into tens and extras. First graders reviewed blends this week and learned about the "th" sound. We continue to practice reading with speed and understanding. Students have been taking home mini consumable books that they can keep. Practice reading these with your child to help with their growth! In math, we are learning about missing addends and decoding story problems. We are excelling at our math facts and story problems!



Please continue to read for 20 minutes a night with your child. It can make a huge difference in the amount of growth and learning in a year. Utilize some of our online resources for different math and reading practices, and use those consumable books!

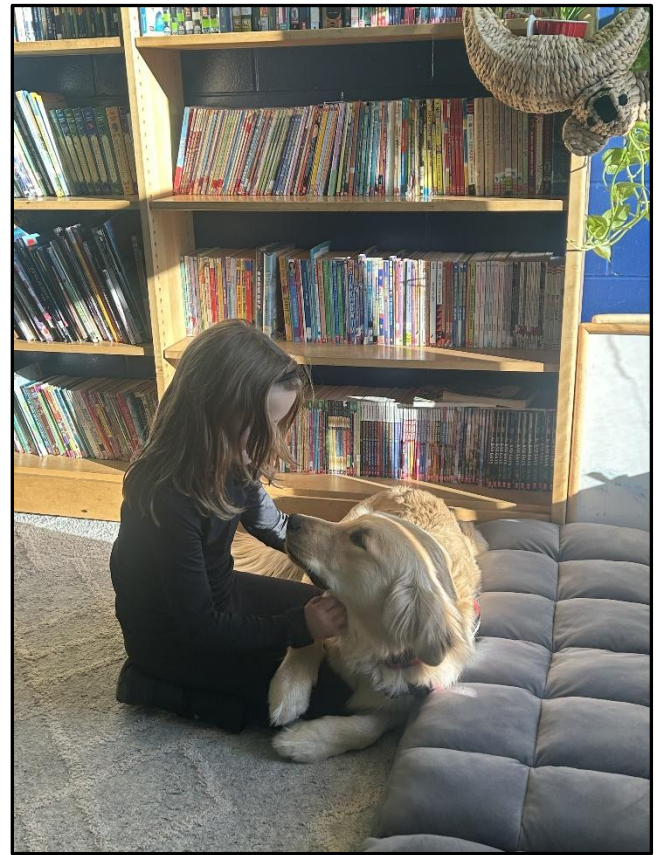
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From Ms. Samantha Forster
2nd & 3rd Grade Elementary Teacher

This week has been all about the musical! We have been practicing like crazy and the students have been putting in so much effort. It will be exciting to see them perform next Wednesday! Because of

the musical, we have adjusted our schedule to fit in practice each day. During snack time, I have been reading Matilda out loud as a read aloud. This book has a diverse vocabulary and has interesting talking points to discuss as a class. We also have been playing lots of checkers and doing puzzles for our indoor brain break. We are going to do winter themed art for the month of December and we started with some beautiful birch trees.

In reading, our main focus has been writing this week. We are writing a narrative text that involves students imagining they were a teacher for the day. Some decided they would be a college professor while some wanted to teach kindergarten. We also talked about the suffix “-ly” and how it has the magic powers to change the words part of speech. I focus a lot on the functions of words within sentences as this can help students create a better understanding of more complex words. We also reviewed commas and read a passage on why sleep is so important for students. Lastly, our sound of the week was “OI/OY.” I paired this with a word sort and a decodable passage to help students work on decoding multisyllabic words that involve this sound.



Math had a focus around subtraction and elapsed time. The second graders were focused on multi-digit subtraction with regrouping. This is the most complex concept they have encountered so far so I am spending the week practicing this skill. Third graders are focusing on elapsed time as well as adding and subtracting time. These skills are prominent in standardized testing and are hard to master so we are also spending the week practicing problems so students can build confidence.

Next week is a busy, busy week. We have lots of musical practice, the musical performances, and a special field trip to see a musical. Make sure students have lots of rest and some extra snacks as they can become easily fatigued and we want them to all feel energized to perform!

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From Ms. Stacy Coronis

4th & 5th Grade Elementary Teacher

Students in our 4 / 5 room have been busy practicing for the Birch Grove Winter Musical. We are putting the finishing touches on our songs, speaking parts, and costume planning. We are excited to share it with our families next week! On a sad note, we continue to miss our beloved class hamster, Piggy.

In reading this week we read a historical fiction story about African American Storm Warriors from the late 1800's. These men would swim into the Atlantic Ocean if ships crashed on the rocks while coming to shore. We practiced drawing conclusions and making inferences using information from the text and recording our inferences on a T chart. Making inferences is what good readers do when they read a story and can draw conclusions from the text along with their background knowledge to comprehend the information. Making inferences is a complex reading skill! We decided that being a storm warrior and rescuing people from ocean shipwrecks must have been a very dangerous and difficult job!



In math we have started our division unit. First we worked at the concrete level by making up story problems and using small cubes and mats to model the division problems. Next we “leveled up” and solved basic and long division problems without the manipulatives. Once we could abstractly understand division, it made it much easier to learn the algorithm for long division. Finally, we learned the definitions for divisor, dividend, quotient and remainders. 5th graders worked on turning the remainders into a fraction in their quotient.

In science class we are still in our food web unit and spent time learning about producers, consumers, and how plants and animals work together to keep the carbon dioxide and oxygen levels safe for their ecosystems. Before Thanksgiving break we started growing vegetables using hydronics which requires no soil, but rather the crops grow in water. Many of our onions and celery pieces have shown a lot of growth. This proved our theory that plants can grow matter from just the air, sun and water and do not need soil to facilitate growth.

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