

Five things to do on... a snowy day

How to make the most of snow activities this winter. By *Julie Mountain*

Wrapped up warmly, and with hot chocolate back indoors, children will adore exploring their changed landscape, so seize the opportunities of magical snowy days by using them as a resource for learning through play.

1. SNOW SCULPTURES

Let children's imaginations take them beyond a snowman or snow angel:

- Ask children to bring in a photograph of a family or neighbour's pet. Sculpt the pet in snow, adding texture and colour with found natural objects such as broken-up pinecones, leaves, mud and twigs.
- Pack a handful of snow onto a tree trunk and sculpt it into a self-portrait using clay-sculpting tools. Add hair, eyes and lips with found objects.
- Build a snow town for the small-world vehicles, dinosaurs and people. Scoop out roads, build tiny houses and sculpt trees.

Snow Play by Birgitta Ralston is full of sumptuous pictures and brilliant snow sculpture ideas.

2. SNOW DENS

Make the most of wintry darkness to create, and light, dens and shelters. Battery-operated LEDs (try a pound shop or DIY store) will turn a daylight snow den into an atmospheric burrow



of night-time delight. Flickering and coloured LEDs will add extra drama.

Build an igloo (left) and use LEDs for atmosphere (below)

- Rectangular moulds are readily available to compress snow into large bricks for building life-sized igloos. Pack the snow bricks really tightly together, filling in any gaps with more snow, so that the igloo is strong and stable. Try adding food colouring to some of the bricks!
- Tiny snow habitats (perhaps for small-world creatures) are quick and easy to build, and look stunning when lit from inside with coloured LEDs. Children can make a dome and then punch a hole into the front for an 'entrance'.
- After a really heavy snowfall, use



drifting snow as the start of a sculpted snow den – packing snow upwards and outwards to make a roof and walls.

3. SNOW BALLS

There's so much more to snowballs than the traditional snowball fight:

- Make a tiny snowball with a group of children and roll it around, gathering snow until everyone has to help in order to keep it growing.
- Read the story, then build a giant Very Hungry Caterpillar with different sized snowballs.
- Pile snowballs into a hollow pyramid or tower, then place LED lights inside it for a glowing outdoor lantern.
- Play target games with snowballs. Provide targets on a wall and on the ground, as well as hoops hanging from trees – with bonus points for hitting the tree trunk through the hoop. Add simple addition and number recognition by labelling targets; Blu Tack magnetic or foam letters to a wall for children to aim at.

4. SNOW PICTURES

A snowfall turns even the most familiar objects into mysterious shapes. Take a walk around the snowscape, describing what you see, and imagining what might be hidden under the blanket of snow. What pictures can children see in their minds?

Add a few drops of food colouring to the water in trigger-spray bottles and use it to mark-make on the snow. Try rainbow colours; spray gently (for example, with the nozzle set to wide) so that the colour lies on top of the snow rather than denting it.

5. SNOW MATHS

Children at Auchlone Nature Kindergarten celebrate Fibonacci Day each year by playing with maths and building spiralling artworks in the autumn leaves (see www.mathsisfun.com/numbers/fibonacci-sequence.html).

Explore snowball spirals, draw patterns in the snow with sticks, or clear snow to reveal the surface below in a colour contrast spiral. Examine snowflakes, frozen spiders' webs, leaf arrangements and other natural materials transformed by frost and snow. ■

RISKS...AND BENEFITS

It's important that we enable children to enjoy the fun of snow play, but there is no denying the misery of chilblains and runny noses.

- Plan snow-play for short, physically active bursts during the day, maintaining the joy and anticipation and giving children a chance to dry off and warm up before heading out again later.
- Snow can mask hazards on the ground, and while it will cushion minor falls, inspect the area. Sometimes the weight of snow can affect trees' and structural objects' integrity.
- Snow dens will only stay strong while the temperature is below zero; keep an eye on them and don't allow children to play inside them once they begin to thaw.
- Earmark a warm indoor space for hanging wet snowsuits and padded waterproof gloves so that they dry quickly, ready for re-use later.
- Provide a bucket of warm socks and fleecy blankets for snuggling up when children return indoors. A ready supply of warm drinks is bound to go down well too.