

MISSISSIPPI CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

ROCKY'S READER

A REACH OUT AND READ NEWSLETTER



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HEAR FROM MCM STAFF

Dear Parents & Caregivers of Mississippi,

As the Assistant Director of Statewide Outreach for the Mississippi Children's Museum, I am thrilled to connect with you through our Reach Out and Read newsletter. As a dedicated advocate for childhood literacy, I feel it's essential to share the profound impact you have as parents and caregivers in cultivating a lifelong love of reading in your children.

From the moment they are born, your little ones look to you for guidance, love, and inspiration. Your role as their first example is truly irreplaceable, and the power you hold in shaping their future is immeasurable.

We understand that parenting can be overwhelming, and finding the time and energy to read to your children may sometimes seem like a daunting task. But remember, even just a few minutes each day can make a world of difference.

As you read aloud, let your children feel the warmth in your voice. Let your tone color the words of the story, and let your energy fill each character with vibrancy and passion.

Choose books with strong rhythm and read them with a lively cadence that invites children to clap and move to the beat. What you read with them, today, is an investment in their tomorrow.

Be encouraged,
Aundreus Patterson
Assistant Director of Statewide Outreach



NOTES FROM A PROFESSIONAL

Lauren B. Elliott is a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner at the University of Mississippi Medical Center's (UMMC) Center for the Advancement of Youth



Lauren B. Elliott, MSN, PNP
Children's of Mississippi

Happy childhood traditions matter. In fact, they make a big impact on child development. Every year when I was a child, late at night on Christmas Eve, my mom would take my sister and me to look at Christmas lights. I remember it being so still, quiet, and peaceful. It was beautiful. Even as a teenager, when Christmas had lost some of its childhood magic, I still wanted to keep that special tradition going, so I'd ask my mom to take me. There's no doubt she had a million things to do late on Christmas Eve—food in the oven, gifts to wrap, other children to tend to—but every year, when I asked, she stopped what she was doing and rode around with me, taking in the Christmas lights in the quiet of the night. It would have been easy for her to say she didn't have time or she was too tired, but she didn't. She showed up and engaged in a family tradition that was important to me.

By engaging in their own family traditions, young children begin to see that every family's customs are unique, creating meaningful moments to discuss diversity and the importance of honoring other cultures. Practicing customs and traditions creates a sense of steadiness, normalcy, and predictability, which works especially well for young children, as they thrive on routine. When children know what to expect, it helps them

regulate emotions, which ultimately builds more resilient children. Continuing family traditions can help us as parents focus on what matters most - building strong relationships with our family members.

Now that I'm the parent of adolescent children, reflecting on how cherished that Christmas Eve memory is helps me appreciate just how much effort it takes to engage with our kids in the ways they truly want. Even when we're busy, stressed, and focused on "important" tasks, our children may ask us to join in little things that, while insignificant to us, matter deeply to them. Thinking about my important memories now

reminds me how critical it is to spend intentional and focused time with our kiddos - they are only little once! It also reminds me I should thank my parents more often—thanks, Mom!

I hope this encourages you, as it did me, to reflect on which family traditions matter most to your children and how you can show up for them, even when it isn't convenient and might seem like a small thing.

"When children know who they are and where they come from, it helps build self-esteem and allows them to explore the world with a sense of confidence."

BOOK FEATURE

Around the holiday season, when people spend more time together, gratitude often comes into sharper focus. One book selected for MCM's Rocky's Book Club program, *An Awesome Book of Thanks* by Dallas Clayton, captures this spirit beautifully.

In this bright, whimsical picture book, readers are encouraged to appreciate gratitude in all forms. From the breeze to the rain, there is always something—big or small—to be thankful for. By highlighting this book, the program encourages reflection on what matters most and the continued expression of thanks to those nearby. After all, as Clayton writes, "Thank yous are what keep this whole world spinning."



MEET ROCKY'S FRIENDS!

Rocky and his friends help share the important message that talking with and to children from birth is essential to their development. MCM's team was intentional in ensuring that all children can see themselves reflected in this campaign.

Kareem is Rocky's best friend. His favorite thing to do is fish and talk about the adventures he wants to have. Since he is the oldest, the others ask him a lot of questions. If he doesn't know the answer, he will get a book and find it.

Kareem
8 years old



Ella
6 years old

Ella's two favorite things are exploring the outdoors and learning about the things she finds. Sometimes she asks people about them. Since she's learning to read, she can discover even more about the things she sees through books!

Cody loves to dress up and play different characters, especially superheroes. He's learning to read sight words and write the alphabet, so he'll soon be able to write down the stories he imagines.

Cody
4 years old



Mei
2 years old

Mei speaks in three different ways: English, Chinese, and with her hands. Since her dad is hearing impaired, she's learning American Sign Language.

Even though Mateo is only 6 months old and can't speak much yet, his family speaks both English and Spanish, so he is learning words in both languages!

Mateo
6 months old



MEANINGFUL MILESTONES

A FRIEND FOR EVERYONE

Rocky and his friends work to advance MCM's Talk from the Start campaign by initiating conversation and engagement through play-based, age-appropriate learning. The goal is to support young children in building strong language skills that will lead to fluent reading.

To help achieve this, names for Rocky's friends were thoughtfully chosen to highlight clear and distinct vowel sounds – like the long "o" in the name Cody – making it easier for children to hear and learn them.



Character ages were also selected to align with key developmental stages in mind, helping parents, caregivers, and educators easily connect with the experiences of children in their own lives.



NEW

Experience at the Mississippi Children's Museum!

MISSISSIPPI CHILDREN'S MUSEUM
BOOK VENDING MACHINE

Inchy's Bookworm Vending Machine™ dispenses brand-new books that children can earn through positive behavior and program participation!

How to earn coins?

Museum guests can earn Inchy's Coins by attending weekly literacy-based programs: ABC Come Play with Me, Rocky's Book Club, and Read with Me. Each time guests attend one of these programs, they will receive a sticker on their Book Club Card, putting them one step closer to earning an Inchy's Coin!

Funded by **ATMOS** energy.



PARENT PERSPECTIVES

WHAT ARE MCM PARENTS SAYING ABOUT OUR ROCKY'S BOOK CLUB PROGRAM?

"Reading plays such an important role in our children's development. From an early age, we've intentionally introduced them to a wide variety of books to spark curiosity and a love of learning. We make regular visits to the museum, where they can see that reading isn't just something mom and dad do at home, but a shared and valued activity among families and the community."

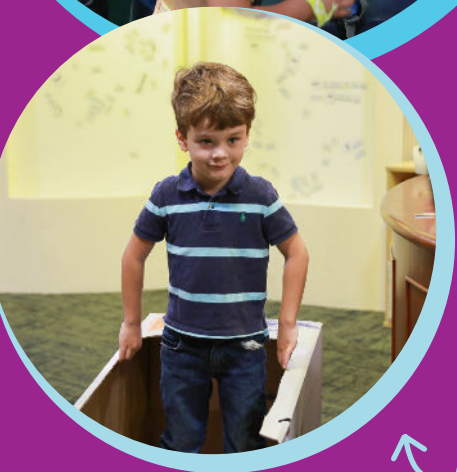
- Stephen Elliott
MCM Meridian Parent



"Because my toddlers are not enrolled in a traditional preschool program, I worried they would miss certain social and structural milestones. Since we found Rocky's Book Club at the Mississippi Children's Museum, I no longer feel like they will struggle with those skills. Not only are they getting a fun story time, they're also getting hands on learning through crafts, song, and play. They have also made a sweet group of friends."

Each meeting, my children are welcomed with an engaging book and an accompanying craft or activity. It is very obvious that there is a lot of thought and care that goes into this program. My children are always so excited to add their new stickers to their library card. Rocky's Book Club and MCM have become an invaluable source of learning and the most exciting day of our week."

- Lauren Carr
MCM Jackson Parent



"We first found out about Rocky's Book Club while visiting the cafe inside the children's museum by one of the teachers, Jennifer. We decided to check it out and Isabelle had a blast with the story and crafts, along with getting to interact with other children. The book club has helped develop social, speaking, and listening skills and increased her engagement and motivation to read. I would recommend it to anyone with young children. It has a very welcoming environment and they will love it."

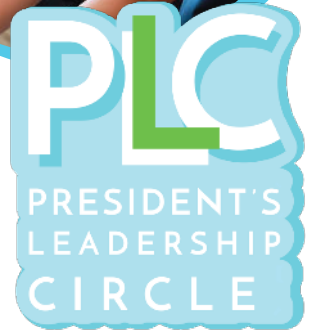
- Brittany Dickson
MCM Jackson Parent



Community Collaboration



The Mississippi Children's Museum (MCM) is privileged to partner with many volunteer organizations that help advance its mission and vision. Among these groups is the MCM President's Leadership Circle (PLC), a community-wide youth leadership program that empowers young people to develop leadership skills, work collaboratively, and make a positive impact on their communities. The PLC focuses on community service, cultural diversity, career readiness, and college preparation.



Demonstrating this commitment to service, Shelby Grant, a senior at Jackson Academy and the PLC Senior Mentor and Community Engagement Lead, founded Education Matters Tutoring—a nonprofit organization that provides free tutoring to elementary students across the metro Jackson area. Through this, Grant and his team raised and donated \$3,400 to support MCM's Talk from the Start initiative. Contributions like these play a vital role in helping the next generation of Mississippians strengthen their literacy and comprehension skills.



From left to right: Aundreus Patterson; MCM Assistant Director of Statewide Outreach, with the Education Matters 2025 Board of Directors – Alex Patterson, Crystal Gao, Shelby Grant, Bennett Allen, Morgan Cheatham, Justina Visgarra, and Cayden Shorter.

FUN FACT:

85 CENTS

of every dollar Reach Out and Read receives is spent directly on the families they serve.

Support Reach Out And Read

Reach Out and Read sites are in constant need of community participation and support in order to ensure that families have the funding and resources it needs to deliver a high quality intervention.

WHAT'S INCLUDED IN SITE SPONSORSHIP?

- 100% of the books needed for a full year (one book per well-child visit).
- 100% of the bookmarks needed for a full year (one bookmark per well-child visit).
- Bookmarks will be co-branded with your company's logo.
- Reach Out and Read posters for display at the site (where allowed).
- All other costs, including training, technical assistance, assessment, and evaluation.
- Your company's logo on the partner page of Reach Out and Read National's website for 12 months.
- Recognition in Reach Out and Read's annual report.
- Recognition in a clinic newsletter or on clinic website (where available).
- Employee and customer engagement opportunities.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO SPONSOR A SITE?

ANNUAL NUMBER OF WELL-CHILD VISITS	COST OF ANNUAL SPONSORSHIP
1,999 or less	\$20,000
2,000 - 3,999	\$40,000
4,000 - 5,999	\$60,000
6,000 - 7,999	\$80,000
8,000 - 9,999	\$100,000
10,000 - 19,999	\$200,000



Scan the QR code for more information on Reach Out and Read Sponsorship.

M C M A T H O M E

Make this season extra fun with these wintery holiday activities!

WORD SEARCH

Can you find all of the hidden holiday words? Look carefully—some are forwards, backwards, or even diagonal!

U	C	U	D	S	A	Q	F	P	S	L	E	I	G	H
R	F	T	D	O	D	J	D	H	O	P	H	O	I	I
M	K	T	I	R	U	O	R	N	A	M	E	N	T	L
S	G	M	N	N	U	T	C	R	A	C	K	E	R	E
A	F	I	T	S	T	O	C	K	I	N	G	C	M	L
N	A	S	N	C	R	S	I	P	Y	W	V	H	E	F
T	M	P	C	G	A	E	N	T	R	U	F	E	R	C
A	I	C	R	A	E	N	I	O	Q	L	A	E	R	H
K	L	D	N	E	R	R	D	N	W	Y	Q	R	Y	I
K	Y	D	F	Z	S	O	B	Y	D	M	M	T	T	M
J	D	S	C	V	Z	E	L	R	C	E	A	N	R	N
R	T	N	J	L	V	Z	N	I	E	A	E	N	E	E
H	J	Y	G	Q	I	L	P	T	N	A	N	R	E	Y
Q	X	X	M	Z	U	N	Y	J	S	G	D	E	P	K
A	R	V	N	N	O	R	T	H	P	O	L	E	B	Y

DESIGN YOUR OWN SNOWMAN

Design a snowman as unique as you are! Will it be funny, fancy, sporty, or magical? Bring your snowman to life with a silly face, cozy clothes, and fun accessories.



- | | | |
|-------------|------------|----------|
| Gingerbread | Candy Cane | Presents |
| North Pole | Reindeer | Ornament |
| Caroling | Stocking | Sleigh |
| Snowman | Family | Merry |
| Chimney | Cheer | Tree |
| Santa | Nutcracker | Elf |

HOLIDAY CONNECTIONS

Find the holiday words that go together! Draw lines to connect each word to its matching partner.

- | | |
|------------|------------|
| North Pole | Ornament |
| Kwanzaa | Winter |
| Countdown | New Year's |
| Dreidel | Kinara |
| Christmas | Santa |
| Season | Hannukah |

Did you know?

Puffins are amazing flyers. Their wings flap up to 400 times per minute, helping them zoom through the air like tiny feathery rockets!

