December preschool themes: no holidays, no cartoon characters

Peabody blog · Teaching · updated 2026-10-30

Six December preschool themes built on the season itself: bears, snow, gingerbread, shadows and light, night and day, and trains. Books, songs and crafts, free.

Six preschool themes fit December without a holiday or a cartoon character in them: bears and hibernation, winter and snow, gingerbread, shadows and light, night and day, and trains. They're built on what the children can see in December, the cold, the snow and the long dark afternoons, so every family in the room fits. Each one opens in Peabody's free theme planner with books, a craft, a song, a snack and a letter pack. Peabody is free through the end of 2026, with no sign-in and no ads.

The December page lists all six. December is often a short month in a program, with closed days and children away, so pick three or four.

Why no holidays and no characters

Families in one room celebrate different things in December, or nothing at all. A theme about the season lets everyone join in, and leaves the holidays to families. There are no characters from shows, films or toys either, and no brands. The gingerbread week uses the old folk tale of the running cookie, and the bear week uses Peabody's own stories.

The six themes

- Theme: Bears and hibernation · Letter: B · Song: Wee Willie Winkie · Snack: Teddy Bear Toast
- Theme: Winter and snow · Letter: W · Song: Mary Had a Little Lamb · Snack: Frozen Yogurt Bark
- Theme: Gingerbread · Letter: G · Song: Pat-a-Cake · Snack: Banana Oat Cookies
- Theme: Shadows and light · Letter: L · Song: Hey Diddle Diddle · Snack: Frozen Banana Pops
- Theme: Night and day · Letter: N · Song: Brahms' Lullaby · Snack: Owl Toast
- Theme: Trains · Letter: T · Song: Simple Simon · Snack: Banana Sushi

Every song is a public-domain rhyme or lullaby from Peabody's lists, and each snack links to its recipe in the Peabody Kitchen, where the allergens, swaps and lines for under-4s are on the page.

Bears and hibernation

Where bears sleep, why they sleep all winter, and a cozy cave day. The question is "Where does a bear sleep in the winter?" The craft is a paper-bag cave: open the bag on its side, glue cotton-ball snow on top, and put a bear inside to sleep. Outside is a bear hunt walk: over the log, through the grass, into the cave (under the slide). The books include Not Yet, Ted (level 3), Dad Naps (level 0) and the read-aloud The Bear Who Could Not Sleep. See the theme page.

Winter and snow

Snow and ice, mittens and coats, and what happens when ice melts. The craft is a cotton-ball snowman, and outside is the melt race: one ice cube in the sun, one in the shade, checked after snack. Three of the four books are read-alouds, Lou and the Snow Dad, Pim and the Mitten and Where Is Ned's Hat?, with Dad Naps for the twos. See the theme page.

Gingerbread

The old tale of the running cookie, smelling spices and a pretend bakery. The question is "Why did the gingerbread man run away?" The read-aloud is The Gingerbread Man, with the line children shout along, and Fox and the Hen gives a kinder fox to compare. The craft is a gingerbread person (a grown-up cuts the brown card) with buttons or stickers. Outside, the gingerbread runners run to the fence and the fox, a grown-up, walks slowly after them. See the theme page.

Shadows and light

Shadows outside and with a flashlight, day and night, and the light we see by. The craft is shadow puppets on craft sticks, with a grown-up holding the flashlight against a wall. Outside on a sunny day is shadow tag. The read-alouds are The Little Lantern and The Sun Is a Star. See the theme page.

Night and day

The sun and the moon, who is awake at night, and bedtime. The question is "Which animals are awake at night?" The craft is a day-and-night plate, half yellow with a sun and half dark with a moon and stars. The song is Brahms' Lullaby, a quiet one to sing before rest time. Books include Sit, Tap, Nap (level 0) and the read-aloud The Moon Follows Me. See the theme page.

Trains

Engines and cars, tracks and tunnels, and a long train line around the room. The craft is a box train joined with yarn. Outside, hands on shoulders, the whole room is a train: chug slow, chug fast, stop at the station, and go through the tunnel under a blanket. The books include The

Red Bus and Dex on the Bus. See the theme page.

One way to run December

- Week: 1 · Theme: Bears and hibernation
- Week: 2 · Theme: Winter and snow
- Week: 3 · Theme: Gingerbread, or Night and day if your room is tired
- Week: Short week · Theme: Trains: the train line works with any number of children

Shadows and light also runs into January and February, so you can save it for after the break. So can Night and day, Bears, Winter and snow, and Trains.

Try this in the first week

December afternoons get dark early. Use it. Turn the room lights off for five minutes after rest time, give one child the flashlight, and let the others name what they can see and what they can't. Then switch the lights back on and ask what changed. It fits the bear week (a dark cave), the night week and the shadow week.

For the plan on paper, open the planner, pick the week and the theme, choose your room's ages, and print the wall sheet and the family note. Add a note to any day you know is a closed day or a short day. The planner keeps your last twelve weeks in this browser.

Three things providers ask

Isn't the gingerbread man a character?

He's from an old folk tale with no owner, told many ways for a long time. "No characters" here means no characters from shows, films, games or toys.

What if families want to share their own celebrations?

That's up to you and your program. The themes stay on the season, so a family's own sharing day can sit beside any of them. Write it in the day's notes and on the family note.

Which December books can children follow along with?

Levels 0 to 3: Dad Naps, Sit, Tap, Nap, Not Yet, Ted, The Red Bus and Dex on the Bus, among others. The rest are marked read-aloud. All are in Peabody's free library.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/december-preschool-themes