



kern county Family

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What Would They Say?

If Your Pet Could Talk

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YOU CAN DO IT

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Vaun Thygerson
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

New Year, New You – I’m looking at you, Bakersfield! As we reflect on our past successes and look ahead to the goals of the New Year, it’s clear our community is moving forward in positive, impactful ways. The reopening of Woolworth’s, along with the buzz around its return, has brought a fresh sense of excitement to downtown Bakersfield. When I moved here over 20 years ago, Woolworth’s was always a stop when friends visited from out of town for antique shopping, followed by

a classic hamburger at its historic luncheonette. When it closed, I feared it would fade into memory and be forgotten. Thanks to the new owners, who share a true vision for both the building and downtown, it’s back and better than ever.

As Woolworth’s Luncheonette is once again serving their classic burgers and my fave, a root beer float, I have a powerful sense of nostalgia and hope for what’s to come for our community. It’s encouraging to imagine downtown as a gathering place where our community comes together and shares uplifting experiences. There’s something deeply meaningful about watching history being preserved rather than erased.

In honor of civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., whose birthday commemoration falls on January 19th, this month’s books celebrate his life and enduring legacy. In the article, **“Get to Know Martin Luther King, Jr.”** on page 14, some highlighted reads for different ages are featured. These include *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Little Golden Book Biography* by Bonnie Bader & Sue Cornelison; National Geographic Kids Readers Martin

Luther King, Jr. by Kitson Jazynka & Nat Geo Kids; and many more titles for babies to young readers to adults.

Turn to page 20, for Julie Willis’s clever parenting take. In her Humor at Home article, **“My Family: Total Chaos at Home,”** she writes about living in a sitcom where there is always something happening that requires attention and levity. In her family, which she calls “a well-oiled machine of chaos,” she loves it all and wouldn’t have it any other way. From the dog barking to the kids teasing their dad to raccoons breaching their garage, she proudly embraces the family she built!

This month’s featured mama cherishes her family and finds beautiful ways to honor and share her daughter’s life and legacy. In the article, **“Hello, Happy (Mission-Driven) Mama: Jody Hudson,”** Callie Collins writes about how Jody finds solace in bluebirds that remind her of her late daughter, Alex Hudson. As founder and CEO of the Alex Hudson Lyme Foundation, Jody is an advocate, philanthropist, and author of the book, *My Promise to Alex*, which details her and her daughter’s story. To read about this woman’s amazing daughter and foundation, turn to page 12.

As January’s tradition encourages us to look ahead to 2026 and set New Year’s Resolutions to improve our lives, don’t forget to look back and be grateful for our history. This is a special time, marked by a historic luncheonette reopening in downtown Bakersfield, a chance to celebrate extraordinary leaders who changed the course of history, and a mother who honors her daughter’s life and legacy by helping others. We have a lot to be grateful for in 2026!

Wishing you happiness and health in the New Year!

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New California State University Bakersfield Scholarship Honors Fallen Deputy

A new California State University, Bakersfield scholarship honoring Kern County Sheriff's deputy **Phillip Campas**, who died heroically in 2021, will support students with a public service background. A new annual scholarship will be available this year to help the educational journeys of members of the military, law enforcement officers, first responders, and their children.

"It feels amazing to be able to do this," says Phillip's wife, Christina Campas. "I'm hoping we can help these students succeed. We want to be a light for them in any way that we can."

Campas worked in the KC Sheriff's Office for five years, serving as a SWAT operator, recruit training officer, and range master, in addition to his regular duties as a deputy. He was killed in the line of duty while trying to rescue a family in Wasco from a relative with a gun.

For more information, please visit www.news.csub.edu.



Kern County Sheriff's deputy Phillip Campas died heroically in 2021. PHOTO COURTESY CSUB

KCAS Partners with DocuPet

Every year, millions of pets go missing across North America, and most that enter shelters are never reunited with their owners. Kern County Animal Services (KCAS) has announced a groundbreaking partnership with DocuPet, a leading provider of modern pet registration and lost-pet recovery services. This collaboration will bring DocuPet's HomeSafe® 24/7 lost pet service and the National Pet Record Search (NPRS) to our community.



"Lost pets shouldn't have to rely on luck to make it back home," says Nick Cullen, Director of KCAS. "With DocuPet's technology, we can move from guesswork to certainty, and from days or weeks of searching, to same-day reunifications. This partnership means fewer animals in our shelter, more families made whole, and more resources available for pets truly in need."

For more information, please visit www.kernanimalservices.org.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Grant Awarded

Kern County Public Works received a \$200,000 grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) to enhance its Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety Program. The funding will help promote safe habits among pedestrians and cyclists while reinforcing drivers' responsibility.

"We are excited to receive this grant, which will allow us to significantly ex-

pand our bicycle and pedestrian safety program," says Kern County Public Works Manager Yolanda Alcantar. "By focusing on education, awareness, and promoting safe practices, we aim to reduce crashes, prevent injuries. Ultimately, we're working toward building more walkable and bike-friendly neighborhoods where everyone can travel safely with confidence."

Bakersfield Memorial and Mercy Southwest Named Best Hospitals for Maternity Care

U.S. News & World Report, the global authority in hospital rankings and consumer advice, has named Bakersfield Memorial Hospital as a 2026 High-Performing

hospital for Maternity Care. This is the highest award a hospital can earn as part of U.S. News' Best Hospitals



Dignity Health®

for Maternity Care annual study, now in its fifth edition.

Bakersfield Memorial and Mercy Southwest earned a High Performing designation for maternity care, as measured by factors including C-section rates in low-risk pregnancies, severe, unexpected newborn complication rates, exclusive breast milk feeding rates, and birthing-friendly practices, among other measures.

For more information, please visit https://health.usnews.com/best-hospitals/hospital-ratings/maternity?src=usn_pr.

12 Leads. One Mission: Save Time

Kern County Public Health announces its "12 Leads Ahead" initiative, a county-wide program that equips every Basic Life Support (BLS) response unit with modern, portable 12-lead enhanced cardiac diagnostic technology. This upgrade enables local emergency medical crews to perform hospital-level cardiac diagnosis on-site.

With earlier detection of heart attacks and other critical heart conditions, first responders can notify hospitals sooner, activate specialty care faster, and get patients the treatment they need without delay.

For more information, please visit <https://www.kernpublichealth.com/emergency-medical-services/12-leads-one-mission-save-time>.

Kern County Probation Earns \$260,000 Grant

California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) awarded \$260,000 to the Kern County Probation Department for an intensive probation supervision program for high-risk individuals with multiple DUI convictions. The grant will also pay for warrant operations targeting probation violations and/or DUI suspects who do not appear in court, alcohol testing, officer training in Standard Field Sobriety Testing (SFST), distribution of DUI "Be on the Lookout" (BOLO) alerts, and collaborating with courts and prosecutors to establish probation orders.

"With the numerous ride options available, there is simply no excuse to drive while impaired. Kern County Probation is proud to continue our partnership with OTS through this grant," says Chief Probation Officer Bill Dickinson.

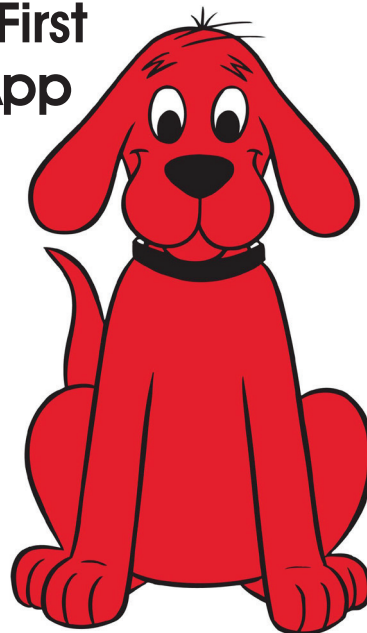


Scholastic Launches First Branded Streaming App

Scholastic launches its first branded streaming app, offering a free, safe, and ad-supported selection of its classic shows and movies for children aged 2-12. Currently available on Roku and Amazon Fire TV, with additional platforms to follow, you can stream over 400 hours of content from popular series like Clifford the Big Red Dog, The Magic School Bus, and Goosebumps.

The app is part of Scholastic's broader 360-degree strategy to reach children everywhere. Scholastic's strategic investment in 9 Story last year has enabled the media company to leverage new synergies, expanding access to its extensive catalog of iconic children's series.

"Scholastic books and programs have been a cornerstone of childhood for generations, bringing characters and lessons that stay with us for life," says David Di Lorenzo, SVP Kids & Family at Future Today. "With this new app, we're



ensuring families everywhere will have access to timeless stories that entertain and inspire – backed by a brand they know and trust."

For more information, please visit www.scholastic.com or download the Scholastic app.

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Ultra-Processed Foods Linked to Rising Cancer Risk



Nutrition advice floods social media daily, but one issue deserves sharper focus: ultra-processed foods.

Not all processing is harmful. Pasteurization makes milk safe, and fortification with vitamin D strengthens bones. But ultra-processed products—packaged snacks, sugary drinks, fried fast food—strip away nutrients and add unhealthy fats, salt and chemicals.

The consequences are serious. Ultra-processed foods have long been tied to obesity, high blood pressure and diabetes. Now, research shows they may be fueling a troubling rise in colorectal cancer among younger adults. A Harvard-led study found women who consumed the most ultra-processed foods faced a 45% higher risk of precancerous polyps compared with those who ate the least. Other studies show similar increases, underscoring how diet choices today

shape health outcomes tomorrow.

This trend is alarming. Colorectal cancer rates are climbing in people under 50, even as they decline among older adults. Ultra-processed foods now account for more than half of daily calories for many Americans, fueling inflammation and gut disruption. Public health experts warn that without changes, early-onset colorectal cancer could double every 15 years.

The solution is straightforward. Read food labels. Limit additives such as high fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated oils and nitrates. Choose fresh, whole foods whenever possible. A baked potato remains a healthy staple; French fries drenched in oil and salt do not.

Ultra-processed foods may be cheap and convenient, but the evidence is clear: they carry a cost younger generations cannot afford to ignore.

Cervical Cancer Risk Tied to HPV, Not Relatives

Family history tends to be a risk factor for various diseases, but cervical cancer does not seem to be one of them. A recent report in Medical News Today noted that a person is not more likely to develop cervical cancer if a parent or close relative has had the disease. Data from the World Health Organization indicates that roughly 70 percent of cervical cancer cases can be traced to the human papillomavirus (HPV), which is often transmitted through sexual intercourse. The Cleveland Clinic notes there are more than 100 types of HPV, and some strains of the virus can lead to cervical cancer. People concerned about cervical cancer are urged to speak with their physicians about what can be done to reduce their risk, a discussion that may include suggestions on lowering the chances of contracting HPV.



Tracking Autism's Growth: New Data, New Question



The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has prioritized finding possible causes of autism, including launching the Autism Data Science Initiative. Research is ongoing regarding which behaviors are safe, including examinations of medications taken

during pregnancy. What is known right now is that autism rates are rising. As of the latest data, one in 31 children in the United States has autism, according to the organization Autism Speaks. This is up from the previous rate of one in 36. Around the world, one in 100 children are

diagnosed with autism. Boys are nearly four times more likely to be diagnosed with autism than girls, and those who are American Indian or members of Alaska Native racial or ethnic groups have a higher prevalence of autism than others.



The Brain Boost of Regular Movement

Regular physical activity is often associated with immediate effects, and rightfully so. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, physical activity can improve cognition and thinking, reduce short-term feelings of anxiety, and make it easier for people to manage their weight. But physical activity also boasts some notable long-term benefits, particularly in regard to disease prevention. The CDC notes that regular exercise can reduce risk for cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome, infectious diseases like COVID-19 and pneumonia, and various forms of cancer, including cancers of the breast, colon, kidneys, and lungs.



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Paws for Thought: If Your Pets Could Talk

WITH JANUARY RECOGNIZED AS WALK YOUR DOG MONTH, it feels like the perfect time to celebrate the bond we share with our feathery, furry, four (or two) legged companions. We asked readers, “If your pet could talk, what would they say about your household?” From dogs who think they run the place to chickens with sharp wit, the responses came pouring in—insightful, heartfelt, and a little silly.



“Why does she lock up the dog food? I’m not going to rip the bag.”

Jessica Payan-Medina

“These people are crazy!”

– Brenna Smith

“We need more toys.”
(They don’t!)

– Cheyanne Rigsby

“Chickens would say, ‘These people only want me for my eggs.’”

– Corrie White

“I love you and my snackies.”

– Rachel Gomez

“Sometimes it’s a little crazy, but there’s always love and snacks so I can’t complain.”

– Saira Ramos

“Is it lunch yet?”

– Luis Carmona

“Miss me yet?” (They are in heaven.)

– Marilyn Radon

“These people love to talk to me like I’m a baby. I’m turning 52 this month!”

– Nina Ha

“The dog would say—get rid of the cat!”

– Rynette Patalsky

“My owner keeps a tight ship, follow the rules and you’ll be alright.”

– Lenora Alvarado

“These kids need to calm down!”

– Diana Montalvo

“Thank you for loving me so much mom!”

– Elaine Martinez

“Why is it so clean?”

– Marisol Moya

“These kids are crazy!”

– Lindsey Moritz



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FIND ALL THE WINTER WORDS LISTED IN THE PUZZLE BELOW



Cold	Mittens	February
December	Icicles	Ice
Skiing	Shovel	Snowflake
Blizzard	January	White
Cocoa	Snowing	Frost
Sled	Winter	Snowball
Fireplace	Scarf	Ice Skates
Snowmen	Chilly	Frozen
Omni	Family	Health

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



For answers to this month's puzzle, scan the QR code, or go to: omnifamilyhealth.org/puzzle-answer-key/



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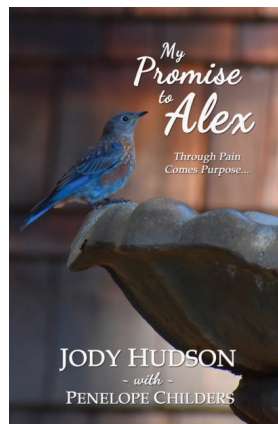
HELLO, HAPPY MISSION-DRIVEN MAMA

A mother's promise,
a daughter's legacy,
and the bluebirds that
keep them connected

Bluebirds have a way of appearing in Jody Hudson's life, particularly at key moments when she has the opportunity to share about the life of her daughter, Alex, forever 22.

Jody recalled a conversation that summed up Alex's faith-filled life.

"I remember asking Alex, 'When you're not here, who am I going to talk to? I know you're going to be with me again.



We need to come up with a sign so I always know it's you,'" said Jody. "I asked her, 'Why are you choosing a bluebird?' and she said 'Because every day, about 3 o'clock, a bluebird comes

out and sits on the fountain. When I see it, I know God hasn't forgotten about me and it's another day to do something good.'"

Jody is the founder and CEO of the Alex Hudson Lyme Foundation. An advocate, philanthropist and author, she has detailed their story in her book, "My Promise to Alex," after Alex's passing in 2018 of Lyme disease and Mast Cell Activation Syndrome (MCAS).

Recently retired, Jody looks forward to spending time with her son, Garrett, 32, and speaking more about Alex's legacy.

Jody remembers the shift she observed in Alex in fifth grade, when her happy, athletic child began to experience pain, inflammation, and later, digestive issues.

"Initially, we thought it was growing pains. We were told to give her ibuprofen and tape her ankles but she didn't



Jody Hudson with Santa, son Garrett, daughter Alex. PHOTO COURTESY OF JODY HUDSON



outgrow it," said Jody, who sought answers from dozens of doctors as her daughter's illness worsened.

Despite having a full-ride scholarship to UCLA, Alex started junior college close to home with the hope of getting better. Her health had been a medical mystery for more than a decade by the time they visited a doctor at Cedars-Sinai in 2017 who suggested Lyme disease testing.

"At that moment, it was so bittersweet because I knew she wasn't crazy. We

had a label, which was a celebration on one hand that we could identify it, but I also had no idea how to help my child," said Jody, recalling the positive diagnosis. "There was so much that we went through, across the country, to try to get her help."

Insurance largely did not cover Alex's medical costs, a common but little known issue with Lyme disease.

"It's crazy and complex. Not every treatment works for every person. So many people don't get the proper treatment because they don't have the resources. There's suicide in the Lyme disease community, even as it becomes more widely known because of celebrities like Justin Bieber and Justin Timberlake," Jody explained. "Awareness has grown even since 2017 but insurance often doesn't cover it. Prevention, including avoiding infection



"Because every day,
about 3 o'clock, a
bluebird comes out
and sits on the fountain.
When I see it, I know
God hasn't forgotten
about me and it's
another day to do
something good."

ALEX HUDSON



spread by tick bites, is part of Jody's mission. She developed a curriculum used nationwide with Girl Scouts in which participants prepare for outdoor experiences by earning a patch featuring the Alex Hudson Lyme Foundation's name. Jody has also partnered separately with Global Lyme Alliance and continues to fundraise.

"Lyme disease is a bacterial infection. Only about 35% of individuals with a tick bite get a bullseye rash, a telltale warning sign. Most people don't realize they have it. Symptoms mimic a summer flu," said Jody. "There is such a gap between people having Lyme disease and doctors having that awareness. I get calls at least a couple of times a week from parents who are so frustrated and living in desperation like I was because there aren't enough doctors who know how to treat it. I learned about grace and forgiveness because the very places that we were supposed to help, doctors and hospitals, didn't believe us."

Despite trying many different treatments, Alex had suffered major organ damage and she passed away just a year after learning of her diagnosis. Her dying wish was for a foundation to be established to educate the public about Lyme disease.

"It was a beautiful passing. I knew she was with God," said Jody. "I want her legacy and what she went through to mean something."

Fill-in-the-blank questions:

Best way to relax: Sunday football

Best local restaurant: Luigi's Italian

Best life advice: Find something to be grateful for every day.

Jody continues her dual mission of awareness and prevention, now without Alex, but always looking for her in bluebirds and the opportunity to tell others their family's story.

Q&A WITH JODY HUDSON

What would you like the public to better understand about Lyme disease?

Find more information at <https://www.alexhudsonlymefoundation.org/>

Q. What advice can you share with other parents?

You don't have to do it all, you just have to be there; your presence is what matters most, not perfection.

Listen to your children and believe in them. One constant should be 'I might not understand but I believe you.' Fight for them, trust your instincts.

Don't wait for later. Do all the things now that matter because those are what your child will carry with them.

Q. What is your parenting PSA?

Don't wait to show love. Life is unpredictable. Love unconditionally.

HELLO HAPPY MAMA CONTEST

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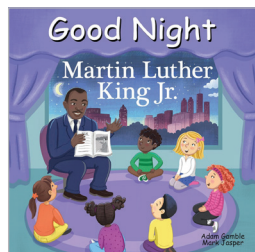
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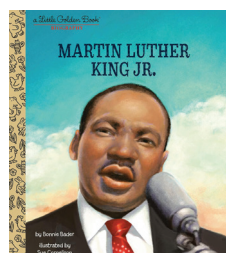
Get to Know Martin Luther King, Jr.

WE CELEBRATE MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY ON JAN. 19. Here are a few great reads to teach and remind children about a man who went on to become a civil rights leader and eloquent speaker guiding change across the nation.



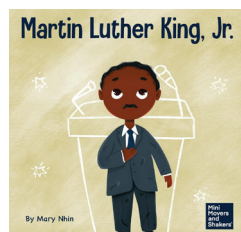
Good Night Martin Luther King Jr.
By Adam Gamble & Mark Jasper
\$8.35; Ages: 0-3
Publisher: Good Night Books
Amazon.com

You know and love the chunky “Good Night Our World” series of board books. This one features the civil rights leader and introduces the youngest kiddos to his leadership and events that happened during King’s time.



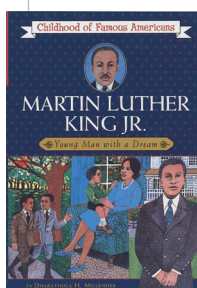
Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Little Golden Book Biography
By Bonnie Bader & Sue Cornelison
\$4.78; Ages: 3-7
Publisher: Golden Books
Amazon.com

The classic Little Golden Books are known for presenting stories in a family-friendly way and this book is no exception. It provides an introduction to King that even the youngest reader can understand.



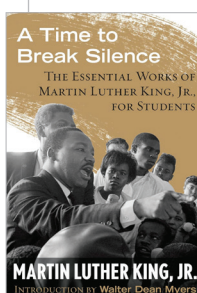
Martin Luther King Jr.: A Kid's Book About Advancing Civil Rights with Nonviolence
By Mary Nhin
\$12.91; Ages: 4-10
Publisher: Grow Grit Press
Amazon.com

Part of the Mini Movers & Shakers series of books that are designed to inspire kids through graphic style. This one tells King’s story and shows how with hard work, one can achieve great things.



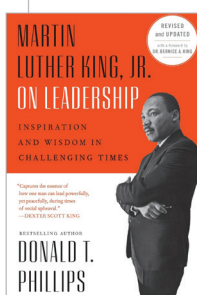
Martin Luther King Jr.: Young Man with a Dream
By Dharathula H. Millender
\$7.83; Ages: 8-12
Publisher: Aladdin
Amazon.com

This book offers illustrations and breakouts to help engage and educate young readers and illustrate King’s life from childhood to death.



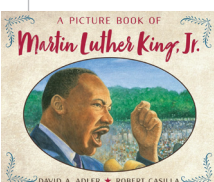
A Time to Break the Silence: The Essential Works of Martin Luther King, Jr. for Students
By Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
\$18; Ages: 10-17
Publisher: Beacon Press
Amazon.com

Written in five sections, this guide introduces King’s writings and speeches, including his “I Have a Dream” speech.



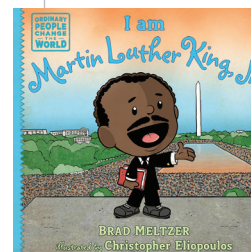
Martin Luther King Jr. on Leadership: Inspiration & Wisdom for Challenging Times
By Donald T. Phillips
\$12.99; Ages: Adult
Publisher: Amazon.com

King’s wisdom made him easy to listen to and this peaceful leader has much to say and much we can learn from today.



A Picture Book of Martin Luther King, Jr.
By David A. Adler & Robert Casilla
\$8.26; Ages: 5-8
Publisher: Holiday House
Amazon.com

This book is geared toward kids in first and second grades who are interested in history and biographies. It’s a great guide to King.



I am Martin Luther King, Jr.
By Brad Meltzer & Christopher Eliopoulos
\$9.59; Ages: 5-7
Publisher: Rocky Pond Books
Amazon.com

This biography is part of the “Ordinary People Change the World” series (which inspired the PBS series “Xavier Riddle & the Secret Museum”) and tells the story Martin Luther King, Jr. King helped gather a generation of people together to lead the world toward a kinder, gentler way of life with racial equality.



National Geographic Kids Readers Martin Luther King, Jr.
By Kitson Jazynka & Nat Geo Kids
\$3.99; Ages: 5-8
Publisher: National Geographic Kids
Amazon.com

This Level 3 book is perfect for guiding young readers in learning about King. The use of Fun Facts, diagrams and colorful breakout boxes make learning about King’s life and legacy fun.



Young King: The Making of Martin Luther King Jr.
By Lerone Martin
\$32.99; Ages: teen-adult
Publisher: Amistad
Amazon.com

This book tells the story of King before he became a civil rights leader, from his youth to his time in the pulpit and beyond. You’ll have to wait till May to find this one in bookstores, but you can pre-order it.

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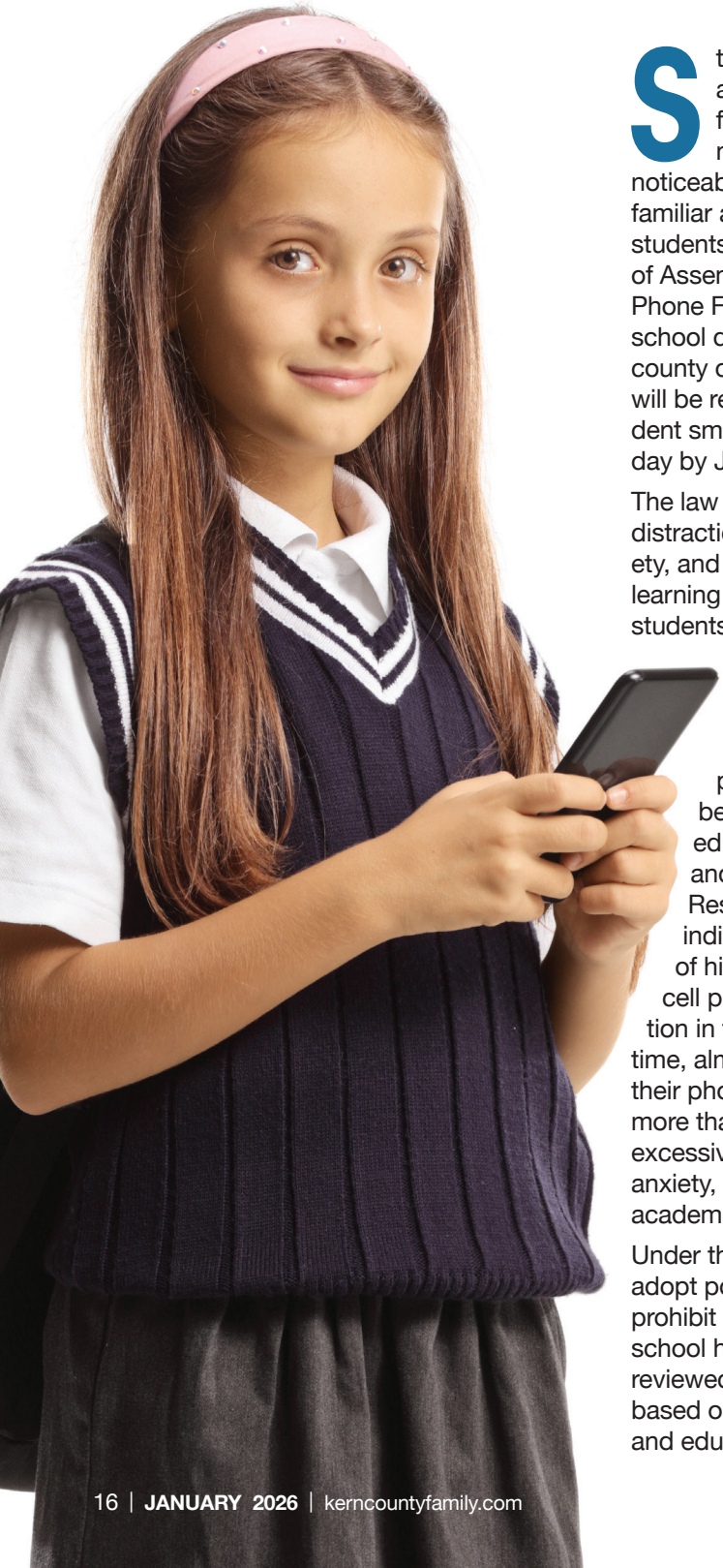
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Phones Away: New Law Will Change the School Classroom

Beginning in 2026, California schools must limit student smartphone use — bringing big shifts for learning, communication, and daily routines.



Starting in 2026, classrooms across California will go phone-free, and the classroom may never be the same. This is a noticeable shift—one that may feel unfamiliar at first but is designed to help students refocus. With the passage of Assembly Bill 3216, known as the Phone Free School Act, every public school district, charter school, and county office of education in the state will be required to limit or prohibit student smartphone use during the school day by July 1, 2026.

The law intends to reduce distractions, ease anxiety, and create healthier learning environments for students who have grown up tethered to their screens. For years, concerns about constant phone access have been building among educators, parents,

and mental health professionals. Research cited in the legislation indicates that nearly three-quarters of high school teachers report that cell phones are a significant distraction in the classroom. At the same time, almost all students report using their phones during the school day for more than an hour. Studies also link excessive smartphone use to increased anxiety, depression, cyberbullying, and academic dishonesty.

Under the new law, schools must adopt policies that either restrict or prohibit student smartphone use during school hours. These policies will be reviewed every five years and refined based on input from students, parents, and educators. Phone access will still

be permitted in specific circumstances, including emergencies, medical needs, instructional use approved by teachers, or requirements outlined in a student's IEP or 504 plan. Several districts, including Los Angeles Unified and Santa Barbara Unified, have already rolled out similar restrictions, offering a glimpse of what may soon become the norm statewide.

For students, the changes are expected to be immediate and tangible.

Teachers report that phones are the single greatest barrier to classroom engagement, and early trials of phone-free days have led to increased participation, deeper focus, and more meaningful peer interaction. Schools have also observed a decline in cyberbullying incidents during the school day, along with a noticeable reduction in the pressure

students feel to respond to messages and social media notifications constantly.

Families will also feel the shift. Midday texting and casual check-ins will likely disappear, replaced by more structured communication through school offices and approved classroom use. While the adjustment may take time, many parents and educators see it as an opportunity to reset technology boundaries.

How schools choose to enforce the new rules will vary. Some districts are turning to locked phone pouches, while others rely on backpack storage, classroom caddies, or clearly designated no-phone zones. The flexibility allows each community to tailor its approach while meeting the same statewide goal.

**Phones are
the single
greatest barrier
to classroom
engagement.**



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Skipping School: What's Really Behind Teen Absences

Truancy is often more than rebellion. Bakersfield families are learning how stress, safety concerns, and mental health struggles can push teens to stay home — and what support can bring them back.

Life as a teenager in Bakersfield can be challenging, with social pressures, academic demands, and the emotional highs and lows of adolescence. It's no surprise that some students might feel tempted to hit snooze and skip the school day. While a single day off may seem harmless, repeated absenteeism, or commonly known as truancy, can indicate deeper underlying issues.

In California, school attendance is mandatory. A student with three or more unexcused absences in a single school year is considered truant under state law. Schools are required to notify parents and may involve law enforcement or the courts if the pattern continues. But before focusing on consequences, it's essential to understand why teens are skipping school.

There are many reasons students choose to stay home. Bullying remains a major factor, with one in five students nationally reporting experiences of verbal abuse, rumors, or social exclusion that make school feel unsafe. Academic overload can also drive absenteeism, as falling behind may feel easier than asking for help. Conflicts with teachers or peers can turn a once — enjoyable class into a source of stress, and family financial pressures sometimes push teens to work part-time jobs, interfering with attendance. Substance use can lead some teens to miss school, while mental health struggles such as anxiety or depression make daily attendance feel overwhelming. Friendship circles can affect attendance, with some students choosing to stay home when peers do the same.

The consequences of missing school extend far beyond falling behind in class. Students may become ineligible



PHOTO COURTESY FREEPIK

for sports and extracurricular activities, struggle to keep up academically, or face restrictions on driving privileges if truancy becomes habitual. In California, repeated absences can even result in fines or court appearances for both students and parents.

Parents, guardians, and caregivers should watch for warning signs such as school notifications of absences, dropping grades, or noticeable changes in behavior, including withdrawal, irritability, or secrecy. Early attention can make a significant difference.

Open communication is key. Talking with teens early and often about the real-world consequences of skipping school can help prevent the formation of such habits. Understanding the root cause usually requires collaboration with teachers, counselors, and even peers. Together, families and schools can develop plans that may include tutoring, counseling, or schedule adjustments, providing students with the support they need to stay on track. Staying connected with the school ensures that intervention can happen quickly and collaboratively.

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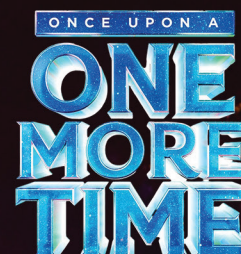
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My Family: Total Chaos at Home

My cat jumped on my keyboard and typed, “89io-ooooooooooooocv8.” Then he climbed onto my neck.

And before you say dogs are better pets than cats, let me just say that while the cat was typing his nonsense, my dog was barking at the UPS delivery driver for daring to leave a package on our front step. In the great scheme of interruptions, the dog caused more trouble. Plus, the dog offered no apology. The cat at least snuggled in, kneading my shoulder with his sharp claws until he found just the right position to drape himself over me—with his stinky end in my face and his head looking over my shoulder like a furry supervisor.

And that is the truth about cats and dogs.

With two kids, a cat, a dog, and two adults crammed into our almost-too-tight 1,600 square feet of house (and no yard), we are a well-oiled machine of chaos.

Our garage, for example, is so full we can’t drive into it—or even walk past all the junk to reach the trash can. So to take out the trash, we have to open the garage door (the big one, meant for cars), walk out the front door, around the house, toss the trash, and then walk all the way back around to go inside—at which point we inevitably forget to shut the big door. So it will often stay open for hours on end, inviting judgement from neighbors and sparking the raccoons’ curiosity. I do not know who is more startled when it gets dark and I finally remember to shut the door and a random raccoon makes a sprint for the door as it is coming down—me or the raccoon. And I have no reason to be surprised since this is not the first time I have found a raccoon in my garage.

Dinner time is its own kind of circus. My kids have outgrown the “take a bite,” years and have settled into the “I’ll make something for myself later,” years. We made a rule about eating together, but that just that means two surly teenagers staring at food while my husband and I eat. The only one enthusiastic about



ILLUSTRATION BY COPILOT

dinner is the dog—if she is not distracted by another UPS delivery. (Oh, wait, there is ALWAYS a delivery during dinner.) She doesn’t get table scraps, but that is only because her legs are short and she can’t reach.

When we do have conversation at the dinner table, it mainly consists of my husband teasing the kids relentlessly. Then they come back with, “Oh yeah? Well, all you do for work is draw lines. Oh, no, wait. You don’t even draw lines. You just tell the computer to draw lines! No... you teach kids how to tell the computer to draw lines.” And there it is: his life’s work as an industrial drawing professor summed up in the retaliatory

words of a fifteen year old.

And around and around they go. The kids don’t fight with each other anymore; they each just have their own never-ending battles with their dad over who is the best and which one Mom loves most and who the dog loves most and who the cat loves the most and who Grandma loves most and who has more friends.

And then the next day arrives, and we do it all again—the barking, the teasing, the raccoons, the deliveries. It’s like living inside a sitcom no one asked to be cast in, but here we are, living the dream. It reminds me that this is exactly the life we built together, chaos and all.

You Can Do It | By Lisa Keosouphanh

Warmth & Wellness: Easy, One-Pot Winter Soup

JANUARY IS NATIONAL SOUP MONTH, the perfect time to enjoy a warm, nourishing bowl with loved ones. Soups like hearty Meatball Tortellini Soup make family dinners simple, satisfying, and full of flavor—all in one pot.



Meatball Tortellini Soup

Servings: 6-8

INGREDIENTS

4 cups of beef broth	1 tablespoon Italian seasoning
1 can (14 ounces) diced tomatoes	¾ cup Parmesan cheese, plus additional for serving, divided
16 ounces frozen meatballs	Salt and pepper to taste
19 ounces tortellini	¼ cup heavy cream
6 ounces frozen spinach	Bread, for serving
1 tablespoon onion powder	
1 tablespoon garlic powder	

INSTRUCTIONS

In Dutch oven, pour in beef broth and diced tomatoes. Fill empty diced tomatoes can with water and add to pot. Stir in meatballs, tortellini and spinach. Cook over medium heat then add onion powder, garlic powder, Italian seasoning and ¾ cup Parmesan cheese. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Cook for 25 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add heavy cream and cook for 5 minutes.

Serve with bread and additional Parmesan cheese.

— Recipe courtesy of "Cookin' Savvy"

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Hello



Happy New Year! Check out all the great local family fun happening near you and start planning today!



JANUARY 1

18th Annual Polar Bear Plunge

Start 2026 by taking the plunge! Register today and enter the year in style!

11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

www.bakersfieldcity.us/

JANUARY 2

Arts Council of Kern's First Friday Artwalk

ArtWalk celebrates creativity with artists, artisans, and vendors, offering hands-on experiences like jewelry making and storytelling in a vibrant, engaging atmosphere.

5 p.m.

www.kernarts.org/artwalk/

JANUARY 2 & 3

Bakersfield Condors vs. San Jose Barracuda

Exciting AHL matchup as the Condors face off against the San Jose Barracudas. Expect

fast-paced action and a thrilling battle on the ice.

7 p.m.

www.dignityhealtharena.com/

JANUARY 3

Dia De Los Reyes Magos: Half Marathon & 5K

The event celebrates El Día de Reyes (Three Kings' Day, Mexico), commemorating the three wise men, who traveled from afar, bearing gifts for baby Jesus. Register today!

7 a.m.

www.reyesracing.com/

JANUARY 4



JANUARY 6



JANUARY MARKS THE BEGINNING OF A NEW YEAR FULL OF CELEBRATIONS. START CELEBRATING TODAY!



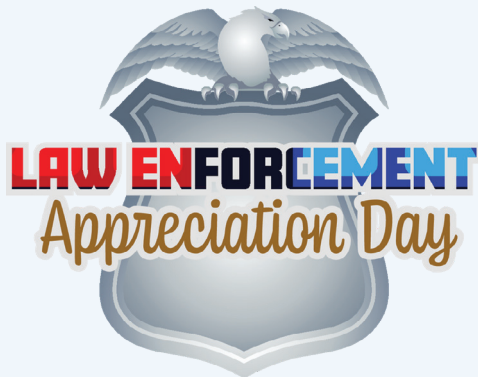
Bubble Bath Day • Jan. 8



Hugging Day • Jan. 21



Pie Day • Jan. 23



Law Enforcement Appreciation Day • Jan. 9



Clean-Off-Your-Desk Day • Jan. 12



Puzzle Day • Jan. 29



Hot Chocolate Day • Jan. 31

Church of LDS Family Fun Night

All ages welcome. Multiple activities in rotation. Refreshments and more!

6 – 8 p.m.

www.churchofjesuschrist.org/

JANUARY 8

National Bubble Bath Day!

Men's Basketball: CSUB vs. UC Riverside

CSUB and UC Riverside continue their Big West rivalry with tightly contested matchups, often decided in the final minutes.

6:30 p.m.

www.gorunners.com/sports/mens-basketball/schedule/2025-26

JANUARY 10

Family Day at BMoA

As part of Downtown Bakersfield's Second Saturday events, BMoA offers visitors fun community programs, family-friendly art projects, and access to exhibitions.

10 a.m. – 4 p.m.

<https://www.bmoa.org/>

36th Annual Fog Run

Probation Auxiliary County of Kern presents a fun, family friendly 5K-10K race to support at-risk individuals in Kern County and the Kern Probation Department's Helping Hands program.

8 a.m.

www.kernprobation.com/probation-auxiliary-county-of-kern-p-a-c-k/

PEARL – A Tribute to Janis Joplin

A night of incredible music honoring the legendary Janis Joplin. Get ready to rock out to all of her greatest hits performed by talented musicians.

7 – 10 p.m.

www.instagram.com/legends_event_center/

JANUARY 11

Condors Hockey Night for Autism Awareness

This family-friendly evening is part of the 25–26 season schedule, featuring community-focused programming to raise awareness and support for autism initiatives.

3 p.m.
www.bakersfieldcondors.com/

JANUARY 12

Cults & Classics: American Graffiti

A group of teenagers spend one final night after their 1962 high school graduation cruising the strip with their buddies before they pursue their varying goals.

Doors open at 6 p.m.
www.tixr.com/groups/bakersfieldfoxtheater

JANUARY 15

Neighborhood Café: FREE Community Meal

Neighborhood Café is a monthly free dinner hosted by First Congregational Church of Bakersfield. Open to everyone, no sign up, no ID, no strings attached.

5 – 6 p.m.
<https://fccbakersfield-ucc.org/neighborhood-cafe-community-meal>

JANUARY 17

Vivaldi's Four Seasons

Candlelight concerts illuminate Bakersfield! Get your tickets now to discover the magic of a live, multi-sensory



First Congregational Church of Bakersfield's free monthly meal is happening on January 15. PHOTO COURTESY FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

musical experience under the gentle glow of candlelight.

6:30 p.m.
www.feverup.com/en/bakersfield

JANUARY 18

Downtown Farmers Market Bakersfield

Shop fresh produce, hand-made goods, local foods, and support Bakersfield's small businesses!

9 a.m. – 2 p.m.
www.instagram.com/the.downtownfarmersmarket/

6th Annual Mouse-Con Bakersfield

Celebrate the magic at Bakersfield's first and only Disney fan convention—packed with fun, excitement, and Disney fandom galore!

10 a.m. – 5 p.m.
www.mouse-con.com/bakohome.shtml

JANUARY 19

Martin Luther King Jr. Day



Celebrate by reading one of our January books! Go to page 14 to view the list of recommended reads!

K-Pop Stars LIVE Show

K-Pop Stars Live Show is here to light up the stage with tributes to your favorite groups. Sing and dance to the hits you love as if you were at a real concert in Korea!

4 p.m. & 6:30 p.m.
www.eventbrite.com/o/kpop-stars-live-show-119511830441

JANUARY 21

ADAKC's Annual Cinnamon Roll Drive

Pick up your tin of warm Hodel's delicious cinnamon rolls and support the mission of ADAKC!

6 a.m. – 11 a.m.
or until sold out.
www.adakc.org/

JANUARY 23

3rd Annual Fatherhood Conference

CAPK hosts a day dedicated to

ACTIVITY CORNER ANSWERS

ACTIVITY CORNER: PAGES 29 & 31

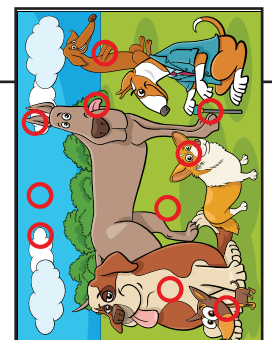
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 2. Stocks
 3. Emphasis
 8. Pot

Across
 1. Leeks
 4. Time
 5. Logic
 6. Al
 7. Soups
 9. Toast

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ONGOING HAPPENINGS

THROUGH JANUARY 9

Christmas Tree Recycling Program

Recycle your Christmas tree for free to keep Kern County green and prevent illegal dumping through proper disposal!

www.kernpublicworks.com/home

JANUARY 9 - 25

BCT's The Curious Savage

Bakersfield Community Theatre presents *The Curious Savage*: a wealthy widow's generosity clashes with greedy stepchildren who confine her to a sanitarium for inheritance.

<https://www.bctstage.org/>

EVERY TUESDAY

GED Testing Lab

Employers' Training Resource offers GED Testing through GED Pearson-Vue Authorized Testing Center. Register at www.GED.com.

www.employerstrainingresource.com/job-seekers/resources/ged-testing

WEDNESDAYS

Walking Moai at The Park at River Walk

Move naturally and connect with new friends. All ages and fitness levels are welcome—come enjoy good company and gentle movement in a beautiful outdoor space.

6 p.m.

www.bakersfield.bluezonesproject.com/events/

SATURDAYS

F Street Farmers Market

Bakersfield's longest-running Farmers Market! Accepts cash, card & EBT Snap.

7:45 a.m. – 12 p.m.

www.fstfarmersmarket.com/

RiverLakes

Farmers Market

Farm to Table, fresh produce! Our certified farmers

bring you the freshest fruits and vegetables.

9 a.m. – 1 p.m.

www.instagram.com/riverlakes_farmers_market/

Haggin Oaks Farmers Market

Visit over 70 different vendors at the biggest Farmers Market in town.

9 a.m. – 2 p.m.

www.instagram.com/hagginoaksfarmersmarket/

SUNDAYS

FREE Junk Journaling & Scrapbooking

Free Junk Journaling Moai, a mindful, creative meetup with rotating supplies, inspiring prompts and community connection!

11 a.m. – 1 p.m.

www.bakersfield.bluezonesproject.com/events/

FIRST SATURDAYS

The Market at Tejon

A vibrant community gathering for families, friends,

and food lovers to enjoy local flavor, fun, and connection.

4 – 8 p.m.

www.tejonoutlets.com/events-promotions/

FIRST & THIRD SATURDAYS

Tractor Supply Farmers Market: Rosedale Artisan Fair

Explore seasonal produce, handmade goods, and family-friendly fun—all brought to you by neighbors and small businesses in your area.

9 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.

www.officialartisanfairs.com/

SECOND & FOURTH SUNDAYS

Riverwalk Artisan Fair

Catch local vendors at this bi-weekly Sunday market. Discover unique goods, delicious snacks, and a bustling community.

8 a.m. – 2 p.m.

www.officialartisanfairs.com/



ADAKC's Annual Cinnamon Roll Drive is taking place on January 21! Pre-order today! PHOTO COURTESY HODEL'S COUNTRY DINING

empowering, educating, and celebrating fathers and father figures. Breakout sessions, lunch, and giveaways!

8:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m.

www.capk.org/headstart/

JANUARY 25

TINA: The Tina Turner Musical

An electrifying musical celebrating Tina Turner's inspiring journey, set to her greatest hits and unstoppable spirit.

7 p.m.

www.dignityhealtharena.com/

JANUARY 31

26th Annual Kern County Teacher Recruitment Fair

This annual fair brings recruiters from school districts

across Kern County, offering attendees the chance to learn about current and anticipated job openings for the 2026–27 school year.

9 a.m. – 12 p.m.

www.news.kern.org/

KAN Disney Lego Workshop

An engaging workshop where children build creativity, fine motor, and social skills through LEGO play. Parents/caretakers must attend; siblings welcome with a child diagnosed with autism. Registration required.

10 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

www.kernautism.org/

Find more happenings at www.kerncountyfamily.com

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KERN AUTISM NETWORK, INC.

"Kern Autism Network Inc. provides support, awareness, information and education to families and the public throughout Kern County"

Happy New Year!

Condor Hockey Autism Night, Sunday, January 11th @ 3:00 p.m.
Tickets on sale at our office only for a special seating area.
Sensory Room available for autistic children to enjoy.
Chess Club for Teens Sunday, January 11th from 11 am to noon.
To register visit our website www.kernautism.org
Parent Support Group Meeting: Wednesday, January 14th @ 6 pm.
To register, visit our website kernautism.org
Female Support Group Gathering Friday, January 15th @ 6 pm.
To register, please contact our office for details.
Father's Virtual Group Meeting: Saturday, January 17th @ 2:30 p.m.
via Zoom Register via www.kernautism.org
Disney LEGO Workshop Saturday, January 31st @ 10 a.m. at Garces Memorial High School.
Register via www.kernautism.org
To read more about the organization, follow us on Facebook and Instagram.

EARLY SIGNS OF AUTISM:

- Delayed language development
- Repetitive language
- Little or no eye contact
- Repetitive mannerisms
- Inflexible routines or rituals
- Preoccupation with object parts
- Little interest in friendships

SERVICES OFFERED:

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- Law Enforcement Trainings
- Autism/Asperger Workshops-Seminars
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Worship Guide

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Centered on God in 2026

Making 2026 all about God begins with choosing, day by day, to center your life around His presence, His purposes, and His voice. A God-focused year isn't built on one dramatic moment but on countless small decisions to seek Him first. It means inviting God into your routines—your mornings, your work, your relationships, and your rest—so that spiritual growth becomes a natural rhythm rather than an occasional event. Let 2026 be a year of intentional prayer, where you speak honestly to God and listen for His guidance. Allow Scripture to shape your thinking, influence your choices, and realign your priorities when life becomes noisy. Making the year about God also means living with gratitude, recognizing His goodness in both the quiet blessings and the unexpected challenges. A God-centered year extends beyond personal devotion; it overflows into how you treat others. Show love generously, forgive quickly, and serve humbly. Look for opportunities to reflect God's character in places that feel ordinary or overlooked. Most of all, let 2026 be a year of surrender—releasing your fears, ambitions, and uncertainties to the One who sees the full picture. When God becomes the focus, every day gains meaning, direction, and hope. Happy New Year!

— By Jon Engen



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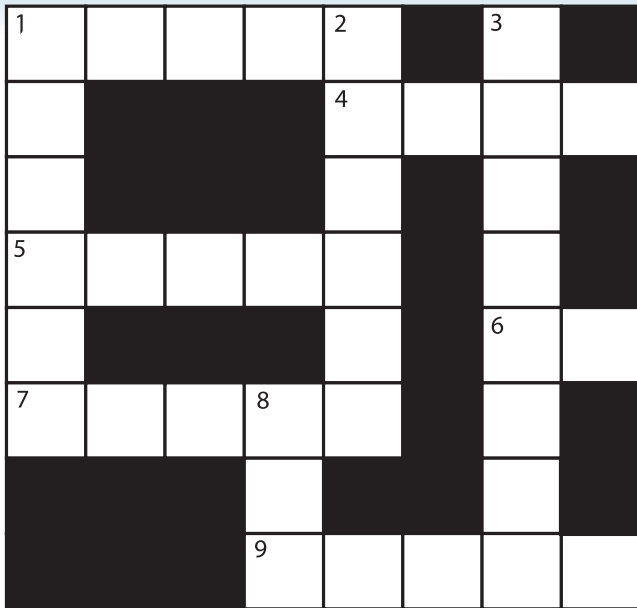
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Crossword



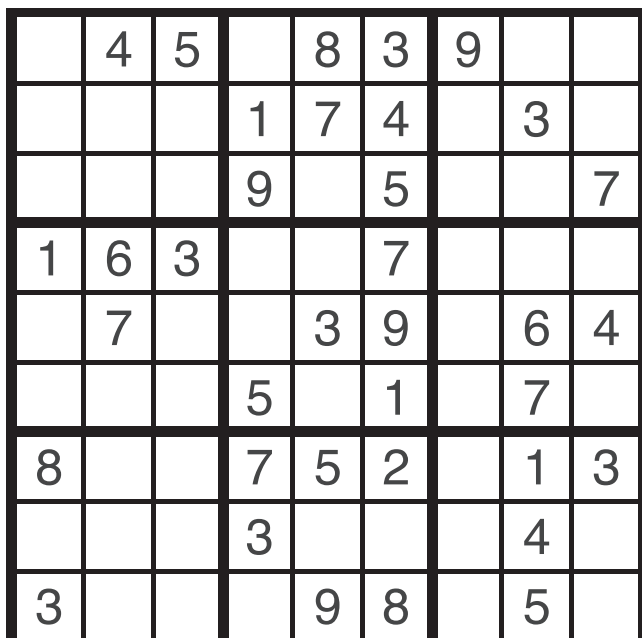
ACROSS

1. Related to onions
4. Passage of minutes
5. Reason
6. Artificial intelligence
7. Liquid meals
9. Brownd bread

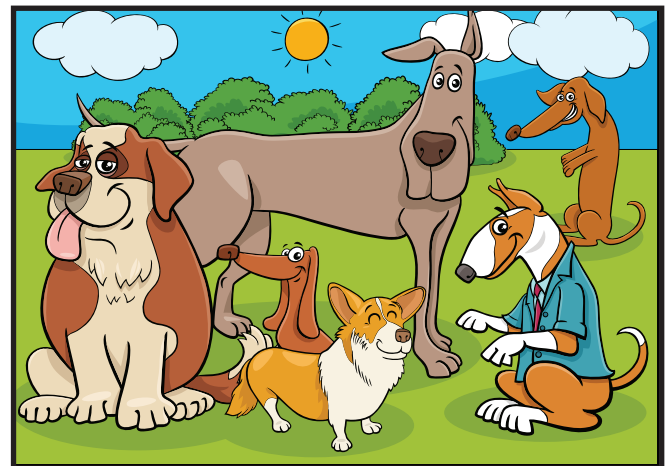
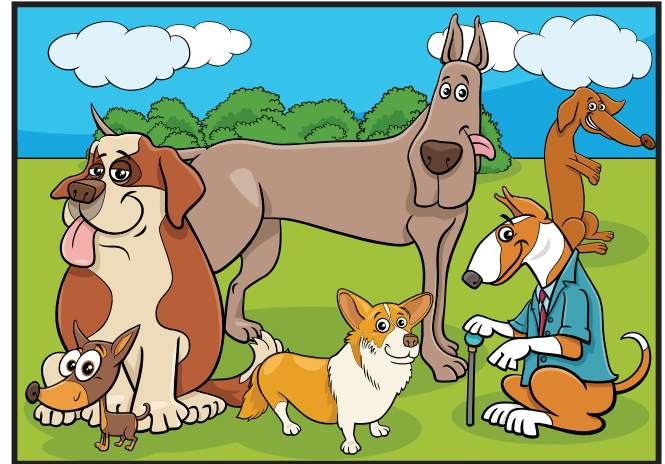
DOWN

1. Scoops liquid
2. Bases for soups
3. Importance given
8. Cooking vessel

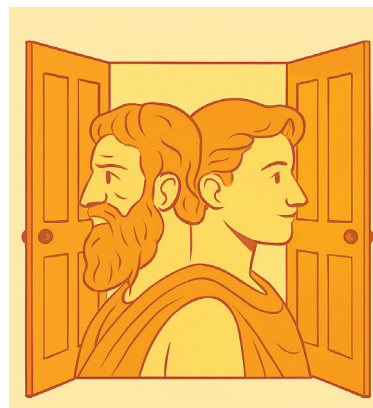
Sudoku



There are 10 differences
in the pictures below.
Can you find them all?



DID YOU KNOW?



Happy New Year!

January is named after Janus, the Roman god of doorways and beginnings, who had two faces—one looking back at the past and one toward the future.



Luigi's Outdoor Mural



A SLICE OF BAKERSFIELD HISTORY: Local muralist Sara Drennan brings a 1909 photograph of Luigi's to life on the restaurant's exterior wall, honoring the Lemucchi family and adding new color to Old Town Kern. PHOTO BY HEATHER HAFEN PHOTOGRAPHY



JEANETTE RICHARDSON, Executive Director of the Arts Council of Kern, says, "The Arts Council of Kern considers indoor and outdoor murals as an essential defining part of the strengthening creative economy. This mural takes its place among many storied murals throughout Bakersfield and the county."

WHERE TO SEE IT:
725 E 19th St, Bakersfield, CA

Old Town Kern has always been one of Bakersfield's most storied neighborhoods, a place where generations of families, businesses, and traditions have shaped the city's identity. Today, that history is being celebrated in a new way: through vibrant public art that brings color and pride back to the streets. One of the most striking examples is the mural on the exterior wall of **Luigi's Italian Restaurant & Delicatessen**, created by local artist **Sara Drennan**.

Painted in 2018 as part of the Old Town Kern Beautification Project, the mural reimagines a 1909 photograph of Luigi's original storefront. It features the Lemucchi family, whose legacy has anchored the neighborhood for more than a century. By transforming a historic image into a large-

scale work of art, Drennan bridges Bakersfield's past with its present, reminding the community of the roots that continue to nourish Old Town Kern.

The project itself was a grassroots effort—funded through donations and supported by volunteers who wanted to bring new life to the area. The mural has since become a visual landmark, drawing visitors, sparking conversations, and inspiring additional beautification efforts throughout the district.

For many residents, the Luigi's mural represents more than a painting on a wall. It's a symbol of resilience, heritage, and the power of community collaboration. In a neighborhood working hard to revitalize its streets, this artwork stands as a reminder that history can be honored not only in memories, but in bold, beautiful color.

JANUARY ACTIVITY CORNER

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RESOLUTIONS WORD SEARCH

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

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INTENTION

PERSISTENCE

ROUTINE

ASPIRATION

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