

# Meaning of Home



SAGEN™



**Education Module:**  
Teacher's toolkit for the  
Meaning of Home contest

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# Thank You from Habitat for Humanity Canada

Dear teachers,

Thank you for downloading our Education Module. Your class's participation will help families in your community access safe, decent, and affordable housing. We hope the Meaning of Home contest helps you and your students explore the importance of home and community service. This toolkit includes submission tips, resources, and lesson plans designed to help you integrate the Meaning of Home contest into your classroom activities.

Please help us spread the word by sharing your experience with other teachers at your school, in your network, or talk to your schoolboard or principal.

To find your local Habitat for Humanity, enter your school's postal code here:

<https://habitat.ca/en/restore/find-a-restore-near-you>

We truly appreciate your support. Every submission counts! Each entry means a \$10 donation thanks to founding sponsor Sagen™\* – helping Habitat for Humanity build a home for people in need of decent and affordable housing in your community.

Thank you for your support,

Habitat for Humanity Canada  
[meaningofhome@habitat.ca](mailto:meaningofhome@habitat.ca)

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# Background

Are you looking for an interesting way to engage your students in creative writing or community service? The Meaning of Home contest in support of Habitat for Humanity Canada, invites grades 4, 5 and 6 students from across Canada to write a composition, essay or poem that explains what home means to them.

By entering this national writing contest, students will have the opportunity to support their local Habitat for Humanity and help local families access safe, decent and affordable housing. In addition to winning great prizes.

The following resources are designed to help you incorporate the contest into your lesson plans.

These resources can serve as a standalone lesson or be used to augment existing lesson plans in areas such as language, creative writing, and community service.



## Objectives and Curriculum Areas

The Meaning of Home contest is a unique and meaningful way to get students involved in the creative writing process. The goal is to teach students about the importance of giving back in their community.

It is also a way for you to meet curriculum criteria in the area of Language Arts. Some of the curriculum requirements that can be addressed through the Meaning of Home contest include:

- Producing an original piece of work that encourages independent critical thought
- Organizing ideas and writing for an intended purpose or audience
- Writing to express thinking and communicate personal opinions
- Developing proper grammar, spelling and punctuation
- Fostering proofreading, editing and revision skills

The contest is an activity that students will see as meaningful. It will challenge them to think creatively about a topic that directly impacts their lives—the meaning of home—and ultimately improve their writing skills.

No purchase necessary. Contest valid from January 6 to February 21, 2025. There are 12 prizes available to be won with a total approximate retail value of \$7,188 CAD. Odds of winning a prize depend upon the number and score of eligible entries received. Correctly answering a time-limited, mathematical skill-testing question required. Open to all legal residents of Canada who are grade 4, 5, and 6 students. Limit one entry per entry person. For complete contest rules see [meaningofhome.ca](http://meaningofhome.ca).



# Included Resources

- Lesson plans
- Habitat family story and author's main idea worksheet
- Getting Involved in Your Community fact sheet
- Habitat for Humanity Canada Fact Sheet
- Writing tips for students
- Meaning of Home word search
- Letter to parents
- Newsletter copy



For complete  
contest rules and  
regulations, go to  
[meaningofhome.ca](http://meaningofhome.ca)

## Contest Details

**The Meaning of Home contest is free to enter and is open to all grades 4, 5 and 6 French and English students in Canada.**

Students can help a family build a home (and win cool prizes) by simply sharing what home means to them. Entries can be submitted online at [meaningofhome.ca](http://meaningofhome.ca) or by mail from January 6 to February 21, 2025.

Thanks to our generous contest sponsors \$10 will be donated to your local Habitat for each entry submitted, and the grand prize winners from each grade will get to direct a \$30,000 grant to their local Habitat for Humanity. Additional prizes include an iPad and class pizza party for each grand prize winner.

Also, nine runners-up will get to direct a \$10,000 grant to their local Habitat for Humanity. Additional prizes include an iPad and class pizza party for each runner-up.

## Contest Requirements

- Contest is open to students in grades 4, 5 and 6 in Canada.
- Entries must be between 50 and 300 words.
- You can submit your entry from January 6 to February 21, 2025.

**Write about it.  
Win a prize.  
Make a difference.**



# Judging Criteria

Contest entries will be judged based on originality, creativity, significance, and relevance. Our judges look for entries that are:

- Well-written
- Evokes emotion in a reader (can be happy, excited, sad, funny, etc.)
- Is aligned with Habitat's work to bring communities together to help families build strength, stability and independence through affordable homeownership

To see what winning entries might look like, go to <https://meaningofhome.ca/page/winners2024>



[Click here to see the illustrated book of the grade 4 grand prize winner from 2024.](#)

## How to Submit Your Students' Entries



### Enter online

Register as a teacher at [www.meaningofhome.ca](http://www.meaningofhome.ca) and have your students compose their entries. Once the contest opens, login to your account and copy/paste their entries and information for each student.



### Enter by mail

Students can also hand-write their submissions and teachers can mail or scan and e-mail the submissions. Mailed submissions must include the submission form that can be found on [www.meaningofhome.ca](http://www.meaningofhome.ca) and contain the necessary teacher and student contact information. Scanned submissions can be sent to [MOHentries@habitat.ca](mailto:MOHentries@habitat.ca)

# Lesson Plan 1

## Time

- 5 minutes for introduction
- 10 minutes for group work
- 5 minutes for presentation

## Materials/Resources

- Chart paper
- Magazines
- Glue sticks

## Teaching/Learning Activities



20 Minutes

### What's in my home?

- Divide the class into small groups of four or five students and give each group a piece of chart paper, a collection of magazines, scissors and glue sticks.
- Ask the students to create a collage of pictures that represent items found in their homes.
- Provide students with some examples to get them started including tangibles such as furniture, family or pets, as well as non-tangibles such as fun, laughter, and love.
- After students have had time to create their collages, bring the class back together and have groups present their collage to the class, pointing out key elements/ideas from their work.



# Lesson Plan 2

## Time

- 5 minutes for introduction
- 10 minutes for group work
- 5 minutes for presentation

## Materials/Resources

- Chart paper
- Markers/pens

## Teaching/Learning Activities



20 Minutes

### House vs. home brainstorm

- Divide the class into small groups of four or five students and provide each group with a piece of chart paper and a marker/pen.
- Ask one student to be the recorder for the group (this student is responsible for writing down the group's ideas) and another to be the reporter (responsible for sharing the ideas later with the class as a whole).
- Instruct recorders to divide their sheet in two by drawing a line down the middle — one side with a title "House", the other with "Home".
- Ask students to brainstorm the characteristics of both "house" and "home", highlighting what distinguishes one from the other. For example, a "house" is a physical structure with a roof, walls, furniture, etc. A "home" involves family, love, holidays, etc.
- After students have had time to create their lists, bring the class back together to share.
- One by one, ask the reporters to present their group's list.
- Teachers should create a list on the board that compiles the various answers from the class.

# Lesson Plan 3

## Time

- 5 minutes for introduction
- 30 minutes for group or lone work
- 10 minutes for class discussion

## Materials/Resources

- Charmaine and Melody's Story
- Main idea and reasons worksheet
- Writing utensils

## Teaching/Learning Activities



45 Minutes

### The importance of a safe home

- The goal of this activity is to encourage students to identify the main point of the story, analyze how the author uses evidence to support it, and learn about Habitat's mission and the significance of having a safe and secure home.
- Introduce the vocabulary, "main idea", "reasons", "evidence", and "support".
- Model how to support a main idea with details.
- Tell students you are going to prove your idea that (name of your school) is the best school in the world! Display this sentence and label it, "main idea".
- Ask students to give you reasons to support why it is the best school. Record three of their answers and label them, "reason or evidence."
- Students can work on their own, in pairs, or in groups to find evidence in the story to support the main idea (which in this case should be Charmaine and Melody deserved a safe and decent home). If the class has already read this story in a previous year, you can find more stories at <https://habitat.ca/en/news/stories>.

# Lesson Plan 4

## Time

- 5 minutes for introduction
- 15 minutes for group or lone work
- 5 minutes for class discussion

## Materials/Resources

- Rylan's story "If Home Were the 5 Senses"
- Sensory Poem worksheet
- Writing utensils

## Teaching/Learning Activities



25 Minutes

### Five senses writing activity

- The goal of this activity is to have students think about their five senses and how they can relate them to the meaning of home.
- Introduce the five senses: touch, sight, sound, taste, and smell.
- Discuss how these senses can make you feel emotions (hearing a certain song can make you happy or sad, feeling your mother's hug makes you feel safe, etc.).
- Have students close their eyes and think about their favourite thing about home.
- Have students draw the object on the worksheet in the provided box.
- Then have them work on their own to describe the object using the five senses.
- And finally have them describe the emotions they feel when they think about this object and why.
- Bring the class back together to discuss the activity and read them the grade 5 grand prize winning entry from the 2022 Meaning of Home contest "If Home Were the 5 Senses". You can read this [online by clicking here](#) (or go to [meaningofhome.ca/page/winners2022](https://meaningofhome.ca/page/winners2022)) or email [meaningofhome@habitat.ca](mailto:meaningofhome@habitat.ca) to request a hard copy.



# Lesson Plan 5

## Time

- 10 minutes for class discussion

## Materials/Resources

- Habitat for Humanity Canada Fact Sheet

## Teaching/Learning Activities



25 Minutes

### Lessons: Community involvement

- Following the introductory activities outlined previously, pose the question to the class: "What is special about your home? Explain the meaning of 'home' to you personally".
- Introduce the idea that some families in your community do not have a safe, decent and affordable place to call home. Using the Habitat for Humanity Canada Fact Sheet, provide a brief background on housing challenges in Canada. To find out more about projects in your community, go to [habitat.ca](http://habitat.ca) to find a local Habitat for Humanity near you.
- Begin a class discussion about ways students can get involved in their community. This can either be a class brainstorm or lecture-style. Using the Getting Involved in Your Community Fact Sheet, point out ways in which students can give back to their community — from gathering food for the food bank, to participating in clothing drives, and the Meaning of Home contest.
- Provide a brief introduction to Habitat for Humanity, using the Habitat for Humanity Canada Fact Sheet.

# Lesson Plan 6

## Time

- 5 minute for introduction
- 25 minutes independent writing time

## Materials/Resources

- Word search
- Writing tips sheet

## Teaching/Learning Activities



30 Minutes

### Lessons: Community involvement (Continued)

- After providing a brief lesson on “Community Involvement”, tell students they also have an exciting opportunity to help a family in need of safe, decent and affordable housing by writing a composition, essay or poem on what home means to them, which will ultimately help to fund a Habitat for Humanity build in their community.
- Inform students of the contest, including requirements and prizes, and let them know they will be completing a writing assignment that can be submitted to the contest
- Give students class time to work independently on their writing assignment — they can use the writing tips sheet to help.
- Plan to have a period of peer-editing, either on the same day or following day, depending on individual class time frames
- Collect writing assignments and work with students to submit their entries, either online if computer/internet is available, or by mail.
- If students finish early, they can also work on the word search.

# Charmaine and Melody's Story

Since Charmaine and Melody welcomed their first son Dakota 12 years ago, they've had to move homes nine different times. Six of those moves were from Ontario to Alberta and back, for Dakota and then their second son Kaleb, now 9 years-old, to receive life-saving medical attention for an extremely rare autoimmune disorder at Edmonton's Stollery Children's Hospital. Although Dakota and Kaleb are not biologically related, they both astoundingly share the same debilitating condition and need expensive life-sustaining treatment each month.

Tragically, after the birth of Kaleb, Melody also had complications which progressively affected her mobility and left her in a wheelchair. This forced Charmaine to leave her job as a registered nurse and director to care for their young family. "I had a decision to make after Melody became disabled," says Charmaine. "I could work 12-16-hour days just to pay for nursing care that left us dead broke and then come home to be a caregiver at night and subsist on two hours of sleep, or I could care for my family myself."



In their quest for accessible and affordable housing, Charmaine and Melody rented a small cottage-sized house from a friend who allowed them to make accessibility upgrades. But they soon realized that the house wouldn't work in the long run. Not only was the house located in an unsafe neighbourhood, it only had two bedrooms and major foundational issues. This caused the floor to buckle, which was a safety hazard for Melody. And there were so many areas of the home that Melody couldn't access with her wheelchair, including the boys' room.

**“ homeownership has reawakened the dream for me. I can give my family what I have always worked towards ”**

They decided to apply to Habitat for Humanity Windsor-Essex, after repeated urgings from Charmaine's mother, and were overcome with joy when months later their application was approved. "After I got off the phone with Pam from Habitat, Mel started crying, and I started crying," says Charmaine. "Mel had just fallen in the house the week before and hurt herself, so we needed this."

But that wasn't the end of their housing saga. After they found out about the success of their Habitat application, they had to move twice more. The owner of the cottage put the house up for sale and they moved to into a triplex that ended-up being cockroach-infested. "We had to leave everything behind in that place or risk infecting our new home. We lost everything." As Habitat homeowners, Melody and Charmaine were required to volunteer 500 hours of their time and pay an affordable mortgage for the fair market value of their home. Ever handy, Charmaine donated close to 300 of those hours on the build sites in their new neighbourhood, while receiving donated hours from friends and the community. Now in their new Habitat home, the boys are thriving.

"There's a happiness and lightness about them. We've moved them a lot. The saddest part for us as parents is that we could not provide that stability. When children don't feel rooted, it's damaging on so many levels," continues Charmaine. "They refer to things like MY house. MY friends. MY karate class. They never had anything 'mine' before. This is MY home. This is MY neighbourhood. They are really holding on to that," adds Melody. "They spend a lot of time dreaming." Melody has independence and feels more hopeful. All the rooms in the home are accessible. Habitat Windsor-Essex put a desk in the kitchen so that Melody could help with meal prep, and cabinets were designed to be lowered if needed in the future. "Everything is in my reach. I can contribute to things around the house." As for Charmaine, "homeownership has reawakened the dream for me. I can give my family what I have always worked towards. I lost the ability to give my family what they needed." "It was such a blessing for Habitat to give us this opportunity that we would not have otherwise had."



# Main Idea and Evidence Worksheet

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Main idea**

**Reason or  
evidence #1**

**Reason or  
evidence #2**

**Reason or  
evidence #3**

**The author of this article makes a good point!  
Explain how the main idea is shown and supported.**

# Sensory Poem Worksheet

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Think of an object that reminds you of home. Draw it below**

**Describe the object.**

**I see...**

**I feel...**

**I smell...**

**I taste...**

**I hear...**

**Describe your emotions when you think about this object.**



# Tip Sheet:

## Talking to Students about Community Involvement

### Overall Talking Points

- According to the Canada Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating, Canada's youth are the volunteering generation
- The study indicated that Canadian teenagers between the ages of 15 and 19 are more likely than those in any other age group to volunteer
- Statistics show that youth who have early, positive volunteer experiences are more likely to volunteer as they get older



### Volunteering Starts at Home

- Kids can begin by volunteering at home — help set the table, wash dishes, or read to a younger sibling
- Children can also accompany their parents as they help out their neighbours by watering their plants or collecting their mail while they are away
- Start local — kids can volunteer to rake leaves or garden for an elderly neighbour

### Benefits of Volunteering

Along with the experience of giving back to the community and helping others, youth volunteers also benefit in other ways:

- They discover their strengths and talents
- They develop critical thinking and teamwork skills
- They build self-esteem and confidence
- They feel needed and valued





# Habitat for Humanity Canada Fact Sheet

## The Housing Crisis in Canada

- 1 in 8 Canadian households do not have a safe, decent, affordable place to call home
- Because the cost of housing is so high, many hardworking families have to choose between paying rent and paying for other necessities, such as food, childcare or heating

## Habitat for Humanity Canada

- Habitat for Humanity Canada was founded in 1985 and is a national, non-profit organization working toward a world where everyone has a safe and decent place to live.
- Habitat for Humanity brings communities together to help families build strength, stability and independence through affordable homeownership.
- In Canada, Habitat for Humanity is made up of 45 local Habitats spread across all provinces and territories.
- Since 1985, over 4,309 families have accessed a safe and decent home by partnering with Habitat in Canada.



## Habitat for Humanity Programs

- Habitat for Humanity Canada helps individuals and families in need of a safe and decent place to live access affordable homeownership.
- Habitat for Humanity Canada is able to do this because we build our homes at the lowest cost possible, with donations of funds, products and labour.
- Habitat for Humanity Canada calls this process, "A hand up, not a hand-out".
- Habitat for Humanity Canada's Global Village program is a volunteer program that sends Canadians around the globe to build alongside families who don't have a decent and affordable place to live.
- Habitat ReStores are building supply stores that accept and resell quality new and used building materials. They generate funds to support Habitat's building programs, while reducing the amount of materials that are headed for overflowing landfills!



**With the right words, you can change the world.**

E.B. White, *Charlotte's Web*

## Writing Tips

Here are some tips to get you started:

### 1. Read, Read, Read

The more you read the better you'll write.

### 2. Brainstorm

Start by writing a list of memories or descriptive words that represent what "home" means to you.

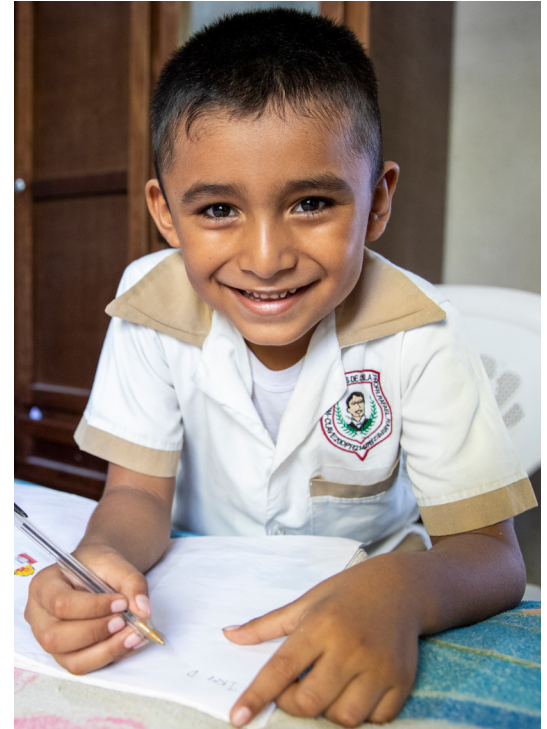
### 3. Write about a topic you know

Look around for inspiration and ideas.

### 4. Edit your work

Once your story is complete, it's time to edit your work! Follow these helpful tips:

- Read your story out loud to find mistakes or missing words.
- Ask a friend, family member, or teacher to read your story.



## Checklist

Here's a checklist of things to look for when editing your story:

- Is every paragraph indented at the beginning?
- Do all sentences begin with a capital letter?
- Do all sentences in your story make sense?
- Does your story have a variety of long and short sentences?
- Is there a variety of words in your story?
- Did you use descriptive words?
- Do you repeat a certain word too many times?
- Is the spelling correct? (Be careful of words that sound the same but have different meanings. For example: 'no' and 'know')
- Will the reader understand what the meaning of home means to you?
- Does the story have a good title?

# Tips for Teachers

## Submitting Entries

- Entries can be submitted either online through the Meaning of Home website, mailed to our PO box, or scanned and e-mailed to [MOHentries@habitat.ca](mailto:MOHentries@habitat.ca).
- The easiest way to submit is through the contest website. If you mail or e-mail your entries, the entries will not appear on the website. The student's name and city will appear and be counted in the total tally, but there will be no entry available to read on the website.
- If your students don't have access to computers and need to hand-write their entries, we of course welcome mailed or e-mailed entries as we understand it may be time consuming for teachers to transcribe each entry.
- To submit entries online, register as a teacher, and fill out your name, contact information, and school information, which will be applied to each student whose entry you submit.

## Collecting Submissions

- If you plan to submit through the website, you will need each student's name, grade, age, title of entry, and the entry itself
- If your students work on computers, provide them with a template for them to input this information and have them send their entries to you. You can then easily copy and paste each entry and the student's information to save time

## Parental Permission

- When you submit an entry for a student, you do have to confirm the student had parent or guardian permission to enter. You can get this permission however you see fit.
- We have provided a letter template in this package that you can use to tell teachers about the contest.
- We also have a permission form template in this package that you can choose to use if you wish. We do not need a copy of this, it would be for your own records.

# With a Little Help From Our Friends

Habitat for Humanity Canada would like to take this opportunity to recognize our generous contest sponsors. Thanks to their investment, students across Canada have been given the opportunity to give back to their community in an engaging and meaningful way.

We are incredibly grateful for their support and for their continued commitment to helping families build strength, stability and independence through affordable homeownership.

On behalf of Habitat Canada and Habitat homeowners, thank you for helping to build a world where everyone has a safe and decent place to live.



## Founding Sponsor



## Award Sponsors



## Judging Sponsors



# Meaning of Home



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

HABITAT  
HUMANITY  
HOME  
STABILITY  
INDEPENDENCE  
SAFETY

SHELTER  
BUILDING  
LOVE  
FAMILY  
MEMORIES  
FUN

SLEEP  
HEALTHY  
COMFORTABLE  
CHILDREN  
ACCESSIBLE

# Meaning of Home



## Example communication to parents:

Dear Parents,

Our class is participating in the Meaning of Home contest! Students will write about what home means to them. Winners will receive an iPad, a pizza party for their class, and a grant to direct toward a Habitat for Humanity build in our community.

Each contest entry also generates a \$10 donation to our local Habitat for Humanity, helping build safe and affordable homes for families in our community.

This contest encourages students to think creatively about a meaningful topic—the concept of home—while also enhancing their writing skills. There is no fundraising involved; all prizes are generously provided by corporate sponsors.



# Meaning of Home



## National Writing Contest for Grades 4, 5 and 6 Optional permission form (for teacher use)

### Parent acknowledgement form

Student first name: \_\_\_\_\_ Student last name: \_\_\_\_\_

☐

I give permission for my child to participate in the Meaning of Home contest.

☐

I have read, understood, and agree to comply with the Official Contest Rules found at [meaningofhome.ca/rules](http://meaningofhome.ca/rules).

Parent name (printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Parent signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# Meaning of Home



**The copy below can be added to your school's newsletter to help promote your class's involvement in this year's Meaning of Home contest in support of Habitat for Humanity Canada.**

## Headline:

It's time for the Meaning of Home contest in support of Habitat for Humanity Canada. Helping families build strength, stability and self-reliance through affordable homeownership, one entry at a time!

## Body:

We are very excited to join classrooms from across Canada participating in the Meaning of Home contest. In its 16th year, the Meaning of Home contest invites grades 4, 5 and 6 students from across Canada to submit a poem or essay explaining what home means to them. Since 2007, over 120,000 students have participated in the Meaning of Home contest. Thanks to their inspiring words, and the support of founding sponsor Sagen™\*, award sponsor Urban Systems Foundation, and judging sponsors BrokerLink, Stantec Consulting Ltd. and Travelers Canada, the Meaning of Home contest has raised over \$2.7 million to build homes across Canada for families in need of decent and affordable housing.

Each grade winner will receive a \$30,000 grant for their local Habitat for Humanity. Nine contest runners-up (three per grade) will receive a \$10,000 grant for their local Habitat. Each entry also results in a \$10 donation to your local Habitat.

We've decided to participate this year so students have the opportunity to make a difference in our community. In addition to winning great prizes, we will be learning the importance of safe, affordable housing while building a homes families. **The contest is open for submissions January 6th to February 21st!**

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