

The Project Approach to Learning at

RisingOaks
Early Learning | St. Matthew



Project Name: Milano Cortina Winter Olympics 2026

Age Group: School-Age Group 1 - JK/SK

Project Start Date: February 3, 2026

Project End Date: February 20, 2026 - Parent Social

Background

With the excitement of the Winter Olympics 2026 quickly approaching, the children and educators within the program decided to join on the journey alongside athletes from around the world. This project aligned with our World Travels that had already been happening since September 2025. The Olympic Games project began on February 3rd, 2026 and ended on February 20th, 2 days prior to the exact date of the closing ceremonies of the 2026 Milano Cortina games.

There were 27 children who participated in this project - however not all children were present at all times throughout the entirety of it.

The educators that participated in this project were Josephine Allishaw, RECE and Keri Neeb, RECE.

Phase 1: Beginning the Project

With the excitement of the Winter Olympics 2026 approaching, conversation began amongst the children within our program. With the children in our program being ages 4-6, they do not have a memory of what the last winter games encompassed. Many of the children engage in sports in their personal lives, but being able to witness the games in action allows the children to gain insight into what is possible, add fuel to their passion, and allows them to ask questions about what being an Olympian is all about.

Our first stop along the journey was learning about all of the countries that would partake in the 2026 games. We also highlighted the events that are present in the games. From this - we were able to develop our own schedule of the games, and decide which sports/events we wanted to focus on. The group knew that although there are some sports we may not be able to replicate within our program, technology provided us with another aspect as we were still able to watch these events live via a projector and video screen within the program. The children gained insight into the power of cheering via distance and the impact these athletes have knowing that they have entire nations cheering them on.

During the initial stages of the project - the children were also able to witness something that they have not seen - to watch the opening ceremonies of the Milano Cortina Olympic Games. There was excitement around the room as the group shouted out and cheered on each country as they walked into the stadium. They were able to identify various countries by the flags that the athletes were carrying. "Why is the front flag so big?" one of the children asked. This sparked conversation amongst the children and the educators as we highlighted the aspect of Olympic Flag bearers.

2026 Olympic Events - Milano Cortina

-  [Alpine skiing \(10\) \(details\)](#)
-  [Biathlon \(11\) \(details\)](#)
-  [Bobsleigh \(4\) \(details\)](#)
-  [Cross-country skiing \(12\) \(details\)](#)
-  [Curling \(3\) \(details\)](#)
-  [Figure skating \(5\) \(details\)](#)
-  [Freestyle skiing \(15\) \(details\)](#)
-  [Ice hockey \(2\) \(details\)](#)
-  [Luge \(5\) \(details\)](#)
-  [Nordic combined \(3\) \(details\)](#)
-  [Short-track speed skating \(9\) \(details\)](#)
-  [Skeleton \(3\) \(details\)](#)
-  [Ski jumping \(8\) \(details\)](#)
-  [Ski mountaineering \(3\) \(details\)](#)
-  [Snowboarding \(11\) \(details\)](#)
-  [Speed skating \(14\) \(details\)](#)

2026 Countries Participating - Milano Cortina

Participating National Olympic Committees [hide]		
•  Albania (4)	•  Haiti (2)	•  Netherlands (39)
•  Andorra (7)	•  Hong Kong (4)	•  New Zealand (17)
•  Argentina (8)	•  Hungary (15)	•  Nigeria (1)
•  Armenia (5)	•  Iceland (4)	•  North Macedonia (4)
•  Australia (54)	•  India (2)	•  Norway (80)
•  Austria (117)	•  Individual Neutral Athletes (20)	•  Pakistan (1)
•  Azerbaijan (2)	•  Iran (4)	•  Philippines (2)
•  Belgium (30)	•  Ireland (4)	•  Poland (80)
•  Benin (1)	•  Israel (10)	•  Portugal (3)
•  Bolivia (1)	•  Italy (198) (host)	•  Puerto Rico (1)
•  Bosnia and Herzegovina (5)	•  Jamaica (7)	•  Romania (29)
•  Brazil (15)	•  Japan (120)	•  San Marino (1)
•  Bulgaria (20)	•  Kazakhstan (36)	•  Saudi Arabia (2)
•  Canada (210)	•  Kenya (2)	•  Serbia (3)
•  Chile (4)	•  South Korea (71)	•  Singapore (1)
•  China (126)	•  Kosovo (2)	•  Slovakia (53)
•  Colombia (1)	•  Kyrgyzstan (2)	•  Slovenia (37)
•  Croatia (14)	•  Latvia (68)	•  South Africa (5)
•  Cyprus (2)	•  Lebanon (2)	•  Spain (20)
•  Czech Republic (114)	•  Liechtenstein (8)	•  Sweden (110)
•  Denmark (38)	•  Lithuania (17)	•  Switzerland (175)
•  Ecuador (1)	•  Luxembourg (2)	•  Chinese Taipei (9)
•  Eritrea (1)	•  Madagascar (2)	•  Thailand (3)
•  Estonia (32)	•  Malaysia (1)	•  Trinidad and Tobago (7)
•  Finland (103)	•  Malta (1)	•  Turkey (8)
•  France (182)	•  Mexico (5)	•  Ukraine (46)
•  Georgia (8)	•  Moldova (5)	•  United Arab Emirates (2)
•  Germany (189)	•  Monaco (1)	•  United States (233)
•  Great Britain (55)	•  Mongolia (3)	•  Uruguay (1)
•  Greece (5)	•  Montenegro (2)	•  Uzbekistan (2)
•  Guinea-Bissau (1)	•  Morocco (2)	•  Venezuela (1)
NOCs that are expected to participate in 2026, but not in 2022.		NOCs that participated in 2022, but not in 2026.
•  Benin	•  Singapore	•  American Samoa
•  Guinea-Bissau	•  South Africa	•  Belarus ^[6]
•  Individual Neutral Athletes ^[5]	•  United Arab Emirates	•  Ghana
•  Kenya	•  Uruguay	•  Peru
	•  Venezuela	•  ROC ^[7]
		•  Timor-Leste
		•  Virgin Islands

Phase 2: Developing the Project

Introducing the Olympic Flame

Our first step within the Winter Olympics alongside the children was to educate the group on the meaning and the importance of the Olympic Flame. To the group It was just something with fire - however the flame is more than a symbol of sport - it is a symbol of unity, hope and community.

The flame was originally lit in Olympia, Greece. "The flame connects the modern games to their ancient roots. As it travels across countries in the torch relay, it represents the shared human spirit that transcends borders, politics, and differences."

We emphasized to the group that the flame reminds us that while we compete on the field, hills, ice, etc. we stand together as one. The flame continues to burn as a symbol of perseverance, excellence, and the power of peace through sport.

The children then were able to participate in creating their own Olympic Flame that they could carry alongside them.



Black History Month - Canadian Black Olympians

As the Olympics fell in the same month as Black History Month, we wanted to ensure that we highlighted the importance of inclusion in the Games. Sharing with the group past and present Black Canadian athletes was the place to start.

By learning about the achievements and challenges of these athletes, we not only celebrated their excellence in sport but also recognize their impact on Canadian history and society. Their

perseverance, leadership, and dedication have helped shape a more inclusive and equitable sporting community. Reflecting on their contributions encourages us to think critically about representation, opportunity, and the importance of creating spaces where all athletes can thrive. Through education and awareness, we can continue to promote respect, diversity, and inclusion both in sport and beyond. These are some of the names that we highlighted:

- William Eldon O'Ree - professional ice hockey player
- Angela James - professional ice hockey player
- Cynthia Appiah - professional bobsled pilot
- Jarome Arthur-Leigh Adekunle Tig Junior Elvis Iginla - professional ice hockey player



The Good Old Hockey Game

Our first stop on our Olympic Games journey focused on a sport that holds a special place in the hearts of many children within our program: hockey. As a shared passion/interest among both the children and one of the educators, hockey immediately created a sense of connection and enthusiasm within the group. Through discussion and play, the children explored the importance of teamwork, communication, and cooperation, while also experiencing the joy, laughter, and passion that come from playing and learning together.

Using loose parts such as cardboard, tape, and various coloring materials, the group worked collaboratively to design and build their own mini hockey rink in the program's indoor space. The children demonstrated creativity and problem-solving skills as they constructed boards, nets, and even a cheering section proudly displaying different country flags. This hands-on activity encouraged imaginative play, fine motor development, and an understanding of how individual contributions help create a shared outcome.

Throughout the experience, the children eagerly shared their prior knowledge, newly learned skills, and strategies they have observed while watching hockey. These conversations highlighted why hockey is often referred to as a Canadian pastime—it brings people together through shared passion, teamwork, and a strong sense of community. By engaging in this activity, the children not only deepened their appreciation for the sport but also strengthened social connections and learning through play, collaboration, and meaningful participation.



Bobsleigh - a Fast Way to Race

As the games were officially set to begin on Friday, February 6th, we celebrated the day prior by heading to the slopes and creating our very own bobsleigh track. With the help of Keri, we carefully cut individual snow blocks from our outdoor play space using a small saw. This process encouraged hands-on learning as we practiced coordination, problem-solving, and safe tool use.

The snow blocks were then transported to another area of the playground, where we worked together to construct two vertical barriers along the track. As we built, we discussed the importance of these walls in a traditional bobsleigh race, learning how they help guide the sled, maintain speed, and keep athletes safely on course.

Once the track was complete, we took turns riding down in our homemade bobsleigh, constructed from cardboard and tape. This experience combined creativity, teamwork, and physical activity, while also deepening our understanding of winter sports and basic engineering concepts. Overall, the activity provided an engaging and memorable way to learn through play, demonstrating how exploration and collaboration can turn a simple idea into a meaningful learning experience.



Curling - Aiming for the Rings

In our after-school program, we are all about using what we have to enhance our learning in any way we can - and after a weekend of Olympic events watched alongside their families, we continued to do just that. Introducing children to the sport of curling doesn't have to start on a full sheet of ice. A tabletop curling game one afternoon turned into a powerful way to teach the core concepts of the sport in a fun, hands-on way that the group was able to instantly connect with.

The children took turns as they slid the stones across the table, beginning to take note and understand the basics of aim, weight, and direction. They were able to see how a gentle push travels differently

than a strong one, and how small adjustments, even like hand placement can completely change the outcome of where the rock will travel. Without even realizing it, the group was quickly learning about strategy, cause and effect, and problem-solving.

Tabletop curling also brings the team aspect of the sport to life. The group was able to ask questions alongside their educators through meaningful conversation about their shots, cheer each other on, and learn to take turns—mirroring the communication and sportsmanship that are so important and evident in real curling and other sports in the Olympic Winter games.



The Olympic Village

A key topic explored with the children was where athletes stay during the Olympic Games. Educators introduced the concept of the Olympic Village and engaged the group in a thoughtful discussion. The children eagerly asked questions and learned that the Village is where athletes from around the world live throughout the Games. We talked about how it fosters a strong sense of community and camaraderie, bringing people together in a shared experience despite coming from different countries and backgrounds.

Inspired by this conversation, and making the most of the cold winter months, we headed outdoors to create our own Olympic Village using one of nature's best building materials – snow! Keri assisted by

shoveling large blocks, while the children eagerly took turns using their heavy-work skills to transport the blocks across the playground. Together, they carefully constructed the frame of their very own village.

The pride and excitement were evident as the children watched their hard work transform into a beautifully shaped Olympic Village. This hands-on experience was a wonderful reminder of how the Olympic Games can inspire teamwork, perseverance, and a strong sense of belonging – bringing everyone together in meaningful ways.



Parent Information Wall

The educators within the school-age 1 program continue to emphasize the importance of bringing families into their program and allowing them to learn alongside their children. Using a parent documentation wall within the centre provided just that. It served as not only a place of information, but that of a space of open-ended conversation and discussion among children, families and educators.



Phase 3: Concluding the Project

Growing Minds Through Play

Olympic Social: Inviting Families to the Closing Ceremonies

As the Olympic Closing Ceremonies day came along - so brought a gentle end, and afternoon of celebration. The program was filled with Olympic highlights on the big screen, laughter from children, and families gathering together - connecting on shared interests and passions. The Olympic spirit displayed. Though the games were over, the memories sparked on as families walked around the program - observing documentation and reminiscing alongside their children on the experiences. As we said goodbye to the 2026 Winter Games, families knew something magical was still glowing inside of their children as they could see the excitement on their faces: the courage to dream big, the joy of trying, and the promise that the Olympic spirit would shine on, wherever they went next.





Teacher Reflections

Learning alongside the children in School-Age group 1 through an engaging and thrilling Olympic project was a rewarding experience that supported both our understanding of learning as educators and our own personal development. Through exploring the values behind the Winter Games, inspired by the work and dedication of athletes from around the globe, the children learned about teamwork, perseverance, and respect.

The experiences that this project took us on encouraged cooperation, resilience, and positive sportsmanship. As educators, we observed children supporting one another, celebrating efforts, and building confidence through participation rather than competition alone. It wasn't about being good at something, it was about growing together.

This project also highlighted the importance of inclusive practice, as activities by us as educators were adapted to ensure every child within our program could take part and feel successful in their efforts. Overall, the experience reinforced how engaging children and co-learning alongside them can reignite your flame for quality programming and reflective practice.

