

# Beyond TOYS

## Gifts that Evoke Kids' Creativity

by Sandra Murphy



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Choosing thoughtful gifts for kids can be a challenge, especially when opting for creativity over this year's hot toy. It's possible to find gifts that appeal to both parent and child, involving the whole family or working as solo projects. Some expand beyond the boundaries of home.

### Go Robo

The Tinkering Kit will have boys and girls, moms and dads all clamoring for their turn to build a robot that does more than merely walk. Challenge cards urge kids to make a machine to scramble an egg or build a robot that moves without wheels. Robotics teaches science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics, also known as STEAM learning. Computer programming is the last step ([TinkeringLabs.com/catalyst](http://TinkeringLabs.com/catalyst)).

### Language for a Lifetime

Benedict Beckeld, Ph.D., of New York City, speaks 11 languages and teaches students via online video chats (Skype) ([BenedictBeckeld.com/contact](http://BenedictBeckeld.com/contact)). Locally, find teachers or grad students to tutor a second or third language at home for the whole family. Search online for interactive, game-like classes that maintain a child's

interest. American Sign Language, the fourth-most-used language in the U.S., is fun to learn and helpful to know.

### Budding Foodies

Take a quiz, experiment, learn more and find kid-approved recipes at [AmericasTestKitchen.com/kids/home](http://AmericasTestKitchen.com/kids/home). Kids learn to make sriracha-lime popcorn, hummus, and chicken and broccoli stir fry. Use organic and non-GMO (not genetically modified) ingredients. Sign up to receive recipes and tips for hands-on activities via email to keep good meals coming. The onsite equipment reviews help with selection of affordable and safe kitchen tools.

### Emerging Artistry

Carolyn Dube, a mixed-media art adventurer in Batesville, Indiana, gives her followers at [AColorfulJourney.com](http://AColorfulJourney.com) permission to play and even make mistakes. "My free online workshop shows ways to use found items like recycled cardboard to make art," she says. For kid-safe paints, look for the Art and Creative Materials Institute, Inc. (ACMI) seal that certifies products are non-toxic and properly labeled. Certified Arteza-brand acrylic premium paints are packaged in less-waste

pouches to use as-is or to refill original containers.

The Danish company Sprout Pencils, operating from Boston, engraves quotes on biodegradable Love Pencils, which contain flower or vegetable seeds. When it's too short to write or color with, plant it. In Cleveland, Faber-Castell USA makes their colored pencils from re-forested wood with an ergonomic, triangular shape, perfect for learning the proper grip. The Young Artist Essentials Gift Set contains eco-pencils, non-toxic crayons and oil-pastels.

[DickBlick.com](http://DickBlick.com) offers hundreds of free lesson plans for art lovers of all ages, skill levels and interests, all designed to meet the National Standards for Visual Art Education.

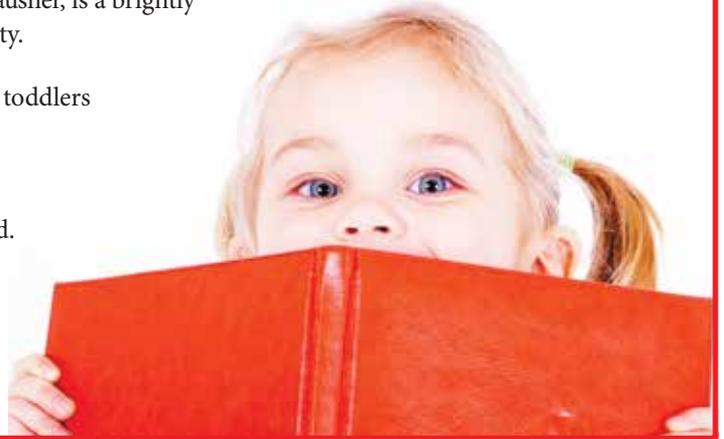
### Memorable Experiences

Erica Hartwig, director of operations at Organic Moments Photography, in Boca Raton, Florida, has five children. "I want to give a memorable experience, rather than a toy that will sit in their rooms," she says. "Football season tickets, dance lessons, an art class or vacations supplement the packages under the tree."

# BOOKS THAT HOOK YOUNG READERS

Books for kids can be the ultimate gift that keeps on giving. Here are some favorites.

- ***The Nocturnals*** is a critically acclaimed, middle-grade series for readers that love animals, adventure and a hint of mystery. Written by film director and author Tracey Hecht, the books also relate to elementary school children, covering bullying, confidence, friendship and self-acceptance. The free reading kit via *NocturnalsWorld.com* includes activities.
- As a mom with a career, Crystal Bowe recommends ***Goodnight Stories for Rebel Girls: 100 Tales of Extraordinary Women***. “My daughter loves it and has been introduced to amazing female role models.”
- ***Noah the Narwhal, A Tale of Downs and Ups***, by Judith Klausner, is a brightly illustrated picture book about friendship and invisible disability.
- ***What Do You See on Chanukah?*** is a board game book for toddlers by Bracha Goetz.
- ***Up in the Garden and Down in the Dirt***, by Kate Messner, shows kids that plants are more than what’s seen above ground.
- ***Hello, Hello***, by Brendan Wenzel, a picture book for ages 3 to 6, celebrates animals, including 30 endangered species.



Crystal Bowe, a mom and physician in Belmont, North Carolina, suggests gifting memberships to encourage new activities for kids. “The zoo is fun and allows parents to spend quality time with their children. Tickets to a movie or a play stimulate the imagination.” Museums, science centers and area attractions are other inviting options.

## More Ideas

Wonder Crate, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, offers a monthly subscription service. “We inspire kids to think big and make a difference,” says co-founder Corrie Wiedmann. “Each month brings a box that educates, entertains and empowers kids to contribute to the world. Our December crate highlights Leonardo da Vinci and focuses on ways kids can use innovation to help others, spotlighting a kid that created an app to help people with disabilities.”

Maple Landmark, in Middlebury, Vermont, a wooden products company, makes puzzles that include an activity clock for toddlers and bookends featuring a fire truck, pirate ship, school bus or train tunnel. Owner Mike Rainville says, “We work hard to ensure that all of our wood is sustainably harvested and finishes are safe and non-toxic.”

Gifts that engage the mind, spark imagination and deliver fun yield immediate and long-term benefits, including being fondly remembered.

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