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Inexpensive holiday gifts for children

Options that are fun, educational and well made for \$20 or less

LOCKIE HUNTER • UPDATED DECEMBER 15, 2008 1:12 PM

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With tight budgets this season, we all need to stretch our holiday gift dollars. Items that provide hours of playtime or items that have multiple dimensions for learning, such as craft projects, science and magic kits, and musical instruments, are excellent choices. We also looked for gifts that are made to last with quality workmanship. Such gifts can be had for \$20 or less, so we've combed the mountain area to find them for you.

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1. The Amazing Magic Mike Easy Magic Set

Owner of Magic Central, Ricky D. Boone, has won the lifetime achievement award in magic. This kit includes many classic tricks, including the ball vase and the magic coloring book, and is "just the beginning," Boone says. While you're shopping, let Ricky demonstrate a few tricks. Ages 5 and older. \$20.00 at Magic Central, 175 Weaverville Highway, Suite L, Asheville, 645-2941.

2. Montgomery Schoolhouse from Maple Landmark

Well made and substantial, this toy is "guaranteed for life by the maker, a fourth-generation toy manufacturer," said Gary Kramer, owner of Enviro Depot. "We stress classic toys." In six rugged designs, all with maple bodies, this gift is appropriate or ages 5 and older. \$15 at Enviro Depot, 58 College St., Asheville, 252-9007.

3. The Writer in Me by Little Miss Matched

This boxed set is "a wonderful gift for a young girl in your life who enjoys the pleasure of writing," notes Malaprops children's buyer, Caroline Green. "Included in the set is a how-to writing book, a diary, a reporter's notebook, a travel journal, a dream journal, a 'wild word box' (that contains flash cards to write those neat words you learn along the way), and an inspirational poster." Ages 9-12. \$16.95 at Malaprops Bookstore, 55 Haywood St., Asheville, 254-6734.

4. Fun Slides Carpet Skates by Simtec

Trapped indoors during inclement weather? To ease that antsy feeling, glide inside with these carpet skates. A Dr. Toy 100 Best Children's Products winner. Ages 6 and older. \$19.99 at Enviro Depot.

5. Musical Instruments by First Note

From First Note comes inexpensive real instruments created to introduce children to music. With prices from \$1.99-\$4.99, you can afford to buy



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three or four for your very own holiday jam session! Ages 5 and older.

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Hum a Zoo, \$1.99; Jaw Harp, \$3.99; Fife, \$3.99; Ocarina, \$3.99; Triangle, \$4.99. Mast General Stores, 527 N. Main St., Hendersonville, 696-1883; and 15 Biltmore Ave., Asheville, 232-1883.

6. Dinosaur Skeleton Excavation kits by Toysmith

Go on an archeological dig with these kits from the Colburn Earth Science Museum. Dig for and then assemble a T-rex or brachiosaurus skeleton. "The gift supports the museum, so you can feel good about your holiday dollars," notes Felicity Green, communications manager for Colburn. Kits include a kid's quiz for further learning. For ages 8 and older. \$10 each at Colburn Earth Science Museum, 2 S. Pack Square, Asheville, 254-7162.

7. The Van Gogh Art Kit by the Metropolitan Museum of Art

"For a young person with interests in the artistic," said Caroline Green, of Malaprops. "The kit comes with a beautiful array of 24 child-safe oil pastels, a book with full color pictures of van Gogh's artwork, and a guided coloring book to create art in the style of this post-impressionist master." Ages 6-9. \$16.95 at Malaprops Bookstore

8. Smart Robot, Tin Can Robot and Soda Can Robot by Green Science

These environmentally friendly robots are "the hottest things for science this year," said Susan Isreal, an employee at the Toy Box. "Anything robotic is exciting, and they are well made." Learn basic electronics while recycling! Ages 8 and older. Soda Can Robug, \$11.98; Smart Robot, \$14.98; Tin Can Robot, \$14.98. The Toy Box, 793 Merrimon Ave., Asheville, 254-8697.

9. The Twelve Days of Christmas by Olivia Price, Illustrated by Asheville's Leo Monahan

"A lovely book that will appeal to younger and older children (and adults)," said Leslie Hawkins owner of Spellbound Children's Bookshop. "Each verse of the song is illustrated with pictures of Monahan's colorful, intricate paper sculptures. There are also twelve ornaments tucked into the book which you can take out and hang on the tree! It's the kind of book that can be enjoyed year after year, and as the children get older they will understand and appreciate it more with each reading." Any age. \$19.95 at Spellbound Children's Bookshop, 19 Wall St., Asheville, 232-2228.

10. Stomp Rocket Ultra

A Dr. Toy and iParenting multiple award winner, the Stomp Rocket is used by teachers to teach specific science concepts, yet it is tons of fun for kids as they propel the soft rocket more than 200 feet into the air! Ages 8 and older. \$15.95 at Once Upon a Time, 7 All Souls Crescent, Asheville, 274-8788.

Contact Hunter at lockie@lockiehunter.com.



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