

THE “IF DA VINCI GAVE A KID A GIFT” GUIDE

Leonardo’s Basement has been pondering this question for 18 years. So we asked a few friends about their favorite gifts to receive and give. We hope that you enjoy the suggestions. The gifts run the gamut and are for all, we mean all, ages.

None of the items are sponsored—we picked them because we like them—although most are for sale from the maker, distributor or one of those online store places. We have included links to those places for product information. We believe strongly in re-use and supporting small businesses. Consider finding these gifts at your local retailer or thrift store, like [Arc’s Value Village](#).

Happy Holidays!

Leonardo’s
BASEMENT

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Ages 0+



Stackable measuring spoons and bowls [\\$5-35](#)



Textured balls [\\$7](#)



Magna-Tiles [\\$60-120](#)



An inflatable swimming pool ([\\$60](#)) inside the house. Fill with different sensory materials depending upon age and interest. Pillows and stuffed animals for daydreaming and storytelling. A case of plastic pit balls ([\\$30](#)) plus a slide ([\\$32](#)) for high energy days!



Skwish Classic [\\$16](#)



Pull toys [\\$24+](#)

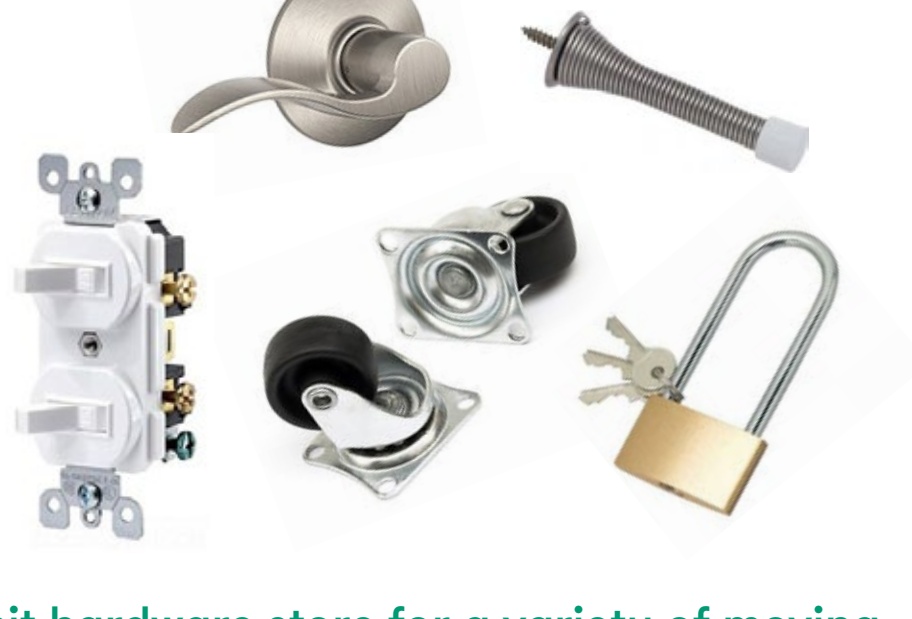


Materials and instructions to make giant bubbles



Three bags sand ([\\$9](#)) in a container, any container ([\\$21](#))

“Just Add Water” junk bin: funnels, cups, sponges, animal figures, toys that sink and toys that float, soap that bubbles, plastic tubes, slotted spoons, colander—just about anything! ([\\$12-35](#))
Water (almost free)



Visit hardware store for a variety of moving items including padlocks, levers, knobs, light switches, door bells, doorstops, wheels and buttons and attach to a board that can hang on a wall for crawling toddlers to explore. Take it to next level—wire for lights and sound! ([\\$40](#))

Great
Idea
By:

Amanda Nix is a super-smart teacher and mom who loves all things food, science, and craft.

Ages 3+



Snapo blocks (\$18-36) They are like LEGO, only better. (That's a bold statement!) Connect like LEGO, but also SIDE-TO-SIDE. Even a product for 1-year-olds!

Great Idea By: **Joe Glenn** loves all things electrical, his nieces and nephews, Amy, and beer (not in that order).



A big box of dress-up clothes... vests, hats, glasses, boots, scarves, jewelry, Halloween costume parts from thrift stores include small table cloths and curtains (easy to modify into capes, skirts, wings and other things). Used and new! (\$20-45)



This sturdy building material has been around for years but still stands up, literally. **Giant cardboard bricks (\$32)** work for towers and walls!



The **Snafu (\$20+)** maze game is without doubt the most popular game ever in the Leonardo's Basement lounge. This 1990s game is really challenging for kids and adults and only available used.

Great Ideas By: **Tracy Nielsen** believes every kid should get to follow their curiosity and eat pizza 3 times per week.



I can't imagine what my childhood would have been like without my **Matchbox cars (\$6-22)** and **Hot Wheels tracks (\$20-45)** plus a **box of marbles (\$5-35)**. After adding empty carpet tubes, blocks and scraps of wood I would spend entire days creating tracks to stretch the basement from end to end.



Great Ideas By: **Greg Flanagan** is a smiling dad and perennial kid, founder of **Tree on a Hill Workshop**.



And **DUPLO kit (\$60)**, for those averse to natural products.



Hardwood building blocks (\$30-800) made by my father. When my daughters were young we added a **wooden train set (\$130)** and built towns and zoos (stuffed animals) with fine transportation facilities.

Great Idea By: **Rand Whillock** is a tireless and enthusiastic teacher, mentor, volunteer, friend and dad.



Hape Toys from Germany, especially the play kitchen (\$25-150) stocked with **foods** and **utensils** and **appliances**.

Great Idea By: **Amanda Nix** is a super-smart teacher and mom who loves all things food, science and craft.



To: Anyone Needing Some Wacky Fun
(5 **Blow-Up Hammers \$35** and 500 **Ping Pong Balls \$40**)



Great Idea By: **Chris Groth** is a gifted teacher, uncle, and melter of metal.



Personal Puzzle (\$20)

1. Take a poster (small or large) of recipient's favorite theme.
2. Mount with spray adhesive to heavy mat board.
3. Cut with a scroll/jig saw into postcard size puzzle pieces.
4. Write a personal message or story-part on each piece
5. Write name/address of recipient and return address on the back of each puzzle piece.
6. Attach a postcard stamp and mail (yes, USPS still mails this kind of stuff!)
7. Mail a successive piece that can be fit with the previously mailed pieces each day leading up to the holiday or birthday.

Great Idea By:

Richard Parnell is an artist, bicyclist, and assistive technology wizard.



Marble Run (\$20-90)

I've used this toy at work for 20 years and kids still love it. Size, material, and manufacturers abound...

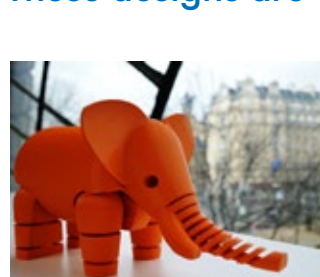
Great Idea By: **Konni Welk** is a School Social Worker, parent, and reluctant cynophilist.



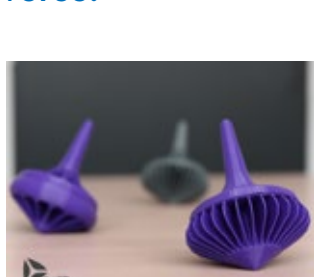
Kites! Pretty much any type of kite: cheap ones, parafoils, stunt kites. (\$9-80)



I'm a big fan of beautiful, sustainable magnetic **Tegu wooden blocks (\$35-140)**.



Articulated Elephant from France



SpiningTop by Martin Zampach



Spinning Tops Orbital Series

Great Ideas By: **Andrew Maxwell-Parish** is a creative inventor, teacher, and runs a maker-space in a hospital! You should feel cheated that he's not your uncle.

Ages 6+



Make Your Own Pickles Kit (\$30)

It's kinda like a science project that you eat and it smells different each day. Kinda like a pet. Also you can't really mess it up and you can pickle anything.

Great Idea By:

Barry Kudrowitz is a playful designer, teacher, artist, musician, author and brand- new dad.



When I was a younger (8 years old), I really liked getting a bike (\$70-650) for a present. I liked that present because it made me feel free when I went outside every day.

I would give a Harry Potter book (\$7+) for a gift to anyone because who doesn't like a great book to read.

Great Idea By:

Francisco Saavedra is mechanical engineering student, big brother, and nicest guy you'll ever meet.



Thames and Kosmos science kits are amazing, but I've been disappointed in the quality of their test-leads! I like "Motors and Generators" (\$33), "Electricity Master Lab" (\$200) and "Gyrobot" (\$50). Get better wire leads [here](#) (\$4).

Great Idea By:

Joe Glenn loves all things electrical, his nieces and nephews, Amy, and beer (not in that order).



BLOKL

Eight SOMA puzzle cubes. Each unique piece has its own color.

Includes activity book of math, games and puzzles. [Order from Ed!](#)

Great Idea By:

Ed Vogel knows his numbers, plays the piano, designs puzzles, loves SOMA and is great volunteer/mentor.



LEGO (or DUPLO for younger kids)

Not theme-based kits but "Classic" (\$20-60) sets where you can build anything. I heard a student say to another student once, "I have every kind of toy, cars, trucks, planes, etc. I build them out of LEGO."

For kids with a lot of LEGO blocks, add a [battery powered](#) (\$25) or [pullback](#) (\$1-5) motor to add a whole new dynamic to their creations. A [MINDSTORMS](#) (\$350) set can open up the world of robotics and automation.

Great Idea By:

Rand Whillock is a tireless and enthusiastic teacher, mentor, volunteer, friend and dad.



A gift certificate to **Ax-Man** or another surplus store in your fair city- who could resist?

(Note from Leonardo's Basement: Make sure the kid does the shopping. And bring a few extra bucks.)

Great Idea By:

Jim Segal owns Ax-Man Surplus Stores, Twin Cities.



Thera-Putty (\$3-10)

Strengthen fingers, hands and arm. Comes in six colors!

NBA Bas-Ket (\$10-50)

Old school greatness. Must buy used, all the better.



Kinetic Sand (\$15)

As they say, it's the "The Original Squeezable Sand You Can't Put Down!"

Great Ideas By:

Konni Welk is a School Social Worker, parent, and reluctant cynophilist.



Puzzibits Sets (\$15-\$120)

Use these dime-sized hexagon shaped pieces to make 3D works of art.

Great Idea By:

Ina Elliott is a bilingual artist and mom with the most infectious laugh in recorded history.



My must have gift used with a few action figures to double as characters, or best friends—big bags of rubber bands from the post office!

Most common size, #64, 5 lbs bag (\$27)

Red packer band, #170, 1 lb box, (\$14)

Great Idea By:

Alex Walton: Parent and artist, who will always offer you the last cookie.

Ages 9+

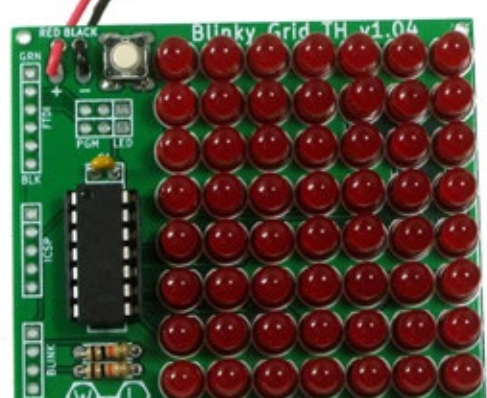
To: Anyone Needing Some Wacky Fun

(5 [Blow-Up Hammers](#) \$35, 500 [Ping Pong Balls](#) \$40, 50 [Mouse Traps](#) \$55)



Great Idea By:

[Chris Groth](#) is a gifted teacher, uncle, and melter of metal.



Simple Soldering Kits

Soldering is a simple skill requiring few tools. Wayne and Layne make kits for learning to solder that are configurable blinky gadgets. Sorry, no tools or batteries.

[Blinky POV](#) (\$15) for beginners and [Blinky Grid](#) (\$25) for those with some experience. Graduate to kits with [surface mount technology](#) (\$15) soldering! Get soldering tools [here](#) (\$30-38).

New “old-fashioned” camera like the [Fujifilm INSTAX mini8](#) (\$60) with [film](#) (\$12).

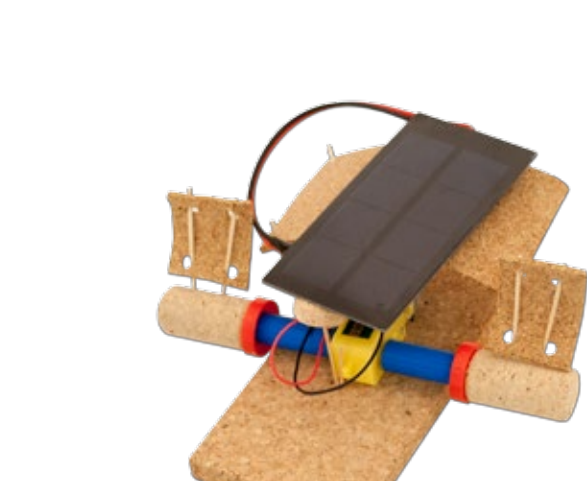


Entertaining books (\$18-50) for little (and big) geeks from [No Starch Press](#).



Great Ideas By:

Adam Wolf is the “Wayne” of [Wayne and Layne](#), proud dad and Maker.



Build a [solar boat kit!](#) (\$30)

Great Ideas By:

[Michael Arquin](#) is parent of three and founder of [KidWind Project](#) and [REcharge Labs](#).



This [Solar Spark Lighter and Survival Tool](#) (\$15) is pretty cool.



I always loved getting a box of [Prisma-color markers](#) (\$23-127) that unpacked to a stand and bundled back to travel.

Great Ideas By:

[Alex Walton](#): Parent and artist, who will always offer you the last cookie.

Ages 12+



Theremins \$80-500, from [Burns Theremin](#)

Great Idea By:

[Gene Chadwick](#): man of mystery, wig wearer and trivia wizard.



Make dog tags or other things with [metal stamps](#) (\$23), [aluminum](#) (\$6), and [beaded chain](#) (\$2-10).



[Jewelry making starter kit](#) (\$35).

Great Idea By:

[Chris Groth](#) is a gifted teacher, uncle and melter of metal.



The best presents for my brothers and me were always the fireworks (\$20-150) that Santa left in our stockings.

‘Firework wars’ ensured engaging and creative usage.

Great Idea By:

[Carl Elliott](#) is a parent, writer and professor (who survived childhood with all of his digits).



A versatile power tool that can help with stuffed-animal modification, costume design and quiver making all in the same weekend! Gift a [sewing machine](#) (\$145).

Great Idea By:

[Tracy Nielsen](#) believes every kid should get to follow their curiosity and eat pizza 3 times per week.



Hummingbird robotics kit (\$160)



The Makey Makey (\$50)



PocketLab (\$120), a palm-sized laboratory for really cool data collection and analysis.

Great Ideas By: **Michael Arquin** is parent of three and founder of [KidWind Project](#) and [REcharge Labs](#).

Magic the Gathering cards (\$8+) at your local game store.



Chances are your teen saw Iron Man 2. They'll remember this gift. [Swinging Sticks](#) (\$290-390) can be a meditative break from homework. They are little pricey, but a smart investment. Students have sooo many homework days ahead of them...

Over 25 years ago a friend of Leonardo's Basement, Bruce Shapiro, invented the EggBot. The good folks at Evil Mad Scientist have improved the [machine](#) (\$195-325) and crafted additional models. You can draw on almost anything roundish.



Bruce hasn't been napping since the EggBot. His [website](#) explains other projects including his newest creation, Sisyphus, which was originally designed for museum installations. (Leonardo's Basement has the prototype!)

In late October 2016 nearly 2,000 people donated nearly \$2 million to support the manufacture of [Sisyphus Kinetic Art Tables](#). Bruce, his wife Bev Trombley, and Micah Roth are building the tables at [Nordeast Makers](#) in Minneapolis. The retail price has not been set but add your name to the [mailing list](#) and buy one as soon as they are available. Mesmerizing!

Great Ideas By: **Steve Jevning** is an industrious dreamer and Founder/Executive Director of Leonardo's Basement.

Ages 15+

[Taxidermy!](#) \$20+ to buy an animal, or, look and fun antique shops. [Hunt and Gather](#) in south Minneapolis has some fine specimens for purchase! Also love the "Book Trader" store. Weird items (including taxidermy) abound. No website, but if in Minneapolis find them [here](#). Not for the faint of heart.

Great Ideas By: **Amy McNally** is a librarian, parent and sought after dinner guest.



[Raspberry Pi](#) (\$90) is a great tool to help transition someone from being a consumer of technology to someone that creates with technology.

Great Ideas By: **Andrew Maxwell-Parish** is a creative inventor, teacher and runs a maker-space in a hospital! You should feel cheated that he's not your uncle.



[My first Swiss Army knife](#) (\$50).

Great Idea By: **Alex Walton:** Parent and artist, who will always offer you the last cookie

Experiences! Give a gift certificate or pay for a class to:

[Summer Graffiti Institute](#) (\$360) at Intermedia Arts to learn the history and create art.

[Never too late to start rock climbing](#) at [Vertical Endeavors](#) (\$80+).

[Learn to fence](#) at the [Minnesota Sword Club](#) (\$100-230).

[Go to a "star party."](#) The [Minnesota Astronomical Society](#) FREE has four observatories a short drive away.

[Try new foods.](#) Give a gift certificate to a restaurant that the recipient has never visited, or one that they love.

[Better yet, learn to make great food](#) at [Cooks of Crocus Hill](#) (\$60+).

Six things kids should receive as a gift:

1. Something to love (teddy bear or doll or action figure, etc.)
2. Something to read.
3. Something to get them active (ball or a water toy or flying toy).
4. Something creative (paints, blocks, craft project, a box of junk).
5. A game to play with others.
6. And a toy.

Cheryl Moeller is an industrious problem solver, parent, and Executive Director of [High Tech Kids](#).



Leonardo's
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SHAMELESS SELF- PROMOTION

We have gifts for “kids” of all ages available at [Leonardo's Basement](#).

- T-shirts with a message, in 11 different styles (\$20.00)
- Gift certificates in any amount, for any workshop for kids, teens and adults
- Blinky traffic cone lights (\$3.00)
- “Helping Kids Fail” Stickers (\$2.00)
- Tool tea towels (\$15.00)
- Enroll in a gift making workshop and make your gifts here! (\$25.00-\$75.00)

Free shipping in the U.S. [Order here!](#)

Leonardo's Basement recommends these ESSENTIALS FOR ALL AGES

Help kids and teens build their futures with necessary tools and opportunities. This list is cumulative. For example, if buying for a 12-year-old look at the 6-year-old list too!

Ages 0-18

Love, attention and freedom to pursue curiosities
Permission: to make a mess, try something new, explore and make mistakes

Ages 3-18

Magnifying glass
Scissors
PVC pipe and fittings

Ages 6-18

Safety glasses or goggles
Tape measure
Hand sewing kit
Cordless drill
Drywall screws (1”, 1-5/8”, and 2-1/2”)
Hardware (pulleys, springs, hinges)
Low-temp glue gun (with instruction)
Handsaw
Hammer
Workbench with vise

Ages 9-18

Sewing machine
Microscope
Soldering iron
Screwdriver assortment (slotted, Phillips, Torx)
Wire stripper
Wire cutter
Pop rivet gun

Ages 12-18

Utility knife
Adjustable wrench
Modest socket set

Ages 15-18

MIG welder
Scroll saw

NOTE FROM NORMAN

Norman Andersen has been exploring and creating for decades. He is an amazing kinetic and sound sculptor who flies remote control airplanes and plays keyboard in jazz groups. He nurtures a corpse flower.

* **Chemistry set (they probably aren't any good anymore)** - you gotta have some interesting smoke making, flammable or toxic chemicals.

* **Erector set** - I made my fingers bleed by the end of Christmas day with one of these - it was all those little nuts you had to fasten - they toughened up though. I'm still using up bits and pieces from that kit.

* I had a lot of fun with a **rose duster**. I sprayed DDT and other chemicals all over the neighborhood with it attached to my bike - it never occurred to me that maybe baby powder or flour or corn starch or something else might have worked as well for the smoke effect. The unit my dad had was wonderful - all metal with various extension tubes (also metal) with articulating joints and a couple different tips for various spray (dust) patterns - lots of fun!

* **Sets of old fashioned Christmas lights...** just dragged out of the attic at any time of year and strung about the house in various imaginative ways. The fact that you could easily change bulbs and organize the colors was great!

* **Hanks of rope and quality string** - ALWAYS useful and fun.

* **Small cans of latex paint and plenty of foam brushes of different sizes.** You've gotta have flat black and silver and a couple other basic colors, like white. If you do red, yellow, and blue, a kid might stand a chance at mixing some other colors, and they'll certainly learn about the power of different colors.

* **Any kind of tools that you don't already have around the house.** Hand tools are mostly what I had access to when I was a kid, and they were slow and frustrating, but I pursued my goals anyway. I moved into a power drill pretty quickly, and a skill saw sure would have been nice, but then, I do still have all 10 of my digits, and they're helpful for playing the piano.

* **LESSONS on using any of the above tools...** buy the kid a shop class at some local school or organization. I took several of them, because my dad didn't really have the time to show me much. I had a marvelous teacher and was a favorite pupil of course.

* **Wheels of any kind are a must.** I find bicycle wheels all the time in my alley, and wrecked bikes (great material), but wheels for lawn equipment, etc. are great.

* **A gift certificate for a surplus store** would be a blast to have as an inventive kid - and part of that gift is to give them plenty of time to go through the store shopping - you can't rush them - they need to imagine all the possibilities.

* **Plastic model kits** (they make them for everything from dinosaurs to hot rods) are a little easier to succeed on, though they have varying levels of complexity. Don't forget to get them the right glue - ask at the store!

* Goes without saying that **fireworks are a blast**. Get a wide variety, and encourage creative uses that are non-threatening to living beings. Blowing up your own models is a wonderful way to not still have them cluttering up your life when you're 62!

* **Anything that makes noise** is always fun - horns, bells, whistles, drums, you name it. A clever kid can incorporate a noisemaker into something else that they are building, or add it to their bike.

* Remember, a kid's **bike** is like a teenagers car, or Mom's and Dad's home; it's their thing to mess around with, modify, and make their own. I changed my bike around so many times that it practically fell apart from all the various holes I had drilled in it.

* **Anything fun that can be attached to the end of a hose** is good. I had a particular blast with a tree fertilizer spike. I would poke a bunch of holes into the lawn then force the water underground from one hole to the next, creating wonderful geysers, and other Yellowstone Park phenomenon e.g. - gurgling pots of mud, etc. It didn't even hurt the lawn too much. Various nozzles and sprinklers are always fascinating in the study of hydrodynamics. This stuff is great summer fun when it's friggin' hot!

* I had **various kits for making anything from batteries to motors to crystal radios**, and I learned a lot from all of them. Today's equivalents might be Arduino, Raspberry Pi, etc. I know less about working that stuff, but the kid you're buying for will. They're also more expensive than a hank of rope however! And, you can't do as much with it. You certainly can't build an elevator to take you up into the Cherry tree (as did I as a 7-year-old).

* There was a lot more that I messed around with, but the above stuff is a great start. **More than anything kids need freedom to experiment and have successes and failures, and hopefully not get hurt in the process.**

That's all from Norman.