

2015
holiday
gift
guide!

Holiday shopping guide: Best

From ingenious cooking sets that'll inspire little ones to become chefs and bakers to books that let kids know the importance of chasing their dreams, our insiders share the hottest children's gifts that are as much fun as they are educational!



1 Spark DIY imaginations!

To gift "green" fashionistas:
❖ **Garbage to Glam Upcycling: Plastic Bags Kit** by Fashion Angels (ages 8–12)

"This kit provides easy instructions for 10 projects that let kids turn garbage bags into everything from headbands to purses," says toy expert Stevanne Auerbach, Ph.D. (DrToy.com). "It sparks creativity and teaches about conservation at the same time!"

(\$16.99 at FashionAngels.com)



To become a published author:

❖ **WRITE BRAIN Published Author's Kits** by Write Brain Books (ages 5–14) Who says only adults can publish books? "These wordless, pre-illustrated books let kids write their own stories and publish them," says Auerbach. "Once boys and girls write their story, they or their parents can go to WriteBrainBooks.com to type it up. They can then order a soft or hardbound book, as well as copies to share with friends and grandparents!"

(\$39.95 at WriteBrainBooks.com)

To make ideas a reality:

❖ **3D Magic 3D Maker** by Tech 4 Kids (ages 6+)

"Kids can make all their own toys with this 3-D maker!" says Toy Insider Mom Laurie Schacht (TheToyInsider.com). "They simply fill stencils and molds with gel, place them into the UV chamber and their designs harden into 3-D plastic creations!"

The LED no-heat light is like the technology used for gel manicures and is safe for kids." (\$39.99 at 3-Dmagic.com)

2 Encourage the next Top Chef!

To please mini chocoholics:

❖ **Candy Craft Chocolate Pen** by Skyrocket Toys (ages 6+)

A huge toy trend this year? "Cooking up fun!" says Schacht. "We're seeing a lot of food-related toys like this so-sweet Chocolate Pen. The motorized pen dispenses real, multicolored liquid chocolate that hardens at room temperature or in the refrigerator. Kids can use it to do anything from fill candy molds included in the kit to decorate cupcakes to draw or practice their ABCs on wax paper!"

(\$29.99; SkyRocketToys.com for stores)



To create gummi goodies—and more:

❖ **Yummy Nummies** by Blip Toys (ages 6+)

These no-bake candy, snack and

meal-making sets let your mini-me create mini treats—gummi bears, hamburgers, pizza, cupcakes and more—that taste just like the real thing, says Schacht. Some Yummy Nummie sets require a few seconds in the microwave, but otherwise no oven baking is needed.

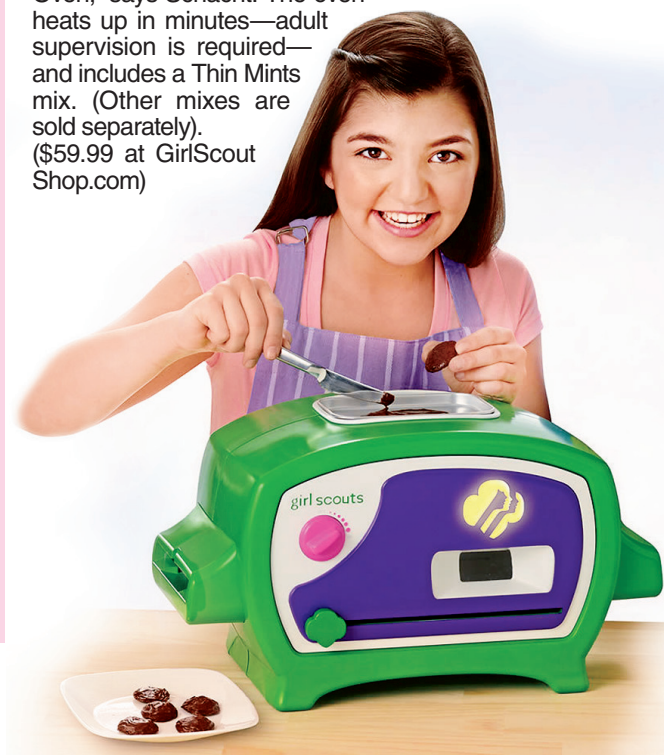
(\$7.99–\$15.99; BlipToys.com for stores)

To snack on homemade Thin Mints:

❖ **Girl Scouts Cookie Oven** (ages 8+)

"Now you don't have to wait for the Girl Scouts to come to your door—your kids can make their own cookies at home with the new Girl Scouts Cookie Oven," says Schacht. The oven heats up in minutes—adult supervision is required—and includes a Thin Mints mix. (Other mixes are sold separately).

(\$59.99 at GirlScoutShop.com)



Best toys of 2015!

3 Boost kids' confidence and creativity!

To thrill robot fans:

❖ **Kingii Dragon Robot Science Kit by OWI (ages 10–12)**

What child wouldn't love to construct his or her very own dragon robot? "It features an infrared sensor programmed to 'escape' or 'follow me,'" says Auerbach. When the robot feels threatened, it gapes its mouth, flashes its eyes and spreads and flaps its frill! (\$41.95 at OwRobot.com)

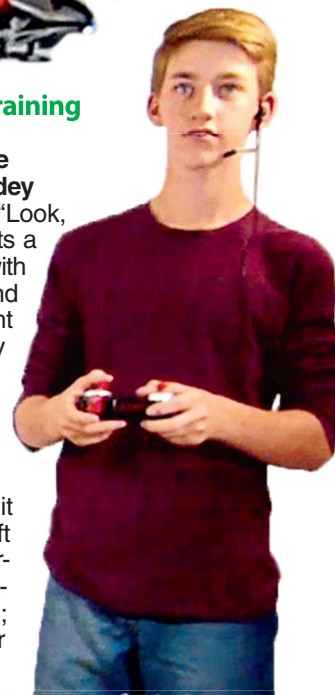


To make construction magical:

❖ **LEGO Elves: The Elves' Treetop Hideaway (ages 8–12)** "In this buildable play set, Emily and her friends are magically transported to a world of Elves," says Schacht. "The sets are gorgeous, featuring all sorts of movements, including a magic portal, parting leaf curtains and a staircase that becomes a magical bridge. It really lets girls build and explore a whole new universe." (\$49.99 at Lego.com)

To let pilots-in-training soar:

❖ **Sky Rover Voice Command by Auldey Toys (ages 8+)** "Look, Ma, no hands!" gets a 21st-century spin with this voice-command helicopter, Schacht says. "Kids simply wear the headset and control the helicopter using twelve voice commands. Young pilots can make it rise and fall, turn left or right, or go forward and backward!" (\$44.99; AuldeyToys.us for stores)

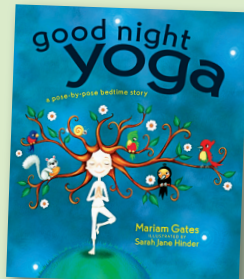


4 Give the gift of reading!

To bond at bedtime:

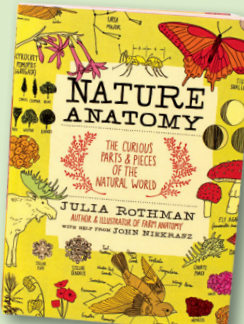
❖ **Good Night Yoga: A Pose-by-Pose Bedtime Story by Miriam Gates (ages 4–8)**

Have a hard time getting a little one to bed? Try tucking him or her in with the help of this soothing book, suggests Bianca Schulze of TheChildrensBookReview.com. "Good Night Yoga follows the natural world as it winds down at night, from the birds flying back to their nests to the ladybugs 'settling softly,'" she says. "Along the way, it features girls and boys doing calming yoga poses that you and your child can do, too, to transition from a busy day to bed. If you want, pair it with a cute set of PJs or a kid-sized yoga mat!" (\$12 at Amazon.com)



To inspire young naturalists:

❖ **Nature Anatomy: Curious Parts and Pieces of the Natural World by Julia Rothman (all ages)** "This coffee-table-worthy book is bursting with natural curiosities, from the anatomy of a bird to the different shapes of snowflakes to an explanation of the lunar cycle," says Schulze. "It's a natural history museum in a book! Give it to the young naturalist in your life all by itself or bundle it with, say, a butterfly kit or rock collection!" (\$13 at Amazon.com)



To encourage kids to chase their dreams:

❖ **What Do You Do With an Idea? by Kobi Yamada (ages 3+)**

Does an idea have a shape? It does in this award-winning picture book! "A child has an idea represented by a golden egg," says Schulze. "The story takes you on the child's journey as he goes from being embarrassed by it to embracing it. You never learn exactly what his idea is, and that's part of the beauty of this book: No matter what your idea is and no matter how small, if you nurture it, it will grow wings and soar." (\$12 at Amazon.com)



To believe in magic again:

❖ **Circus Mirandus by Cassie Beasley (ages 9–12)**

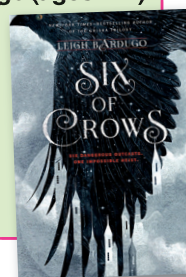
When his dying grandfather, Ephraim, describes a magical circus where wishes are granted, Micah Tuttle and his friend Jenny Mendoza set out to find the fabled Circus Mirandus—and The Man Who Bends Light, a magician powerful enough to save Micah's grandfather. "Fans of Roald Dahl's stories will love this book," predicts Schulze. "It's fantastical yet also explores deeper themes of love, loss and friendship." (\$12 at Amazon.com)



To give teens their next obsession:

❖ **Six of Crows by Leigh Bardugo (ages 12+)**

"Teens won't be able to put down this fast-paced fantasy!" It follows 17-year-old criminal prodigy Kaz Brekker and his band of six complex outcasts as they plot to infiltrate an impenetrable prison and pull off a world-changing heist. (\$12 at Amazon)



Attention Star Wars and Frozen fans!

The force is strong with *Star Wars* fans—and *Frozen* is still hot! Schacht's picks:

✓ **Star Wars Bladebuilders Jedi Master Lightsaber by Hasbro (ages 4+)** "This set lets kids create more than 100 combinations of lightsabers with real lights and sounds," she says. (\$49.99 at Hasbro.com)

✓ **Disney Frozen Sing-A-Long Elsa by JAKKS Pacific (ages 3+)** Kids can pass a microphone back and forth as they sing the full-length song "Let it Go" together with Elsa! (39.99; Jakks.com for stores)



—Kristina Mastrocola

Photos: courtesy of manufacturer (10); Amazon.com (5).