

From: "Sesame Family Newsletter" <sesamefamily@sesameonline.org>
Subject: **Holidays on a Budget**
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Sesame Family Newsletter

December 11, 2009

Holidays on a Budget

by Jordan D. Brown

The most-loved gifts are often low-cost or homemade.

Featuring:

- "You Want Your Dolls to Live WHERE?!"
- Stick-on Earrings & Toilet Paper Casts
- Big Box, Bigger Imagination
- Kid-Made Creations



This Week on the Street...

Toys!

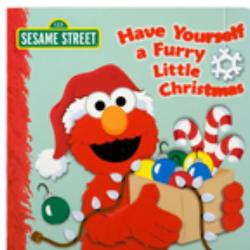
- [Turn on the Toys](#)
Help Elmo unwrap his presents!
- [Ernie Plans](#)
Ernie organizes his toys.
- [Sharing Toys](#)
Grover asks Katrina about sharing her toys.

Give the Gift of Giving

Share a love of learning this holiday season. Send a [Holiday Tribute E-card](#).



Sesame Street Holiday Collection



Celebrate the holidays with DVDs, books, and ornaments featuring favorite furry friends!

[Shop Now!](#)

Kid-Tivity: Animal Charades

Grrrow! Cut & color animal printables and play a fun charades game.



McDonald's A Proud Sponsor of Sesame Street

McDonald's is a proud supporter of *Sesame Street's* efforts to help parents choose a preschool. Together, we believe in bringing a sense of joy and imagination to learning and life.

"YOU WANT YOUR DOLLS TO LIVE WHERE?!"

"I want one of THOSE for Christmas!" exclaims my 5-year-old daughter Olivia, as I remove a department store insert from my newspaper.

I look at the ad and wonder what dazzling toy has caught her eye. Was it a "gourmet" kids' kitchen with a "real" blender? Was she lured by a new princess video game? Perhaps the object of her desire



was a cool pink sled for the winter? Wrong, wrong, wrong. Turns out the item that Olivia instantly fell in love with was a multi-floored plastic dollhouse. Against my better judgment, I peeked at the price tag -- and nearly fainted. This toy was HUNDREDS of dollars! Maybe "Billionaire Barbie" could afford such digs, but this place was clearly out of our price bracket. While Olivia would probably have fun with such a dollhouse, everything about it struck me as excessive, and unnecessary. On many a rainy afternoon, I've watched Olivia and her friends spend joyful hours turning large empty cardboard cartons into castles, rocket ships, time machines, and more. That said, the power of toy ads cannot be underestimated. In response to Olivia's request for the bank-busting dollhouse, I said, "Honey, maybe we could MAKE one of those for your Barbies." Olivia thought about this for a moment, then said, "Nah, I still think we should BUY one!" ...* sigh * ...

When my wife Ellen and I shop for toys for our children, we try to keep in mind one of the Big Rules we've learned as parents: There is absolutely no connection between the cost of a toy, and how much a child will enjoy it. Really. We've had pricey items totally bomb, and cheapies like bubbles or paper airplanes become instant favorites.

[Tough Times](#)

Caring for your child during difficult economic times.

STICK-ON EARRINGS & TOILET PAPER CASTS

The power of inexpensive toys was driven home on two different occasions last week. The first happened after an upsetting incident at the playground. Olivia was coming down the slide, when another girl walked up to her, noticed Olivia's short haircut and frilly dress, and commented, "You're half-boy, half-girl!" Olivia was taken aback. "No, I'm not!" she insisted, but she was clearly shaken. I don't think this other girl knew how much she'd hurt my daughter's feelings. (In my mind, I wished Olivia had retorted, "Yea, well you're half-mean, and half-jealous!" But I simply reassured Olivia that she was fine the way she was.)



[Imagination with Elmo](#)

Watch Elmo sing about where imagination takes you and your child.

The next day, as Olivia was getting dressed for school, she picked up an inexpensive toy she had recently received from her Aunt Ann -- a big sheet of 100 stick-on "jewel" earrings. (Olivia had no idea that this gift came from a dollar store.) Olivia peeled off two little heart-shaped sticker earrings, and stuck them on her lobes. Later, at the playground, Olivia held her head high, and whispered to me, "Now, everyone will know I'm all-girl!"

We discovered the second inexpensive plaything while waiting for Olivia's older brother to finish his late-afternoon swim practice. She had already colored, read books, played catch, socialized with some of the other kids, and was now getting bored and overtired. I was worrying that I'd soon have a tantrum on my hands, when Olivia sneezed. I took a roll of toilet paper out of my bag. (We had run out of regular tissues, so better to have some TP than nothing.) As I unrolled the paper to hand Olivia a section, her eyes lit up. "Make me a cast!" she exclaimed. At first, I was perplexed by this request -- then realized what she wanted. We had recently met a child with a broken arm that had been set in a cast. She wanted one, too.

I unraveled a long piece of toilet paper, and carefully wrapped it around Olivia's palm, so her thumb stuck out, then wound it up her arm and tucked in the end. Voila -- a cast! Olivia proudly strutted around to show off her arm, and explained how she "broke it." Soon, five or six other children in the bleachers came over to have "Dr. Daddy" (as Olivia dubbed me) put similar casts on their arms.

BIG BOX, BIGGER IMAGINATION

Ever since Olivia could talk, I've noticed that when it comes to opening gifts, size matters. Not the size of the actual gift, mind you - - the size of the box! Another parent and I were joking the other day that this year, for the holidays, we could give our children several big boxes filled with inexpensive things they might like -- such as balls, art supplies, recycled dress-up clothes. What started as a joke actually seemed like a wonderful idea!



[Making Music](#)

Making music together is a fun way to bond with your child.

[Zoe's Favorite Book](#)

Zoe tells Telly about her favorite book. Ask your child about his or her favorite book.

After poking around the Internet to see what other parents had done, I came away with some interesting ideas for "Big Boxes" that could be a big hit with kids. Before wrapping the cardboard boxes, one parent suggested covering them in inexpensive, colorful contact paper so that they would seem new, and could be reused to store the toys inside. Many of the supplies for inside the boxes could be found around the house, or purchased inexpensively in dollar stores. Here are some "themes" for possible boxes that could help spark children's imaginations:

* **Young Artist's Box** - paints, brushes, chalk, glue, stencils, paper, recycled containers for mixing paints, stack of coloring pages printed free from the Internet, attached with a binder clip

* **Budding "Mad Scientist's" Box** - magnifying glass, magnets, baking soda and vinegar for

homemade volcanoes, measuring spoons, plastic bowls

* **Sports Nut Box** - a variety of balls of different sizes and colors, a paperback book about a favorite athlete

* **Play Kitchen Box** - pots and pans, empty (clean) food boxes and containers, sponges, soap, plastic plates, spoons, forks, a homemade "cookbook" with pictures of foods the child likes

* **Make-Believe Box** - old hats, coats, costume jewelry, "mustaches" (cut out from cloth or fake fur scraps), inexpensive make-up, maybe a disposable camera for documenting the homemade costumes

* **Booklovers Bonanza Box** - gently used books from the library or thrift shops and/or dollar stores; books could be tied up with ribbons or wrapped inside the big box

* **Music Box** - collection of homemade and inexpensive drums, recorders, shakers, bells, and other music-making materials

* **Make-Your-Own Board Game Box** - homemade game board of the child's neighborhood, dice for rolling, a spinner, playing pieces made by attaching photos of family members to cardboard

KID-MADE CREATIONS

While most preschoolers firmly believe that it is more fun to receive than to give, the holidays are a perfect opportunity to teach children about the rewards of giving. Children love to make homemade gifts for friends and family. One easy-to-make present is a coupon book with certificates for things like "good for a bear hug," "good for cleaning my room," and so on.

Such presents need not be costly and will often mean more to family members than some hastily bought gift from a store. A special drawing, painting, or clay sculpture from a child can be a gift that a relative treasures as if it were gold trinkets. A few years ago, one of my friends gave his wife a priceless present: a notebook, in which he wrote down many of the adorable things that their kids had done over the past year. By documenting those precious memories, my friend had given a gift that was filled with love and laughter.

Have fun coming up with inexpensive and meaningful ways to exchange gifts this year.

Jordan D. Brown
Sesame Workshop

SESAME STREET CAMPAIGN FOR UNDERSTANDING

More than the letter "O" and the number "9," Sesame Street is a place where children learn about friendship, respect, and getting along with each other.



In Northern Ireland the Muppets of *Sesame Tree* bring children together through the common bonds of learning, laughter, and fun. In Kosovo, children of Serbian, Albanian, and Roma descent -- ethnic groups long at odds with each other -- discover they enjoy the same games, songs, and stories. And in South Africa, a vibrant young girl Muppet who is HIV-positive teaches children compassionate lessons about living with HIV/AIDS. We call it Muppet Diplomacy -- and it works!

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