



Sesame Family Newsletter

December 15, 2004

The nonprofit organization behind Sesame Street and so much more



For Parents

Picking Winning Toys

by *Jordan Brown*

Great toys for your child needn't break the bank.

Featuring:

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- Controlling Toy Clutter
- Look What I Made!
- This Toy Sucks... Literally!
- Santa, Just A Fresh Diaper, Please

Games and More: A is for Adventure

Travel the world with your favorite Muppets.

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From the Workshop



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Picking Winning Toys

BATTERIES NOT INCLUDED

"**I want one of those!**" exclaims my 3-year-old son Finn whenever he sees a toy advertised on television. I'm amazed at the power of commercials to hook kids' attention and interest. It doesn't matter whether it's the latest Barbie doll, a cool remote control car, or a new Shrek computer game--Finn seems to believe that if it's on TV, it's gotta be good.

Sometimes, when Finn points out a simple toy in a commercial, I'll suggest, "Hey, I think we could **MAKE** one of those."

Finn always rejects this idea, saying: "No, I want to **BUY** one."

This holiday season, the toy at the top of his wish list to Santa is something he saw on TV called "Crocodile Dentist." In this game, a plastic croc's mouth snaps shut if the kid touches a particular tooth. Somehow I survived childhood without one.

When my wife Ellen and I shop for toys, 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. We've had pricey items totally bomb, and cheapies like bubbles or paper airplanes become instant hits.

One rainy day last week, this point was driven home. As I walked toward the kitchen where Finn was playing with Ellen I overheard him say, in his giddiest voice, "Oooh, this is going to be so great! Let's open it!"

Curious to know what they were doing, I turned the corner to find them with screwdrivers in their hands. She and Finn were getting ready to take apart an old telephone that had recently broken. I had been planning to throw it away, when a little voice in my head said, "No, keep it for Finn" knowing how my son is obsessed with all things mechanical.



THE SMARTEST TOYS
Toys to boost your kid's
multiple intelligences.

ATTENTION, SHOPPERS
How do you keep your
children occupied in stores?



CONTROLLING TOY CLUTTER

As the chaos and pressures of the holiday season increase, I can't help thinking: Maybe the Grinch was onto something. Do we really need any more toys in our cluttered home? I realize that praising Dr. Seuss's classic villain takes me out of the running for Dad of the Year, but so be it. While there are many aspects of Christmas and Hanukkah that I appreciate, the influx of new toys isn't one. At the end of a busy day entertaining Finn in our apartment, the place looks as though a tornado ripped through it. If some clever inventor ever comes up with a "re-set button" for the homes of families with young kids, I'll be the first to buy it!

Teaching Finn to put his toys away hasn't been easy. The usual request to tidy up is met with, "No, YOU clean it up!" Charming. Still, there are times we are surprised. If Finn's worktable is covered with toys, he understands the necessity of putting things away if he wants to do something else on it, such as paint. In such situations, he gladly helps.

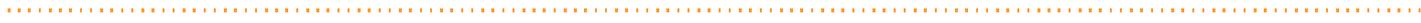
In our valiant but futile quest to control the toy clutter, there are several valuable lessons we've learned: First, never be afraid to throw out a lousy toy when the kid isn't looking. Second, from time to time, hide some of the best toys in the back of a closet. An old toy that's been in hibernation for a month will become a popular treat when it's brought out again. Third, give every toy a home. If a toy doesn't have a particular place it belongs, then how will a child learn where to put it away? These places don't have to be highly specific. A big category, like a box for "Things With Wheels," is fine. Sometimes, just clumping a group of toys together in a clear storage box makes them seem more organized. Amazingly, Finn seems to have a mental map of where every toy lives in our home. Even when I think a toy is lost, he'll go right to the box where it's stored--dump the whole box on the floor--and quickly hold the toy in question proudly in the air.



TOTS WHO TIDY UP
[Our readers tell how they get their kids to put their toys away.](#)

MOMMY, MY TOY BROKE!
[Get simple solutions to broken toys.](#)

SHARE YOUR IDEAS
[Got tips on how to control toy clutter? Select "Newsletter" from the menu and send us your ideas.](#)



LOOK WHAT I MADE!

While most preschoolers firmly believe that it is better to receive than to give, the holidays are a perfect opportunity to teach children about the rewards of giving. Now that Finn's nursery school program is on break, you can bet that he'll be spending many happy hours with arts-and-crafts projects. Many of these will turn into presents. Nothing makes Finn's grandmother's heart melt more than the sight of a homemade dried pasta necklace. Since Finn enjoys baking with us, he'll also join me in whipping up many batches of holiday cookies.



CHRISTMAS-GIVING FUN
[Help your children create festive gifts for the holidays.](#)

MAY I HELP YOU?
[The gift of time can be the best present of all.](#)

THIS TOY SUCKS...LITERALLY!

When searching for activity ideas for Finn, we often don't have to look beyond the various tools and machines in our home. When Finn is in a funk, one of the things that usually snap him out of it is vacuuming. Ellen and I don't know exactly what the fascination is, but Finn loves every aspect of it. With our supervision, he adjusts the settings, puts on the different attachments, and uses it to clean our floors and carpets. Feeding his fascination with vacuums, trips to the department store often include a visit to the home appliance section. He'll also look through home magazines to find pictures of vacuums, which we tape to his bedroom wall. While Ellen and I have assured Finn that Santa will probably bring him Crocodile Dentist if he's a good boy, Finn wonders why the big jolly guy can't bring him a top-of-the-line vacuum.

SANTA, JUST A FRESH DIAPER, PLEASE

When I wrote my last column in October, I mentioned that Finn would become a big brother around Thanksgiving. Well, as John Lennon said, "Life is what happens when you're making other plans." On November 2, as most of the country was focused on political matters, we were rushing to the hospital. It turns out that our little bundle of joy wanted to arrive about a month early. I'm relieved and delighted to tell you that our one-month-old daughter Olivia is doing just great. The gift of a new, healthy family member is greatest present any of us could wish for. No doubt she'll follow in her big brother's footsteps and learn to roll over, crawl, walk...then vacuum.

Jordan Brown

Sesame Workshop



Weekly Trivia

Who is the largest Muppet on the Street?

- A. Big Bird
- B. Herry
- C. Snuffleupagus
- D. Cookie Monster

At seven feet tall and twelve feet long, Snuffy (C) is the largest Muppet on the block.

FROM THE WORKSHOP

As you know, Sesame Workshop is a nonprofit educational organization. We depend on financial support from individuals like you, to produce meaningful, measurable, and lasting differences in children's lives. Whether it is to provide the resources needed to create content for the website or the weekly newsletter or to help produce a show that will convey messages of respect and understanding to children in the Middle East, your contribution will be put to use to benefit your child and children around the world. Making a gift to Sesame Workshop is quick and easy. And only a mouse click away.

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COMMENTS? QUESTIONS?

[Tell us what's on your mind.](#) Kindly note that we are unable to respond to every email received.

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

Sesame Workshop is a nonprofit educational organization making a meaningful difference in children's lives around the world. Founded in 1968, the Workshop changed television forever with the legendary Sesame Street. Today, the Workshop continues to innovate on behalf of children in 120 countries, using its proprietary research methodology to ensure its programs and products are engaging and enriching. Sesame Workshop is behind award-winning programs like Dragon Tales and Sagwa, The Chinese Siamese Cat, Pinky Dinky Doo and ground breaking multimedia productions in South Africa, Egypt and Russia. As a nonprofit, Sesame Workshop puts the proceeds it receives from sales of Sesame Street, Dragon Tales and Sagwa products right back into its educational projects for children around the world. Find the Workshop online at www.sesameworkshop.org

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