

HOLIDAY

gift guide

BEST ~~Worst~~ Gifts Ever

When the
HOT GIFT
Isn't Under
the Tree

TRENDING:
#Fab Fitness
Gifts

TOP 10
Stocking
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BOOKS, MOVIES,
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GIFTS THAT GO
Why the best
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Can You ID
the Characters
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The Most-Wanted
'FROZEN' Toys

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HOW TO GIVE THE BEST GIFTS EVER

Some gifts they want, and some gifts they want to return! Here's how to be sure to give a great one



HOW TO BE THE RIGHT KIND OF SCROOGE

You can create an awesome Christmas morning and stay on budget. The key: Forget the never-ending wish list and focus on making them happy



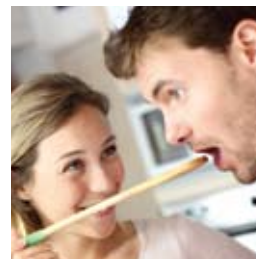
THE RIGHT CAST OF CHARACTERS

The toys from their favorite books, movies and TV shows are the easiest gifts to give - and the ones they're most excited to receive. Here's why licensed toys are the best bets for Christmas morning



WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN THEY'RE EXPECTING

Sometimes their most-desired gift just isn't available. Here's how to let them down while keeping the holiday joy



NO-PRESSURE FITNESS GIFTS

More and more people are participating in fitness events not because they need to but because they're fun! So, what better for the 'social participant' on your list than one of these practical, stylish gifts

GIFTS THAT FEED THEIR PASSION

The perfect food-focused presents for the person who lives in the kitchen



THE 8 BEST 'FROZEN' GIFTS FOR 2014

Let's face it: No one's letting go! Here are the top items to gift the 'Frozen' fan in your household

LET'S RIDE!

How to pick out the perfect bike for your kids

PLUS STOCKING STUFFERS

Music
Movies
Award-Winning Kids' Books

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HOW TO BE THE RIGHT KIND OF *Scrooge*

You can create an awesome Christmas morning and stay on budget. The key: Forget the never-ending wish list and focus on making them happy

BY RACHEL GRAF
CTW FEATURES

Fancy computers, tablets and video games quickly add up to expensive holiday wish lists. Although children will continually want the next big, expensive toy, gadgets will eventually break whereas experiences will stay with them for many years.

During the 2013 holiday season consumers planned to spend an average of \$800 on gifts, according to the American Research Group, Inc. Instead of spending hundreds of dollars on presents, however, emphasize meaningful experiences and shared memories that will be just as impactful – if not more impactful – in the long run.

“What are your fondest memories?” says Barbara Desmarais, a parenting and life coach at theparentingcoach.com. “It’s not things. It’s the people you spent the time with, it’s the things you did together. It’s the love you shared, it’s the laughter you shared, it’s the joy you shared, it’s the craziness you shared.”

Consider investing in a family trip or a funny photo session with the family rather than spending money on material objects, says Meghan Leahy, parenting coach at positivelyparenting.com. Twenty years from now, those memories will be far more special than any new computer.

Of course, in the short run children might be disappointed that the pricey gadget on the top of their list is not under the Christmas tree. If that gift is unrealistic given your budget, be open and honest with your children about that reality. Parents often want to give their children the world, and, although this comes from a loving place, overly justifying purchasing decisions or feeling guilty might make parents appear insecure, Leahy says.

“At the end of the day [your children] love you and they just want your family to be whole and happy, and so you are the leader in that effort,” Leahy adds.

If children still really want a particular toy after having an honest conversation about its expense, they can pay for part of it. These children will quickly learn the value of a dollar and appreciate the item

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“What are your fondest memories? It’s not things. It’s the people you spent the time with, it’s the things you did together. It’s the love you shared, it’s the laughter you shared, it’s the joy you shared, it’s the craziness you shared.”

– Barbara Desmarais, parenting and life coach at theparentingcoach.com

even more after earning it.

A predetermined budget also can be extremely helpful during the holidays. If consumers plan to spend \$800 on gifts again this year, as they did last year, this amounts to saving approximately \$15 each week of the year. Start saving early and you’ll be less inclined to shop impulsively and more able to spend time collecting meaningful gifts, says Stephany Kirkpatrick, senior director of financial planning at LearnVest.

Regardless of your budget, though, the best gifts are usually those that come from the heart. The more thought people put into the gift-giving process, the better they feel emotionally about their money, Kirkpatrick says.

Do-it-yourself projects are great examples of meaningful gifts. A batch of homemade granola in a mason jar or an IOU for a fun day together are both great gift ideas.

“Just taking someone special in your life on a day where you can create a memory and you’re not spending money on things,” Kirkpatrick says. “So the cost of grabbing baguettes and cheese and a \$10 bottle of wine can make a far better experience.”

Pinterest and Etsy have plenty of simple, low-budget ideas for gifts that people can make themselves. Loved ones will receive a personalized present, as well as the knowledge that you took the time and energy to make it yourself. Especially during the holidays, when televisions and newspapers advertise hundreds of toys, consumers should remember that life is about experiences – not things.

“Everybody wants to have that moment where the child opens the gift and goes ‘Oh my god!’” Leahy says. “But that is a very brief moment in a very long life.”

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HOW TO GIVE THE BEST GIFTS EVER



Some gifts they want, and some gifts they want to return! Here's how to be sure to give a great one

BY MARLA R. MILLER
CTW FEATURES

There are great gifts, and there are not-so-great gifts, and luckily for you, we know just what they are.

If gift-giving gives you anxiety, here's a bit of good news: 70 percent of people polled in an online survey last year said they were happy with most of their gifts, with very few claiming to have returned or re-gifted a majority of the presents they received.

That said, cash remains king, with iPads, clothing, cars, vacations and jewelry ranking among the best gifts by respondents of a survey of more than 6,500 online buyers' via Bizrate Insights.

Socks and a sweater topped the list as worst presents - so, unless you written or verbal confirmation that those wool or cotton items are desired, set them down and slowly step back! In general, spouses and significant others did the best at selecting gifts, with women dropping hints and making lists to make sure they got what they wanted. Parents ranked No. 1 as gift givers, according to Millennials, but at the same time, both Gen Y (the Millennials) and Gen X were the hardest to please. Nearly half of respondents in those groups returned at least one gift. They also were most likely to resell gifts on eBay.

For that very reason - the anxiety of pleasing - holiday shopping is usually met with indecision and procrastination. It's hard to find the perfect gift for everyone on your list and stay within budget.

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Some best bets from the 2013 holiday were tablets and TVs, along with electric toothbrushes and athletic shoes, according to market research by The NPD Group.

But there are many thoughtful gift ideas to consider beyond the latest technology and national retailers, says Lisa Emmons, a personal shopper, professional stylist and owner of Posh Image Consulting in the Tampa Bay, Florida, area.

You can shop local artists and boutiques for unique jewelry, clothing and gourmet food, or buy a spa package or gift certificates to a professional sporting event, play or concert. As small business owners, she and her husband made their own wine to give to clients last Christmas.

Champagne or wine with chocolates for pairing, or gift cards for wine making or beer brewing courses are good for busy professionals, couples, singles and clients, Emmons says.

Other ideas for couples are things they can do together in their area and will help them reconnect, depending on their hobbies and interests. Emmons suggests spa treatments, dinner, dancing lessons, theater tickets, cooking classes or an outdoor event they can enjoy together.

Busy moms may enjoy books, a massage or other pampering treatment, a package to their favorite spa, or a luxury clutch, fashion scarf or shoes.

Makeup and skincare gift sets and gift cards for Sephora, Victoria's Secret and other luxury brands are safe bets for women.

Ideas for men include tickets to a game, sporting good items, fashion scarf or dress shoes, cologne, devices, personal accessories and tools.

Seniors were the most enthusiastic about the gifts they received, according to the survey of online shoppers. Good gifts for grandparents are books, movie tickets or theatre shows, dinner gift cards, dancing lessons or home improvement cards - or something they need or want but wouldn't buy themselves.

Teens are often the hardest to buy for, but gift certificates for the movies or a concert, any technology they are into or accessories are a change of pace from clothes, Emmons says.

"You really need to know what they like because teens are very difficult to shop for," she says. "Actually gift cards may be a great option so they can pick out what they want. If not, always get a gift receipt."

As children are more technologically savvy than ever before and into electronics at earlier ages, parents are under a lot of pressure to deliver on their children's wish lists.

Nearly 45 percent of people planned to buy toys as gifts last year, according to National Retail Federation's 2013 holiday consumer survey. Children continue to ask

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for classic toys – Barbie, LEGO – but they also want high-tech gifts like tablets/iPads and game consoles like Xbox One and PlayStation 4, according to NRF’s 2013 Top Toys survey conducted by Prosper Insights and Analytics.

For the first time last year, iPads were among the most popular gifts for both girls and boys, with demand among young girls being slightly higher, according to the survey.

People who are too busy to shop may find it easier to hire a personal shopper. They usually meet with clients in person, via phone or over the Internet and go over questions about the person they are shopping for. Emmons, like other personal shoppers, and several websites offer virtual shopping services. She recommends people make sure they are certified and have a website and social media pages since it does involve divulging financial information.

“We find out as much as we can about the individual and what they like, their personality and lifestyle,” she says. “It helps to know a little about them because you want to get something they actually enjoy. I really get to know my clients. Even if it is virtual, there’s a series of questions we go through.”

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THE RIGHT CAST OF *Characters*

The toys from their favorite books, movies and TV shows are the easiest gifts to give – and the ones they’re most excited to receive. Here’s why licensed toys are the best bets for Christmas morning

**BY RACHEL GRAF
CTW FEATURES**

Great stories – be they on a screen or in a book – all have a clear beginning, middle and end. But, just because the storyline concludes doesn’t mean that children necessarily have to say goodbye to their favorite characters.

Sales of licensed toys – toys that incorporate characters from popular movies, books or television series – accounted for nearly 30 percent of total brick-and-mortar toy dollar sales in 2013, according to a recent report by the NPD Group, a 3-percent increase over the previous year.

The popularity is due in part to children’s desire to interact with these fic-

[Doc McStuffins Talking and Singing Doll \(\\$25\)](#), [Backpack \(\\$23\)](#)



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'Frozen': Sven Plush (\$20), Elsa & Anna Classic Dolls (\$17), Olaf Plush (\$40)

tional characters and immerse themselves in their world.

"The toys are really a great way for kids to engage with the characters and role play or even just play out favorite scenes from the movie," said Laurie Leahey, senior editor of consumer site TTPM, which reviews toys and other kid-focused products. "It's all about letting them re-enact the movie and immerse themselves in that world."

Overall, licensed toy sales reached \$5.3 billion last year, according to the NPD Group report. In 2013, boys accounted for more toys than girls did, with boys ages 3 to 11 making up 44 percent of all licensed dollar sales, whereas girls ages 3 to 11 comprised only 26 percent of sales.

The numbers might be more equal this year, following the sweeping success of Disney's animated film "Frozen." Currently, it is one of the top-selling licenses of 2014. Marvel licenses - The Avengers, Guardians of the Galaxy - tend to be successful, as well, but their popularity plateaus after the second or third movie because there are only so many versions of masked and caped characters with which children can play. Other popular lines include Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Star Wars, and Disney's Doc McStuffins and Dora the Explorer.

These character toys are so successful because they typically target a wide audience

Guardians of the Galaxy Battle FX Star-Lord (\$20), left. Groot, center, and Gamora figures come as part of GOTG action figure 2-packs (\$10).



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Clockwise, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle Movie Assault Van (\$30), Stretch 'n' Shout Leo (\$23), Turtle Sub Underwater Stealth Shell (\$21), Basic Movie Roleplay Leo (\$18)

and are fun for the whole family.

“Star Wars was always very good at being able to create an experience that appeals to all ages,” said Richard Gottlieb, CEO of Global Toy Experts, a toy industry consultancy in New York. “So I think that’s a real key – that the family together really enjoy it, that it’s cross-generational.”

“Frozen” certainly meets the criteria of reaching multiple maturity levels, says Gottlieb, as do items from “Guardians of the Galaxy,” Marvel’s latest box-office smash. These stories incorporate “winks” at an older audience that children usually do not understand. Such winks help pull in parents and older siblings to what might otherwise seem like an overly childish story.

A successful movie or television show or book, however, is not always enough of a reason for toy stores to stock the latest, greatest licensed toys. Small, independent toy stores that carefully choose which toys they carry put a heavy emphasis on a toy’s play value, says Kathleen McHugh, president of the American Specialty Toy Retailing Association. “If the child can’t do anything with it, then [the specialty toy stores] wouldn’t even consider having it,” McHugh says.

TTPM publishes reviews, videos, and live price updates for toys, and they rank items on their repeat play value, Leahey says. Toys with a high play value are items that kids can play with for hours at a time. These products tend to be open-ended and promote fun, creative play.

“Parents don’t want to spend money if their kid’s just going to throw it in the toy box and never see it again,” Leahey says. “We also look at things like is it something that’s interesting for kids to play with and does it really help them interact with the character in a fun way?”

For this reason dolls, action figures and costumes or accessories that promote role-play are especially popular. “Frozen” has had such success with its licensed toys because of the wide appeal of both the movie and its soundtrack.

Although many factors contribute to certain license’s success, such as its breadth of

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appeal, variety of toy types and a bit of luck, the storyline likely has some influence as well. "Frozen" is one of the first Disney movies in which the story's heroine does not rely on an external force to save her. Anna has no fairy godmother or prince to rescue her at the end of the movie. Instead, with her selfless act of sisterly love she saves her own life.

Young girls who have seen the movie sing along to the movie's soundtrack with such expression and emotion that Gottlieb thinks this might be an indication that the young audience has been moved by the movie's plotline.

"This is all about being able to do it yourself and that the power's in you, and I think that those that make intellectual property would be wise to pay attention to that," Gottlieb says. "It wasn't just that she was strange and she learned to use her powers. It was really about self-empowerment."

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'Star Wars': From left, Chewbacca Plush (\$20), Rebels Stormtrooper Blaster (\$22), Inquisitor Lightsaber (\$30), Black Series Speeder Bike (\$50), Black Series Yoda (\$11), Inquisitor TIE (\$40), Black Series Luke Skywalker (\$23)



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The 8 Best

FROZEN

Let's face it: No one's letting go! Here are the top items to gift the 'Frozen' fan in your household

Gifts for 2014

BY MATTHEW M. F. MILLER
CTW FEATURES

For any parent grown weary of hearing the inescapable songs from the Disney megahit "Frozen," well ... you might be in for a long holiday season. In 2013, the unanticipated and extreme fandom of the film's viewers led to a massive rush on tie-in merchandise, which concurrently left many shoppers frustrated with the lack of inventory and even more kids disappointed that Santa forgot to pack Anna and Elsa in his sleigh.

With a re-release of the movie as a Sing-Along Edition (\$20, DVD), the rush on "Frozen" toys and accessories, most of which play the film's songs, is likely to rival last year. Thankfully there are a lot more buying options this go-around, but if you want to snag the most-wanted "Frozen" swag in 2014, the tactic remains the same: Buy early and buy often to avoid the insanity that is likely to ensue. If you see something your kid wants, do not - I repeat - *do not* let it go.

KIDTRAX DISNEY FROZEN 6V SCOOTER AGES 2 TO 5 (MAX WEIGHT: 50 POUNDS), \$140

It's pretty much everything a young "Frozen" fan could want under the Christmas tree. It lights up; it plays three songs; it's outrageously sparkly; and it zooms around at a whopping 2.5 mph. And lest you're worried about dropping a fortune on batteries, the scooter's 6V battery is rechargeable.



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FROZEN CRYSTAL KINGDOM VANITY

AGES 3 AND UP, \$70

Standing just over 3 feet, the mirror can change its reflection from Anna to Elsa at the push of button while playing "For the First Time In Forever." It includes a brush, a necklace and Elsa hair-braid extension. Do not be fooled by the picture on the box: Elsa's tiara and dress are not included.

OLAF SNOW CONE MAKER

AGES 8 TO 11, \$25

A clever take on the film's snowy sidekick, just insert ice cubes and flavored syrup into Olaf and out pops flavored ice from his belly. Included are two Olaf cups, one flavor bottle, one scoop and two sugar-free flavor packets.



SNOW GLOW ELSA DOLL

AGES 3 AND UP, \$35

Touch Elsa's "magical" snowflake necklace to hear her say 15 iconic lines from the movie as her dress lights up. And just when you thought you might escape "Let It Go" - just raise her arms and the song plays while her necklace puts on a mini-light show.

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HIDE AND HUG OLAF ALL AGES, \$27

Love “Elf on the Shelf?” Love “Frozen?” Why not have the best of both worlds? Box set includes a brand new Olaf story and plush Olaf doll. Following the hide-and-seek theme of the book, parents can hide Olaf for kids to find and receive one of the snowman’s signature warm hugs.

STRIDE RITE FROZEN BOOTS AND SHOES AVAILABLE IN TODDLER AND KIDS SIZES, AROUND \$50

Sisters Anna and Elsa are featured prominently on these rainbow-sparkled, suede boots with a fluffy lining. Boots feature a side zip, flexible sole and decorative bow. The Velcro-fastened shoes feature purple sparkles and pink flowers, and they light up as kids walk, skip and dance, presumably while singing “Let It Go”.



FROZEN COOL TUNES SING-ALONG BOOMBOX AGES 3 AND UP, \$35

The whole family can sing along to the preloaded tunes from the movie via the built-in microphone and speakers. Or jack-in your MP3 player to sing along to one of the billions of other songs in existence that are not from this movie.



FROZEN FINGER PUPPET SET AGES 2 AND UP, \$15

Re-enact every scene from the movie with these 3 ½-inch plush puppets with padded finger sockets, satin gowns and faux fur accents. Also, they are beyond adorable.

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LET'S *Ride!*



How to pick out
the perfect bike
for your kids

Bikes are a milestone gift.
Here's how to pick out a safe,
fun ride for the kid on your list

BY BEN LARRISON
CTW FEATURES

At the outset, buying a new bike for your child may seem almost as daunting as buying a car for yourself. There are so many questions to consider: Where to begin? What sort of safety features should you keep in mind? What is the proper-sized bike for your child, and how long will it last?

To help you on your quest, here are some thoughts and tips from bicycle and bike safety experts:

SIZE MATTERS

Your kid will get bigger – that's life. And the fact that they'll grow may temp some parents to buy a bike that their child can "grow into," similar to clothing or shoes. But when it comes to buying a bicycle, getting one that is too big for your son or daughter could not only hamper their ability to ride it well, but it also could pose a safety risk.

"Don't buy a bike that is so large as to be dangerous," says Charlie Didrickson, sales manager at Turin Bicycle in Chicago. "Some parents like to purchase a bike their child will 'grow into,' and it is often unsafe for a period of time and harder to learn on."

Because of the concern that many parents have about making a hefty investment in product their child may only be able to use for a year or two, inquire about a "trade-in" program when shopping for a bike this holiday season. Many bike specialty shops will offer deals where you can exchange your kid's old used bike in exchange for a significant discount on a bigger model.

And though it may be quite tempting to want to completely surprise your child with a bike on Christmas morning, the best way to make sure you are getting the right bike – and helmet, of course – in his or her size is to take them to the shop to try them out first.

"Even if it's going to be a surprise ... you can take them

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“Generally speaking, bikes sold from bike shops versus bikes sold at department stores and big box stores are much higher quality,” Didrickson says. “The bikes are professionally built, and will last twenty years-plus if kept in good working order.” – Charlie Didrickson, Turin Bicycle

and say ‘Santa Clause needs to know about the size,’” says Dr. Kate Cronan, a pediatric emergency room doctor at Nemours/Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children in Wilmington, Delaware, and a senior editor for KidsHealth.org.

TRUST THE EXPERTS

In many towns, the only option for new bike purchases is going to be the local sporting goods store, toy store or department store. But if your town has a specialized bike shop, you may be better off in terms of service and selection.

“Generally speaking, bikes sold from bike shops versus bikes sold at department stores and big box stores are much higher quality,” Didrickson says. “The bikes are professionally built, and will last twenty years-plus if kept in good working order.”

What’s more, employees at specialty bike shops are often more knowledgeable when it comes to finding a properly sized bike and helmet.

Don’t have a bike shop in your town? Don’t worry: whatever local store that does carry bikes will be able to help you find just the bike and gear you’re looking for, even if it has a bit smaller overall selection.

SAFETY FIRST

Before riding a bike can be, well, “Just like riding a bike!” there’s a bit of a learning curve. And as your kids are picking up the basics of cycling, it’s important to emphasize safety fundamentals.

The core principal, of course: Always wear a helmet.

When picking out a proper helmet, make sure it fits no more than two fingers above the eyebrow, and that it touches the top of the head. Without any incidents or accidents, a helmet is generally good for about three to five years, but it’s a good rule of thumb to always replace a helmet after it encounters any sort of significant impact.

“Helmets are the single most effective way to prevent brain injury in a bicycle crash,” says Kristin Rosenthal, program manager of bike and pedestrian safety at Safe Kids Worldwide. “And a parent should be a good role model and wear a helmet, as well.”

Other cycling safety tips include always riding “with traffic” on the right hand side of the road, and wearing reflectors to better make yourself known to drivers, especially at night/if it’s dark out.

And even if you decide to get your younger kids up on a bike at an early age, it’s probably best to keep them in the driveway.

“It’s not really recommended that children are (bicycling) in traffic before age 10,” says Rosenthal. “So they really shouldn’t be out riding in the road without supervision.”

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FUN Modes of Transportation

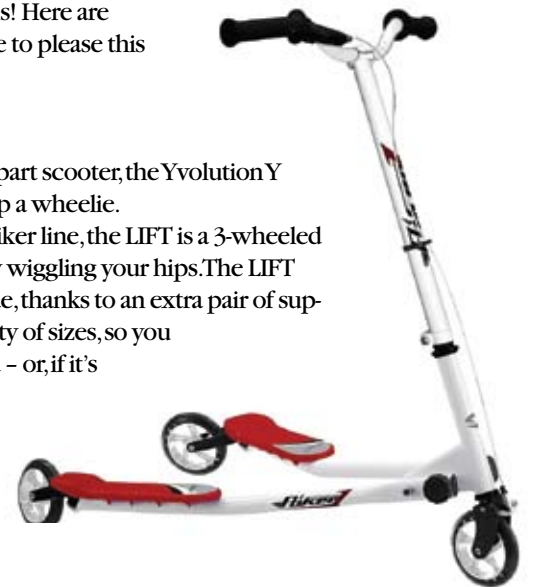
THE OTHER 'RIDE' GIFTS KIDS WILL GO CRAZY FOR!

Everything's more fun on wheels! Here are three rideable gifts that are sure to please this holiday season.

Y FLIKER

Part skateboard, part roller blades, part scooter, the Yvolution Y Fliker is a cool way to glide and pop a wheelie.

The newest addition to the Y Fliker line, the LIFT is a 3-wheeled scooter you can propel forward by wiggling your hips. The LIFT also allows you to tilt back and glide, thanks to an extra pair of support wheels. It's available in a variety of sizes, so you can get the right one for your child - or, if it's too tempting to resist, for yourself. With a little practice, you and your son or daughter will be popping wheelies in no time.



MOBO MEGA MINI

Want to introduce your young child to the world of riding without breaking out the training wheels? This three-wheeled cruiser may be just what you're seeking.

Mobo's Mega Mini is a great option for kids age 2 to 5. Plus, the Mobo Mega Mini is adjustable, so unlike a tricycle, it can grow with your child and last for several years.

Or, if your little one is a cartoon lover, Mobo also has a line of Disney-themed cruisers featuring characters from Cars and Planes - and, starting this Christmas, "Frozen."



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MAVERIX ELECTRONIC SKATEBOARD

What's the only thing better than a skateboard? How about an electronic skateboard with a belt-driven motor and a handheld wireless remote? Yeah, that just may trump it.

The Maverix line of electronic skateboards, which can go up to 10 miles on a single charge, come in a variety of sizes and feature anti-lock breaks to help slow riders down without kicking them to the curb. Their smallest model, the California, is an ideal gift for kids ages 9 through 16.

Marc Shinderman, CEO of Maverix, says that the skateboards have found a home just not amongst youths, but with their parents, too.

"We're finding that it's not just young adults, or kids and teens that want to ride them, but also adults," says Shinderman.

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WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN THEY'RE *Expecting*

Sometimes their most-desired gift just isn't available. Here's how to let them down while keeping the holiday joy



BY JESSICA ROYER OCKEN
CTW FEATURES

Many children today have raised the holiday wish list or letter to Santa to an art form: a document to be labored over and carefully considered, perhaps even rewritten or reordered a few times before completion. It receives attention and focus that homework assignments only dream about. But sometimes, no matter how elegantly it's been crafted, problems arise in the execution.

Like the time a few years ago when Michelle Bocci's daughter requested a Furby for Christmas – and there were no Furbies around. Bocci, of Scranton, Pennsylvania, finally managed to buy one on eBay for close to \$400, but when she met the seller at a local restaurant, the woman tried to demand even more money. And a Merry Christmas to you!

Clearly this is not the holiday vibe you want, nor the blow to the budget, but what's a parent ... er, Santa ... to do when the coveted item, the list-topper, the pièce de résistance, just can't be acquired?

To start, take a deep breath. "Children twenty years down the road are not going to fault their parents for the latest electronic gizmo they didn't get," says parenting expert Susan Newman, Ph.D., author of "Little Things Long Remembered: Making Your Children Feel Special Every Day" (Iron Gate Press, 2014 – 2nd edition). "They'll find other things to fault you for, so don't worry," she adds with a laugh.

DON'T BUY MEMORIES, MAKE THEM Gifts generally are not what gets stored in a child's memory bank, Newman explains. Instead, family rituals and traditions make a lasting impression. "That's what's remembered as a highlight of growing up, not the trendy toy they didn't get," she says. So be sure your holiday preparations and celebrations include more than just frantic shopping. Participate in religious activities if that's part of your tradition, bake cookies with your children, share gifts or food with those less fortunate in your community, or create handmade ornaments for the

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tree, suggests Newman.

But of course you can't overlook presents altogether, so back to the matter at hand ... Yes, your child is telling you he'll die without the latest whatever-it-is, but does that sound like something he's actually interested in? Will he enjoy it after the wrapping is ripped off? Or does he just want it because everyone else does, too? Did he see an enticing ad on TV or online?

"Always listen to what kids are talking about before the holidays," says Jane Erickson of River Forest, Illinois, whose two children now are in their 20s. "Ellie always wanted a dog, so we got her a battery-operated dog that did tricks one year. The glee on her face when she opened it was magic, and it wasn't even on her list."

DESIRE ≠ DELIVERY

It also may be helpful to emphasize that just because something's on your child's list, that doesn't guarantee delivery.

"Sometimes the sleigh was too full, so Santa brought this instead," says Erickson. And because her family celebrates the birth of Jesus at Christmas, Erickson also linked her children's wish lists to the three gifts Jesus received when he was born. "They knew they'd get three things from their list," she says. "And it might not be the top three, so that gave us some wiggle room."

Plus, with a little finesse, you could still pull off getting the most-desired gift - even if it doesn't make it on the right day. One year Anu Varma Panchal's daughter Radha requested a Squinkies carriage that could not be located, so Santa brought her a note on Christmas morning saying it was taking a little extra time to make. "The day it finally arrived - via my sister and Amazon Prime - I rang some jingle bells and said, 'Hey, did you hear those bells?'" recalls Varma Panchal, who lives in Tampa, Florida. "Then we went to the door, and the present was waiting outside. Radha was so excited she was pounding the box in joy."

However, even if you're going to be a hero a little later, there's still the question of how to make Christmas morning or Hanukkah night(s) a magical time for your little ones. "Starting with very young children, build traditions," says Newman. If your kids love pancakes, start the holiday with a special batch. Or play a family game of Monopoly. When you do open gifts, take turns, she suggests, so kids can see what others got and how they like it. "Have them look away from themselves to see how others feel."

Then maybe pile in the car with some hot chocolate and drive around to look at decorations. "Just create memories with your children," says Erickson. "That's what they remember, not a toy."

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HOLIDAY *gift guide*



NO-PRESSURE FITNESS GIFTS

More and more people are participating in fitness events not because they need to but because they're fun! So, what better for the 'social participant' on your list than one of these practical, stylish, effective items

BY LAURA DEPTA
CTW FEATURES

As the holidays approach and ideas for New Year's resolutions begin to take hold, many people will resolve to get serious about fitness in the upcoming year. Others, though, may take a more laid-back approach and just look to have fun with their workouts by finding new and creative ways to stay active.

Like any industry, trends in fitness continually change. In 2010, the half marathon was booming in popularity. Trendy fitness classes or workouts like Pilates, Zumba and CrossFit emerge all the time.

The latest boom has been themed

running races - Color Runs, where white-clad runners get caked with colored powder throughout the 5K course; nighttime Glo Runs where participants wear lights and glow-in-dark materials; and obstacle-course events like Tough Mudders and Warrior Dashes.

According to the 2014 State of the Sport report by Running USA, the number of finishers in these nontraditional events has grown from the low six figures in 2009 to 4 million in 2013.

Social fitness is on the rise. So this holiday season, think about getting the social athletes in your life something they want, rather than something they need. Instead of a gift that says, "This will help you get in shape,"

consider one that instead says, "Go out and have fun with this!"

Carolyn Gardner, an avid runner and founding member of the Chicago-based run club Crew Runs the World, believes that people who like their workout gear are more easily motivated.

"If you feel good in what you're doing, you're more likely to continue doing it," says Gardner. "Especially with females, if they have the ability to wear a cute outfit to work out in, they're going to pick the cute outfit to work out in."

So, what are a few no-pressure fitness gifts for the social runner or gym-goer in your life? This year, look for colorful prints and versatile accessories to be highly popular.

HOLIDAY *gift guide*



SHOES

Gardner sees a lot of casual runners wearing the Nike Free, either out running or at the gym. Runners logging high mileage should certainly be fitted by a professional for the correct type of shoes, but Gardner recommends the Nike Free for a casual runner doing low mileage because it “feels comfortable and is affordable.”

Matthew Champa, team member at a Nike retail location in Chicago and pace leader in the Nike Run club, also anticipates that Nike’s Flyknit technology will gain popularity this holiday season. Put the two together in the **NIKE FREE FLYKNIT 4.0** (\$120) for a can’t-miss gift choice.



ACCESSORIES

Along those lines, DeBoom also recommends arm warmers as a staple for outdoor workouts in temperamental climates. Skirt Sports offers this affordable (\$30) accessory in many fun colors and prints that are easy to slip on or take off as needed.

Gifts with multiple uses can be particularly handy for a no-pressure athlete.

THE MIX IT UP SCARF (\$48) from Moving Comfort can be worn to and from the gym or even on an outdoor run or bike ride. And if it’s not a gym day, fitness scarves like this can double as traditional scarves, too.



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HOLIDAY *gift guide*

APPAREL

As far as apparel, Champa recommends something like the **NIKE DRI-FIT SPRINT FULL ZIP (\$135)** as a versatile gift option for both men and women.

“Jackets and hoodies are available in a variety of styles for men and women,” he says. “They make excellent gifts. Features such as innovative fabrics, hoods, pockets and reflective elements make them ideal for active, outdoor pursuits.” For the fun-loving female athlete in your life, consider a colorful **PAIR OF CAPRIS**. Lululemon offers a wide array of crops for yoga, running and general fitness (from \$72). The company’s bold color choices make a statement while keeping things light-hearted.

“It goes back to making you feel fun and sassy and excited about working out,” says Gardner. “Printed capris are so popular right now, and I also feel like the capri length is good for working out versus the full legging.”

Speaking of fun apparel for women, Nicole DeBoom, founder of Skirt Sports and creator of the first-ever fitness skirt, has a great suggestion. **THE COUGAR SKIRT (\$62)** from Skirt Sports is functional — it has built-in shorts and three pockets for storing music players or keys — but it’s also fun.

“This one is definitely for that fun crowd,” says DeBoom. “It’s pleated all along the bottom and it’s got this cute little band that gives you a little bit of a contrast look where we put a print or a solid fabric.”

Skirt Sports aims to create apparel and accessories that make women feel pretty and allow their personalities to shine through as they work out.



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HOLIDAY *gift guide*

TECHNOLOGY

When it comes to tracking a no-pressure workout, DeBoom suggests a **FITBIT** as opposed to a more sophisticated GPS watch or heart rate monitor. The fitbit Zip (\$60) is an easy-to-use device that allows users to track steps, distance and calories easily and without all the technical bells and whistles.

“I started using a fitbit about six months ago,” says DeBoom. “I love it for the simplicity of it. It’s literally just tracking my steps. It really helps you keep moving.”

And of course many runners and gym goers need their trusty music, and a pair of reliable headphones to go with, at all times.

YURBUDS makes earphones (from \$30), armbands and music player cases all available in a variety of styles and colors. Any Yurbuds product would be an excellent stocking stuffer for the music-loving athlete in your life.

So keep it light and keep it fun this holiday season. There is no reason a fitness gift can’t be both functional and stylish at the same time.

CTW FEATURES



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Gifts That *Feed* Their PASSION

The perfect food-focused presents for the person who lives in the kitchen

BY JILL JARACZ
CTW FEATURES

The holidays are a special time for foodies. From elaborate holiday meals to elegant cocktail parties to extensive holiday desserts, this is a time where foodies can shine. It's only natural to give the friend who's basically a celebrity chef - at least in their own kitchen - a gift they can use year-round for their next culinary creation.

The first trick to buying a gift for the food lover is to know how well they know their way around the kitchen. "Most people come in [to our store] trying to find the perfect kitchen gadget, which is easy for the budding chef but not as easy for the experienced cook," says Linwood Bradley, lead merchant at Southern Season, a housewares mecca with locations in North and South Carolina and Virginia.

Bradley suggests getting the budding chef a trendy gadget or a practical kitchen tool. "Also, many budding chefs are using less-than-great knives, so a knife upgrade is always appreciated."

But what if the foodie friend has all the tools covered? "Here's the thing most people forget: foodie equals entertainer," says Bradley. "Generally, people who love food love to entertain, so I guide the gift giver to that side."

With that in mind, here are some gift ideas that can help your foodie friends not just with their holiday masterpieces but also with their culinary creations all year long.

HOLIDAY *gift guide*



GEFU SPIRELLI SPIRAL SLICER (\$30)

This tool that makes creating julienne vegetables a breeze. It works with firm vegetables such as carrots, squash, zucchini and cucumbers, and is perfect for slicing veggies for stir-fries and pasta.

CHEF'N MIXQUICK (\$30)

Chef'n is a company that's "always coming up with improvements in the kitchen," says Jim Hill, owner of KitchenWares by Blackstones in Boston, who cites the Chef'n strawberry huller as a perennial big seller. The MixQuick hand is a manual hand mixer that comes with interchangeable blades: a single or double-wire whisk, a frother and a universal mixer. "It's better than, quite different and more functional than any mixer we've seen," says Hill.

VACU VIN COCONUT OPENER (\$12)

Coconut water has become one of the hot beverages of the last couple of years. This tool now allows you to get your own supply directly from the coconut. "It also halves a coconut quickly so you can get to the meat easily," says Liz Songer, buyer at The Chopping Block, a cooking school and housewares store in Chicago. ≡



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HOLIDAY *gift guide*



SHUCKER PADDY OYSTER KNIFE (\$20)

Seafood lovers can have a devil of a time getting oysters open, but Songer says this tool makes it easy to shuck them. "This distinctively shaped oyster knife, designed by the world's fastest oyster shucker, makes it easy to pop open oysters with less pressure than traditional knives," she says.


PREPARA EVAK FOOD STORAGE CONTAINERS

These award-winning glass and stainless steel storage containers (prices vary) are perfect for the friend who has a lot of specialty ingredients on hand. The container has a twin-valve system that releases air as you push down the lid, which keeps the food fresher for a longer period of time. "It's perfect for storing coffee, tea, dried fruits, granola, herbs, et cetera," says Songer.

SLATE SERVING TRAYS

Slate boards are perfect for serving cheeses, charcuterie platters or other hors d'oeuvres. With a piece of chalk your friend can label each item to make a beautiful display.

ALL-CLAD COPPER-CORE COOKWARE

For the high-end gift, check out cookware manufacturer All Clad's line of stainless-covered copper cookware (from \$140). These pots have "all the wonderful benefits of copper cookware, but with a regular stainless steel cooking surface," says Hill. The copper promotes better conductivity, while the stainless steel is easier to clean. 

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HOLIDAY *gift guide*

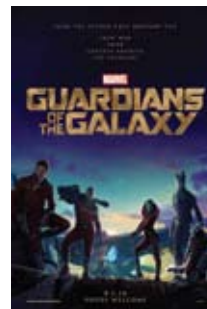
STOCKING STUFFERS: MOVIES

BIG AT THE BOX OFFICE

The year's biggest movies are the sure thing to give the film fanatic on your list

The Hollywood hits they loved earlier this year are just the thing to give this time of year. Here are some of 2014's biggest big-screen hits to bring home

1/2 PAGE AD



«1. **GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY** (Buena Vista)
Format and price TBD

2. **CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE WINTER SOLDIER** (Buena Vista)
Blu-ray 3D + Digital — \$40
Blu-ray — \$33
DVD — \$30



«3. **THE LEGO MOVIE** (Warner Bros.)
Blu-ray + DVD + Digital — \$36
DVD + Digital — \$29

4. **TRANSFORMERS: AGE OF EXTINCTION** (Paramount)
3D Blu-ray + Digital — \$40
Blu-ray + DVD + Digital — \$40
DVD — \$30



«5. **MALEFICENT** (Buena Vista)
Blu-ray + DVD + Digital/DVD — Price TBD

HOLIDAY *gift guide*



« 6. X-MEN: DAYS OF FUTURE PAST

(Fox)
Blu-ray — \$40
DVD — \$30

7. DAWN OF THE PLANET OF THE APES «

(Fox)
Blu-ray + Digital — \$40
DVD — \$30



8. THE AMAZING » SPIDER-MAN 2 (Sony)

3D Blu-ray + Blu-ray +
DVD + Digital — \$46
DVD — \$31



« 9. GODZILLA

(Warner Bros.)
3D Blu-ray + Blu-ray + DVD +
Digital — \$45
Blu-ray + DVD + Digital — \$36
DVD — \$29

10. 22 JUMP STREET «

(Sony)
Blu-ray + DVD + Digital — \$41
DVD — \$31



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HOLIDAY *gift guide*

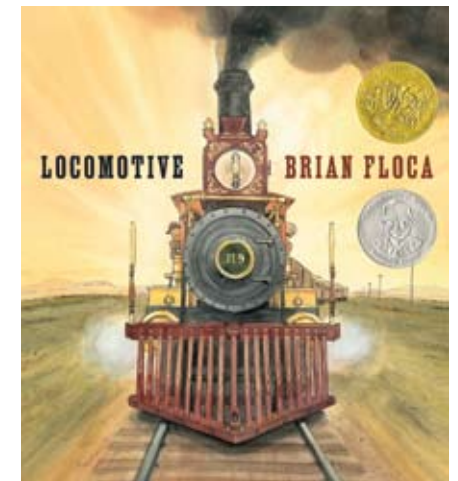
STOCKING STUFFERS: AWARD-WINNING KIDS' BOOKS



2014 CALDECOTT MEDAL WINNER

LOCOMOTIVE

Written illustrated by Brian Floca
(Atheneum Books for Young Readers, \$18)



2014 CALDECOTT HONOR BOOKS

JOURNEY

Written and illustrated by Aaron Becker
(Candlewick Press \$16)

FLORA AND THE FLAMINGO
Written and illustrated by Molly Idle
(Chronicle Books, \$17)

MR. WUFFLES!

Written and illustrated by David Wiesner
(Clarion Books \$18)

ALL THAT *Glitters* IS GOLD

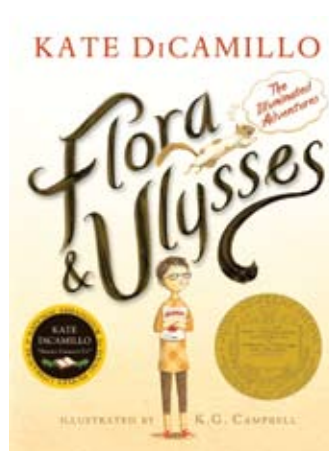
The books are the sure to please the kid on your list, and they have the bling to prove it

It's OK to judge a kid's book by its cover. When you see that shiny medal badge on the cover signifying the title is winner or honoree of the Newbery Medal (tops in kids' literature) or the Caldecott Medal (best in kids' picture books), you know it's going to be good. Here are the distinguished books for 2014:

2014 NEWBERY MEDAL WINNER

FLORA & ULYSSES: THE ANIMATED ADVENTURES

by Kate DiCamillo
(Candlewick Press, \$18)



2014 NEWBERY HONOR BOOKS

DOLL BONES by Holly Black (Margaret K. McElderry Books, \$18)

THE YEAR OF BILLY MILLER by Kevin Henkes (Greenwillow Books, \$17)

ONE CAME HOME written by Amy Timberlake (Alfred A. Knopf, \$7)

PAPERBOY by Vince Vawter (Delacorte Press, \$17)

NEWBERY MEDAL WINNER, #TBT EDITION

THE GIVER Lois Lowry (Laurel-Leaf Press, \$10)
1994 Newbery Medal Winner, now a major motion picture

HOLIDAY *gift guide*

STOCKING STUFFERS: MUSIC

10 hot new albums from some of the decade's top artists

Don't look now, but the '90s were officially so long ago that they are now considered retro cool. And anybody who came of age in that decade will be happy to tell you it was the best of times - especially when it came to the music. For those on your list feeling nostalgic, these new releases from iconic '90s acts will offer the two best gifts money can buy: music and feeling like a kid again.

1. WEEZER

Everything Will Be Alright In The End (Universal Republic, 2014)



2. TORI AMOS

Unrepentant Geraldines (Mercury Classics, 2014)



3. EMINEM

Shady XV (Aftermath Records, 2014)

4. FOO FIGHTERS

Sonic Highways (RCA, 2014)



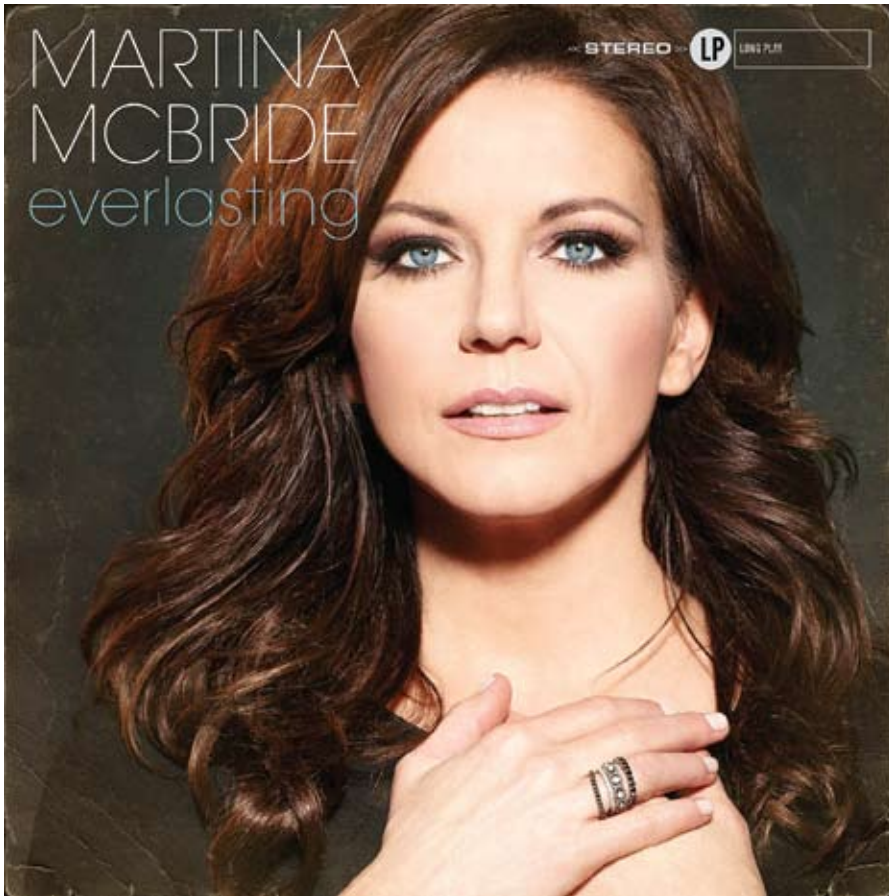
5. MARIAH CAREY

Me. I Am Mariah ... The Elusive Chanteuse (Island Records, 2014)



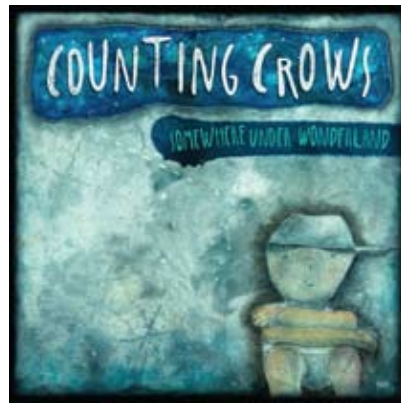
I Still
Love
the '90s!

HOLIDAY *gift guide*



6. MARTINA MCBRIDE
Everlasting (Vinyl Recordings, 2014)

7. THE COUNTING CROWS
Somewhere Under Wonderland
(Capitol, 2014)



8. NATALIE MERCHANT
Natalie Merchant (Nonesuch, 2014)

9. BECK
Morning Phase
(Capitol, 2014)

10. TIM MCGRAW
Sundown Heaven Town
(Big Machine, 2014)
CTW FEATURES



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STOCKING STUFFERS: REBOOTS/REMAKES

THEN & NOW *Favorites*

5 big-name Hollywood titles get modern-day updates

One of Hollywood's most prolific abilities - for good or ill - is taking a beloved title or franchise and jolting it back to life in a new shape or form. Here are 5 that got a makeover in 2014

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COSMOS

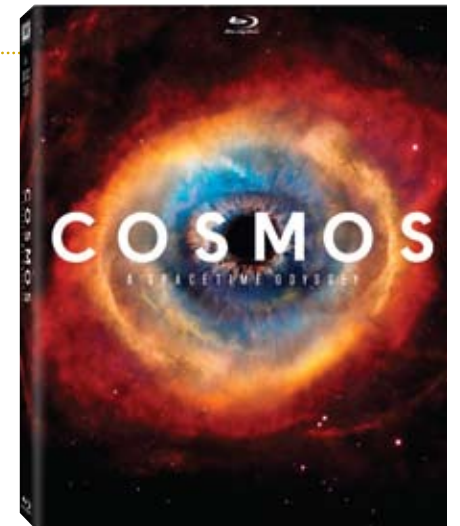
The late astrophysicist Carl Sagan presented the original guide to the universe, 1980's 13-part docu-series "Cosmos: A Personal Voyage." In 2014, the astrophysicist and Sagan protégé Neil deGrasse Tyson took command of the "Ship of the Imagination" and presented "Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey," a follow-up and update to the original.

COSMOS: A PERSONAL VOYAGE

(Cosmos Studios, 1980)
7-disc DVD - \$100

2014: COSMOS: A SPACETIME ODYSSEY

(20th Century Fox, 2014)
4-disc Blu-ray - \$60
4-disc DVD - \$50



HOLIDAY *gift guide*

GODZILLA

The King of the Monsters has spent decades terrorizing the world in movies, books and video games, the most recent of which is the 2014 Warner Bros. blockbuster featuring Bryan Cranston (“Breaking Bad”). Just as impressive is Ishiro Honda’s 1954 original monster movie, which got a high-def restoration from the Criterion Collection in 2012.

1954: GODZILLA

(The Criterion Collection)

Blu-ray – \$40

DVD – \$30

2014: GODZILLA

(Warner Bros.)

3D Blu-ray + Blu-ray +

DVD + Digital – \$45

Blu-ray + DVD + Digital – \$36

DVD – \$29



ROSEMARY'S BABY

Roman Polanski’s 1968 horror classic, starring Mia Farrow as the titular Rosemary, is just as frightening today as it was 45 years. And like “Godzilla,” it recently got a high-def restoration from Criterion. Twenty-fourteen saw the adaptation of the Ira Levin novel take to the small screen in a 4-hour miniseries starring Zoe Saldana.

1968: ROSEMARY'S BABY

(The Criterion Collection)

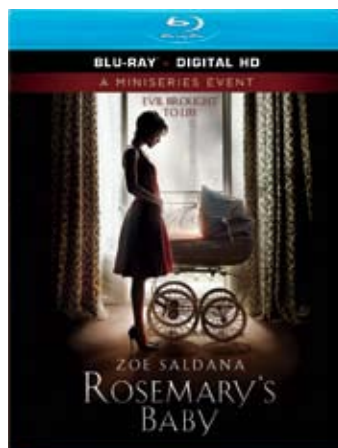
Blu-ray – \$40

DVD – \$30

2014: ROSEMARY'S BABY

(Lionsgate)

Blu-ray + Digital/DVD + Digital – \$20



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HOLIDAY *gift guide*

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ROBOCOP

Paul Verhoeven's 1987 sci-fi classic about a cyborg Detroit police officer (Peter Weller) got a reboot in 2014 with Joel Kinnaman (TV's "The Killing") filling the armored suit.

1987: ROBOCOP

(Fox Searchlight)
Blu-ray/DVD — \$15

2014: ROBOCOP

(MGM)
Blu-ray + DVD +
Digital — \$40
DVD — \$30



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

Leonardo, Michelangelo, Donatello, Raphael. Splinter. Shredder. April O'Neil. And, of course, pizza! What else is there to really say about the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles? The new reboot of the franchise, 2014's "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles," uses motion-capture technology for the most lifelike Turtles action yet. But, if you're feel nostalgic for some vintage Cowabunga, look no further than the original 1990s trilogy that is, well, less technologically advanced but just as fun.

1990s: TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES/TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES II/TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III TRIPLE FEATURE

Blu-ray — \$25

2014: TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

3D Blu-ray + Blu-ray + DVD +
Digital — \$55
Blu-ray + DVD + Digital — \$40
DVD — \$30

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