

Hood County News

A SPECIAL ADVERTISING SECTION
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Holiday GIFT GUIDE

2023

Inside

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Last-minute holiday shopping tips

Though devotees of early holiday shopping do not hesitate to point out how convenient it can be to get all their gifts long before the arrival of Chanukah and Christmas, scores of shoppers still wait until the last minute to begin checking names off their lists. It might be beneficial to shop early, but it's easy to procrastinate.

Last-minute holiday shopping might not be as enjoyable a custom as family dinners or office parties, but scrambling to find the right gift in the waning days of the holiday season is a familiar situation for millions of shoppers. Shoppers who find themselves with some last-minute shopping on their to-do list can utilize these tips to make the frantic search for the right gift go smoothly.

WORK WITH STORE PERSONNEL

If a shopping list is lengthy but the time before the holiday arrives is dwindling, speak directly with store personnel, who may offer suggestions but can also help shoppers find what they need. In-person shoppers can speak with a store clerk immediately upon entering a store, while online shoppers can utilize chat functions on retailers' websites for help finding something that's in stock and deliverable before the big day.

EXPECT COMPETITION

Though online shopping would seemingly make last-minute shoppers relics of a bygone era, that was not really the case in 2022. A survey of more than 1,000 shoppers conducted by the retail industry publisher Best Black Friday found that just about 16 percent of consumers estimated they would finish their shopping during the week of Christmas. Last-minute shoppers who want to avoid crowds should consider shopping during off-peak hours, such as on weekday mornings and afternoons when most people are working.

SHOP LOCAL

Last-minute shoppers may be flocking to malls and busy downtown shopping districts as they hurry to get gifts for friends and family members with different interests. Shopping at small, local businesses can help last-minute shoppers avoid such crowds. And with less on their shelves and smaller storage rooms, small business owners and their staff also tend to know their inventories inside and out. That can ensure a shopping trip is not spent wandering numerous aisles in search of the right gift.

BAG IT, DON'T WRAP IT

Shoppers who wait until the very last minute likely



COURTESY PHOTO

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won't have time to wrap all the gifts they pick up for loved ones. Gift bags conceal gifts just as well as wrapping paper, but it takes a fraction of the time to place a gift in a bag as it does to wrap it in paper. Quality gifts bags also are reusable, which can appeal to anyone looking to

create less waste this holiday season.

DON'T FORGET FOOD

If it's truly impossible to find something late in the season and a gift card feels too impersonal, give the gift of food. Adult recipients also

can be gifted a bottle of wine or another spirit that can be enjoyed during a holiday meal. Shoppers skilled in the kitchen can whip up a homemade treat, while those without such talents can give a store-bought delicacy or even a subscription to a monthly food club or service.

Last-minute shopping may look different than it used to, but scores of shoppers still wait to buy gifts for their loved ones. A handful of strategies can simplify last-minute shopping.

Christmas stocking decorating tips and tricks

Hanging Christmas stockings is just one of the many traditions that fill the days leading up to Christmas.

One theory regarding the origins of stockings says the tradition began when a poor widower who had three daughters worried over having enough money for their wedding dowries to help secure the daughters' futures. The women, who had hung their stockings by the fireplace to dry, woke up to find solid gold spheres inside. This legend suggests kindly St. Nicholas visited the home in the night and left the presents, helping ensure the daughters could marry well, after all.

Christmas stockings were the first places where gifts were stowed, before under the boughs of Christmas trees became the primary spot for placing gifts. Then stockings were secondary vessels reserved for small trinkets. Today stockings are largely Christmas decorations rather than places to place gifts. Still, they're a key component of holiday magic.

When including stockings in holiday festivities, follow these tips for whimsy and more.



COURTESY PHOTO

Hanging Christmas stockings is just one of the many traditions that fill the days leading up to Christmas.

UTILIZE STOCKING HOLDERS

Stocking holders are either metal or wooden devices that are placed on mantels. Hooks on the hold-

ers suspend the stockings. Just be sure the holders are sturdy enough to handle the weight of a stuffed stocking if you plan on filling it with

goodies.

DETERMINE YOUR STYLE

There are Christmas stockings that coordinate to just

about any interior design style. From farmhouse to modern to traditional, choose one that fits with your aesthetic. That isn't to

say you can't mix and match stockings if you prefer a more eclectic, homespun feel.

ENHANCE YOUR STOCKING LOOK

If stockings are strictly decorative, enhance their look with a few tricks. First, use tissue paper or balled up shopping bags to stuff the stockings and give them shape. Fill a small baggie with sand or florist glass and place in the heel of the stocking to balance it out and prevent the stocking from blowing around in the breeze.

No fireplace; no problem. Stockings are traditionally hung from the fireplace mantel, but if you don't have a fireplace there is no need to fret. Simply use ribbons to hang them from the bannister of a staircase, or hang stockings right on walls with removable hooks, or from sturdy shelves. You also can think creatively and hang larger stockings on a door like you might a wreath.

Whether they're decorative or functional, stockings can be an integral component of holiday decor in a home.

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Did you know?

Lights on a Christmas tree may seem like a relatively recent phenomenon, but people who can't wait to deck the halls each December may be surprised to learn that this beloved tradition dates all the way back to the late nineteenth century. Edward

Johnson, a friend and colleague of Thomas Edison, introduced holiday light bulbs in 1882. Prior to that, candles were lit on trees and families would briefly gaze at this awe-inspiring bit of holiday decor before the candles were quickly extinguished. Johnson

is credited with being the first to suggest light bulbs, which were invented by his friend Edison, be used to light trees in place of candles. While many were impressed by Johnson's eight-bulb holiday display, it remained a novelty until the 1920s, when pre-

assembled lights became more accessible. Since then, Christmas tree lights have taken hold as a must-have piece of holiday decor in households across the globe.

Santa's Word Search

Y	I	E	R	Y	F	V	R	W	F	B	W	S	K	V	M	M	Y	P	I
G	C	D	I	T	F	O	I	U	R	E	A	Y	F	A	J	D	D	N	P
O	K	C	A	D	F	B	D	F	D	N	E	C	M	I	T	J	Y	N	U
G	R	W	T	S	B	L	C	O	T	O	R	P	K	W	S	D	H	A	H
A	F	S	O	U	G	N	Y	A	R	E	L	K	U	G	A	J	G	U	S
O	O	A	S	R	W	P	E	I	E	W	E	P	N	W	D	R	J	G	G
L	E	G	N	V	K	I	R	R	N	V	C	I	H	O	W	E	D	H	D
T	D	L	P	N	B	S	T	F	E	G	K	F	V	G	I	E	D	T	R
Y	R	S	O	I	O	F	H	I	K	C	R	J	I	T	N	D	V	Y	A
M	T	S	D	P	J	B	L	O	O	Y	O	F	E	M	T	N	A	U	E
F	N	B	A	B	H	E	P	T	P	A	T	M	C	J	E	I	V	F	B
H	R	T	G	M	B	T	S	K	T	S	A	G	I	E	R	E	E	L	N
O	S	S	S	G	T	W	R	H	T	Y	R	C	N	I	G	R	K	H	D
O	B	T	C	H	D	S	G	O	K	W	A	D	A	Y	W	D	A	L	D
S	S	O	R	R	G	I	I	P	N	Y	E	N	M	I	H	C	L	Y	J
U	H	O	A	T	N	I	U	R	A	E	Y	Y	R	S	L	Y	F	T	V
A	C	B	G	D	O	D	E	Y	H	L	L	A	K	H	D	J	W	H	J
L	L	U	I	A	B	Y	E	L	L	C	T	V	K	Y	F	N	O	U	L
C	M	M	F	E	O	T	S	O	S	R	M	G	E	T	H	V	N	U	M
C	R	A	U	Y	B	E	J	M	W	D	S	G	G	S	V	E	S	V	U

WORDS

- BEARD
- BELIEVE
- BOOTS
- CHIMNEY
- CHRISTMAS
- CLAUS
- ELVES
- FLYING
- GIFTS
- JOLLY
- MIDNIGHT
- NAUGHTY
- NICE
- NORTH POLE
- REINDEER
- RUDOLPH
- SANTA
- SLEIGH
- SNOWFLAKE
- STOCKINGS
- TOYS
- TREE
- WINTER
- WORKSHOP

Find the words hidden vertically, horizontally, diagonally, and backwards.

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GIFT CARDS AVAILABLE

November 25th 7:00pm Jolie & Sonny Burgess Kickin' Christmas off Texas Style
December 1st 7:30pm FABBA Christmas ABBA's Hits and some Christmas
December 2nd 7:00pm Malpass Brothers
December 7th 7:30pm Garry Morris a Gary Morris Christmas
December 8th 7:30pm Country Christmas
December 9th 3:00pm & 7:00pm Michael Hix The Michael Hix Christmas Party
December 15th 7:30pm Shake Rattle & Roll Magical Music of the 50's and 60's
December 16th & 17th Josh Weathers
December 22nd 7:30 December 23rd 3:00 & 7:00pm An ELVIS Christmas Kraig Parker
December 29th 7:30pm Michael Hix All About Texas
December 30th 7:00pm New Years Through The Decades Michael Hix taking you through the 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s & more
December 31st 7:00pm Las Vegas New Years Eve Party Michael Hix Ringing in the new year

WISHING YOU

Happy Holidays

FROM THE HOOD COUNTY NEWS



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Gifts for the bookworms

BY TERRI SCHLICHENMER

One thin line. There you are, you've just crossed off your last person, thereby finishing your Holiday Gift List for the year. But oops, you forgot that one hard-to-buy-for aunt, and you haven't gotten anything for your baby-sitter. And, and, and... you're out of ideas. So how about something to read? See if these great books don't give you some guidance...

FICTION

The novel lover who's always doing good things for other people may enjoy unwrapping "Just Do This One Thing for Me" by Laura Zimmermann (Dutton). It's the story of a daughter who always does what her free-spirited mother asks of her - even if it gets her in trouble. Wrap it up with "Time's Undoing" by Cheryl A. Head (Dutton), a novel about a woman who's determined to learn how her great-grandfather died, and how what it means to her safety. Bonus: this book was based on the author's own family history.

The reader who loves twisty tales of sister love and rivalry will want to unwrap "How to Care for a Human Girl" by Ashley Wurzbacher (Atria), the story of two sisters, two pregnancies, and a whole pile of resentments. Pair it up with "Before You Found Me" by Brooke Beyfuss (Sourcebooks). It's a tale of choosing your family and sticking together.

Is there a horse lover on your gift list? Aha, then look for "Girls and Their Horses" by Eliza Jane Brazier (Berkley), a novel set in the world of competitive show-jumping, where one mother's wish to give her daughters an opportunity she always wanted could lead to death. Wrap it up with another mean-girl novel, "Under the Influence" by Noelle Crooks (Gallery Books), a novel about a woman who gets a job with an influencer. Does she live to tell? Wait a few days, then ask your giftee...

Here's a nicely complex novel your giftee will love: "The Heaven & Earth Grocery Store" by James McBride (Riverhead Books). When a new housing development is being constructed in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, builders found a human skeleton. The people in the neighborhood know who the bones belonged to, but they're not talking. This book about racism, community, and survival will make a great gift.

Mystery lovers will rejoice when they unwrap "Mrs. Plansky's Revenge" by Spencer Quinn (Forge), the story of a seventy-something widow who's scammed out of all her money. Law enforcement says the crime is impossible to solve, but your giftee will know better... Wrap it up with "The McMasters Guide to Homicide 1: Murder Your Employer" by Rupert Holmes (Simon & Schuster), a book about an unusual school where murder is the main focus.

If you've got someone on your list who loves books of magic and spells, then look for "Black Candle Women" by Diane Marie Brown (Graydon House). It's a tale of three generations of Montrose women who live in the same house, stick to home, and keep their own company. Everything's fine until one of them brings home a boy whose presence opens up an old family secret that will change everything. Wrap it up with "Wade in the Water" by Nyani Knrumah (Amistad), a novel of a white woman who befriends an eleven-year-old Black girl, and the relationship between the two in a racially-divided southern city.

GENERAL NON-FICTION

Your giftee follows politics, rabidly. So why not give them "The Handy Supreme Court Answer Book, second edition" by David L. Hudson, Jr., J.D. (Visible Ink Press). This easy-to-understand book is filled with Q&A information on how the SCOTUS works, why it's important, and some insight to the nine people who sit on what may be the most controversial court ever. Pair it with "Grifters, Frauds, and Crooks"

by Richard Estep (Visible Ink Press), for a great look at law, order, and the lack thereof.

The horror-movie-lover on your gift list will absolutely want "The Exorcist Legacy: 50 Years of Fear" by Nat Segaloff (Citadel Press). It's the story of the movie, its making and the outrage and controversy it led to... but it's also about the crowds, creators, and fans who made it a classic. Wrap it up with "Say Hello to My Little Friend: A Century of Scarface," also by Nat Segaloff, also from Citadel Press.

The connoisseur of fine liquor will want to unwrap "Last Call at Coogan's: The Life and Death of a Neighborhood Bar" by Jon Michaud (St. Martin's Press). It's a biography of a drinking spot, but also of the people who loved it and could be found inside it. Wrap up "A Good Mom's Guide to Making Bad Choices" by Jamilah Mapp and Erica Dickerson (Harper One) with it. It's sharp, hilarious, and a good reminder that you can make mistakes and the kids will probably be just fine.

For the giftee who likes to think big, "Age of the City: Why Our Future Will be Won or Lost Together" by Ian Goldin and Tom Lee-Devlin (Bloomsbury) may be the perfect gift. It takes a deep dive into how cities have shaped the world in the past, and how they may be the answer to a lot of the problems that citizens in the future will face. Wrap it up with "Bold Ventures: Thirteen Tales of Architectural Tragedy" by Charlotte Van den Broeck (Other Press), a book about builders and buildings they didn't live to regret.

If you've got a pop culture fan on your list, or a Millennial, wrap up "Wannabe: Reckonings with the Pop Culture That Shapes Me" by Aisha Harris (Harper One). Harris, of NPR's Pop Culture Happy Hour, takes a look at growing up in the 1990s and all the fun, irritating things that came with it. Pair it with "The Perennials: The Megatrends Creating a Postgenerational Society" by Mauro F. Guillen (St. Martin's Press). Imagine a world with no more Boomers, GenXers, or Millennials. It's a world where we're not categorized, and your giftee may love reading about that.

The person on your gift list who loves love will be thrilled to unwrap "Love Stories" by Trent Dalton (Fourth Estate), a collection of quick, super-short man-on-the-street stories of finding, having, and losing love. Swoon. Pair it with "Your Difference is Your Strength" by Kris Ferraro (St. Martin's Essentials), a book about knowing, loving, and accepting yourself. Or try "The Joy Strategist" by Grace Harry (Andscape Books) and wrap it up for someone you love who also loves books.

For the person on your gift list who wants to but more communication in their relationship, wrap up "The Power of Language" by Viorica Marian (Dutton). This intriguing book looks at the way we speak and how we can tap into unique abilities of our minds. Wrap it up with "Mother Tongue" by Jenni Nuttall (Viking), a book of language, vocabulary, and the meanings of words that women have created, hated, and embraced.

Your giftee who devours books on social issues will want to unwrap "No Human Contact" by Pete Earley (Citadel Press). Ripped from today's headlines, this book takes a look at solitary confinement in prison, and what a pair of inmates did to change how prisons work. Wrap it up with "The Serial Killer Next Door: The Double Lives of Notorious Murders" by Richard Estep (Visible Ink Press), for a full look at some of the people inside those prisons.

If there's a sneaker lover or a collector on your gift list, don't give another pair of shoes or fancy laces as a gift. Instead, wrap up "A History of Basketball in Fifteen Sneakers" by Russ Bengtson (Workman). Full of pictures, history, sidebars, and more, this book will make a buckets fan smile,

PLEASE SEE **BOOK** | D5



COURTESY PHOTO

Personnel tasked with organizing the sharing of gifts across departments or the company can employ the following tips to make things run smoothly.

Tips for organizing a workplace gift exchange

The average person will spend around eight hours at work each day, and do so roughly five days a week. Over time, relationships with coworkers may grow, and many people become friendly with their colleagues. In such settings, it can be customary to celebrate holidays with coworkers at company-sanctioned events. Personnel tasked with organizing the sharing of gifts across departments or the company can employ the following tips to make things run smoothly.

DEFER TO COMPANY RULES

Companies may have guidelines in place that govern gifting. Check employee handbooks or company policies, which may dictate spending limits or even prohibit gift-giving. Keep it holiday nonspecific. Companies feature staff from various cultures, ethnicities and religious backgrounds. Therefore, resist any urge to affiliate the gift exchange with a specific holiday. Keep terms generalized, avoiding the use of "Secret Santa" or references to Christmas or Chanukah. Specify that

gift wrap be generic as well.

RECOGNIZE THAT GIFT-GIVING FLOWS DOWNWARD

The general rule of the workplace is that people at the same employment level can give gifts among themselves, but employees should not feel pressured to give gifts to their supervisors or bosses. Should one choose to do so, it could be misinterpreted and may cause rumbblings across the company. If supervisors and managers want to gift their subordinates, then that is fine so long as everyone is treated fairly.

Decide on a spending limit. Set a firm spending limit. A range of \$15 to \$20 may be affordable to most, and ensures a nice gift. However, if yours is a laid back environment and everyone is lighthearted, you can have gag gifts or set a silly amount for laughs, such as purchasing gifts only at the local dollar store.

DO NOT PRESSURE PARTICIPATION

Engaging in a company-wide gift exchange should be completely vol-

untary. Only those who choose to participate will exchange with others. The easiest way to do this is to collect the gifts, then hand out grab bag numbers, enabling all participants to grab a random gift from the bag or table. Also, gifts should not be highly personal or anything that may be viewed as offensive.

KEEP SOME SPARE GIFTS ON HAND

It's happened before when someone has become ill or simply forgotten to bring a gift to the exchange. Human resource managers or department heads may want to use an expense account to have a spare gift or two on hand so that no participant walks away empty-handed.

Exchange at the party

If an office party is part of the plan, the gift exchange can take place there at a certain point in the festivities where it will be convenient for all involved.

Office gift exchanges are common during the holiday season. A few guidelines can keep such exchanges festive and fun.

How to celebrate the holidays away from home

A popular Christmas song attests "there's no place like home for the holidays." For many people, a truer statement couldn't be uttered. But sometimes life gets in the way of an old-fashioned holiday spent at home.

There are a number of reasons why individuals may not be able to spend the holidays at home. Active military service people may not be able to leave their posts to travel home. Some students studying abroad or even far away domestically may find getting back to their homes can be time- and cost-prohibitive. Some people may not be home for the holidays because work obligations keep them out of town, or because they have planned vacations to serve as nontraditional holiday celebrations.

Being away from some familiar sights and sounds of the holidays doesn't mean celebrations should be any less special. Here are tips for celebrating away from home.

FIND PEOPLE IN SIMILAR SITUATIONS

Chances are you will not be the only person away from home, particularly if you are a student or someone on a business venture. Connect with others who are away from their families and do something together for the holidays.

PARTAKE OF LOCAL TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES

You may be used to baking sugar cookies for the holidays, but in a foreign country, the locals may make another type of dessert. Figure out how the locals celebrate the holidays and then take part in any way you can.

VOLUNTEER YOUR TIME

If you will be away or alone for the holidays, volunteer your time to help the less fortunate. Deliver meals to



COURTESY PHOTO

There are a number of reasons why individuals may not be able to spend the holidays at home.

those who are not able to leave home, like seniors, or volunteer at a soup kitchen. Visit a children's hospital and deliver small gifts.

ENGAGE IN VIRTUAL FUN

Connect with people at home through the power of digital technology. Video conferencing services connect people who can't be together in person. Utilize these apps and services to remote into a holiday dinner or when loved ones open gifts.

COOK UP YOUR FAVORITES

Evoke traditional holiday celebrations by cooking the foods you would normally enjoy at home. Those tastes and smells can transport you back to grandma's kitchen or dad's living room.

STAY OFF OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Being away from home during the holidays can be challenging, and that challenge can be even greater if you see photo after photo on social media of people you know spending time with their friends and loved ones. Tune out of your social feeds for a few days.

INVITE OTHERS TO YOU

Maybe you don't have the means of getting home, but you can bring those at home to you. Find out if anyone can plan a road trip, train ride or flight to where you are and then enjoy the holidays together.

Being away from home during the holidays may not be ideal. However, there are plenty of ways to maintain your holiday spirit when celebrating in unfamiliar surroundings.

BOOK

FROM PAGE D4

too. Readers who can't get enough of sports, period, will want to read "Banana Ball: The Unbelievably True Story of the Savannah Bananas" by Jesse Cole with Don Yaeger (Dutton), the story of baseball, but not quite.

There's a lover of the paranormal on your gift list, isn't there? Then you want to wrap up "Encounters: Experiences with Nonhuman Intelligences" by D.W. Pasulka (St. Martin's Essentials). Has your giftee seen a UFO or had an angel encounter? Have they been to other dimensions and want to explore more? Yep, this is the right gift - and it'll be even better if you wrap it up with "The Afterlife Book" by Marie D. Jones and Larry Flaxman (Visible Ink Press), a book on Heaven, Hell, this side of life, and that side.

RACISM AND RACIAL ISSUES

What has racism looked like throughout history? Your social-justice-minded giftee will get a peek in "The Stories Whiteness Tells Itself" by David Mura (University of Minnesota Press). Meant for both Black and white readers, this is a conversation-starter. Wrap it up with "The Hidden Roots of White Supremacy and the Path to a Shared American Future" by Robert P. Jones (Simon & Schuster) for a perfectly thought-provoking gift.

No doubt, your giftee knows how life has been like since Black Lives Matter stepped into the news. "In Our Shoes: On Being a Young Black Woman in Not-So 'Post-Racial' America" by Brianna Holt (Plume) is a book that examines the feeling further, in ways that relate to both culture and pop culture. Wrap it up with "Real Friends Talk About Race" by Yseult P. Mukantabana and Hannah Summerhill (Park Row Books), for a gift that takes this sometimes-squirmy subject and makes it possible to discuss.

The activist on your list wants to do best, so look for "We Need to Talk About Antisemitism" by Rabbi Diana

Fersko (Seal Press). We discuss racism against Black people? Why not this, says the author. How else can we fight it? Pair this book with "The Cost of Free Land" by Rebecca Clarren (Viking), a book about a Jewish immigrant success story and what it meant to the Native Americans in their territory.

BIOGRAPHY / MEMOIR

For your music lover, "To Anyone Who Ever Asks: The Life, Music, and Mystery of Connie Converse" by Howard Fishman (Dutton) will be a welcome gift this holiday. It's the story of a singer / songwriter who never quite made the Big Time, although her music haunted the author and spurred him to try to understand why she disappeared one day. Wrap it up with a bookmark; it's a big book. Wrap it up with "Too Late to Stop Now: More Rock 'n' Roll War Stories" by Allan Jones (Bloomsbury). It's a collection of tales about a genre, from someone who was there.

Is there a Sherlockian fan on your list? Then imagine the excitement when "Doyle's World Lost & Found: The Unknown Histories of Sherlock Holmes and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle" by Daniel Friedman, MD and Eugene Griedman, MD (Square One Publishers) is beneath the tree. This book fills in a lot of the cracks between the Holmes mysteries with info from the tales' author's life. Fans of literature will want this book, and so will Holmes readers. Wrap it up with "A Mystery of Mysteries: The Death and Life of Edgar Allan Poe" by Mark Dawidziak (St. Martin's Press), the story of the great author and the how he may have met his end.

For the farmer or rancher on your list, "A Bold Return to Giving a Damn" by Will Harris (Viking) is a book about a farm, but also about the way things were and how they should be, the love of land, and the problems ahead with climate, raising food, and making a living.

Struggling to find the right biography for the history fan? Try "King of Diamonds: Harry

PLEASE SEE **BOOK** | D6

Sport experiences can make great gifts this holiday season



COURTESY PHOTO

Adult sports fans may not need such equipment, but they might be just as excited to receive these unique sports experiences this holiday season.

The thrill of sports has inspired billions of loyal fans and athletes across the globe. Professional, collegiate, scholastic, and even recreational sports entertain people all year long. That popularity is something shoppers can keep in mind as they look for the perfect gift for the family sports fan this holiday season.

Many adults undoubtedly recall receiving sports equipment as a holiday gift when they were children. Whether it's a baseball mitt or a field hockey stick or a new ball, these gifts tend to light up kids' eyes come Christmas morning. Adult sports fans may not need such equipment, but they might be just as excited to receive these unique sports experi-

ences this holiday season.

TICKETS

For diehard sports fans, nothing is better than going to the big game. Perhaps in acknowledgment of the growing popularity of following a favorite team on the road, many professional sports leagues now release team schedules months in advance of the first game of the season. For example, the National Football League released its 2022 schedule in mid-May, despite the fact that the season does not begin until September. Shoppers can peruse schedules and circle a must-see home game or lay the foundation for a memorable trip by giving tickets to a road game.

STADIUM TOUR

Stadium tours are another great experience the family sports fan will undoubtedly appreciate. Many professional sports teams now welcome fans to tour their stadiums both in-season and during the off-season. These tours offer a behind-the-scenes look at stadiums, arenas and ballparks. Teams may even host tours on game days, making this a great stocking stuffer to pair with tickets to a game.

FAN FEST

Fan fest tickets make an ideal gift for individuals who can be accurately described as "diehards" for their

PLEASE SEE **SPORTS** | D6

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Toy buying tips when shopping for kids

Shopping for gifts for kids makes many shoppers nostalgic for their own childhoods. Few adults can forget the joy of finding the perfect gift under the tree on Christmas morning. Recreating that magic for a youngster can be as joyous for gift givers as it is for kids. That's especially so when shoppers make it a point to give safe, age-appropriate gifts.

Whether shopping for their own children or their grandkids, nieces or nephews, shoppers can keep these tips in mind to ensure they give toys that are as safe as they are fun.

SPEAK TO MOM AND DAD FIRST

When buying for a grandchild, niece or nephew, shoppers should first ask Mom or Dad for suggestions. Parents will know which types of toys their children like, and they'll also know the child's level of maturity. Some kids may not be mature enough to play with otherwise age-appropriate toys, while others may be mature beyond their years and enjoy more complex toys than their age would suggest. Parents will know what makes a good toy and what doesn't.

LEARN WHAT TO LOOK FOR ON LABELS

Toy labels are great sources of information, but shoppers must know what to look for. The American Academy of Pediatrics notes that toy labels include information about age-appropriateness (i.e., "Ages 3 & Up") as well as directions regarding how to use the toy. If the instructions seem a bit complex for the child the item will be for, look for something else. Children's toy labels also include additional information that consumers may not be familiar with. For example, toys labeled "ASTM F963" meet the latest safety standards from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission. An "ASTM D4236" label indicates the materials associated with the art toy have been reviewed and deemed safe by a toxicologist. More information about toy label requirements can be found at cpsc.gov. The AAP advises that electric toys should only be given to kids if they include the UL label. That means the toy has been certified by the global safety certification company UL, LLC.

AVOID CERTAIN FEATURES

The AAP notes that toys that are loud, shoot objects into the air or



COURTESY PHOTO

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contain small pieces pose a threat to children. Especially loud toys can damage children's hearing, while projectiles can increase the risk of eye injuries or choking. Toys with small pieces also pose a choking risk to young children who may try to put the pieces into their mouths.

ERR ON THE SIDE OF CAUTION

Consumers who are uncertain about the safety of a given toy, even after reading its label, should err

on the side of caution and only give toys they're confident won't pose a safety risk. Even toys that may seem safe could be dangerous to kids who might otherwise seem old enough. For example, the AAP advises against giving kids under 12 hobby kits and chemistry sets. That's because such kits may contain dangerous chemicals that even pre-adolescents are not old enough to handle safely.

Shoppers must consider a host of factors when looking for safe toys for kids this holiday season.

team and typically include activities for adults and children alike.

LESSONS

Holiday shoppers may have a sports fan on their list who still enjoys lacing up their cleats. For example, pro golf fans may still enjoy hitting the links themselves. In such

instances, lessons from a nearby golf pro can be just the thing to make sports fans smile this holiday season.

Sports experiences make an ideal gift for individuals whose passion for a favorite team is a big part of their life.

BOOK

FROM PAGE D5

Winston" by Ronald Winston & William Stadiem (Skyhorse Publishing, Inc). It's the Gilded Age story of a rags-to-riches man whose name meant "diamonds" to generations of fine jewelry-wearers, and the times in which he lived.

HISTORY

If your giftee loves reading about Black History, then you can't go wrong when you wrap up "The First Migrants: How Black Homesteaders' Quest for Land and Freedom Heralded America's Great Migration" by Richard Edwards and Jacob K. Friefeld (Bison Books). It's the story of the people who headed to the plains decades before the Great Migration, and how their mve changed the country.

For the person who devours history, look for "African American Almanac: 400 Years of Black Excellence" by Lean'tin Bracks, PhD (Visible Ink Press). This second edition is full of history, mini-biographies, things your giftee might not know, and best of all: it's completely updated. Also look for "Before the Movement: The Hidden History of Black Civil Rights" by Dylan C. Penningroth (Liveright). More history. More stories.

The person on your list who enjoys real-life mysteries and history will want "Unearthed: A Lost Actress, A Forbidden Book, and a Search for Life in the Shadow of the Holocaust" by Meryl Frank (Hachette Books). For much of her childhood, Frank's aunt Mollie strove to ensure that the kids in the family never forgot what had happened during World War II to the Jews. When Frank inherited a book filled with secrets, she went in search of a missing link to that story. Wrap it up with "The Ghost Tattoo: Discovering the Hidden Truth of My Father's Holocaust" by Tony Bernard (Citadel Press), the story of a son who learns the secrets of a concentration camp that his father finally told.

BUSINESS

Here's an unusual business book for the unusual business reader: "Blood Money" by Kathleen McLaughlin (One Signal / Atria). Donating blood saves lives. Donating blood plasma is a big business, and it's banned in all but five countries in the world. This book will make a great gift for a business reader or for your favorite health care professional.

For the future mom or the mother-to-be who's still trying to figure out her work situation, "Carry Strong: An Empowered Approach to Navigating Pregnancy and Work" by Stephanie Kramer (Penguin Life) may be the best gift ever. Bonus: case studies and real stories so the new

mother can read about real life.

The future business leader on your gift list will want to own "Power to the Middle: Why Managers Hold the Keys to the Future of Work" by Bill Schaninger, Bryan Hancock, and Emily Field (Harvard Business Review Press). Middle managers, as the authors argue, is no longer a throwaway position that takes pressure from above and below. Today's middle manager is as important as everyone else in an organization, if not more so. Give this book and see what kind of a difference it makes. Wrap it up with "The Unlocked Leader" by Hortense Le Gentil with Caroline Lambert (Wiley), a book on being the kind of leader that people ask to work with.

If there's someone on your gift list who's heading for a leadership role, wrap up "To the Top: How Women in Corporate Leadership are Rewriting the Rules for Success" by Jenna C. Fisher (Wiley). Gone are so-called old-boys' networks. Today's corporations run differently. Support it by giving this book.

LGBTQ INTERESTS/FICTION

For the person on your gift list who'd love a boy-meets-boy story, wrap up "Bellies: A Novel" by Nicola Dinan (Hanover Square Press), the tale of a playwright and the man who loves him wholly, until a transition threatens to change everything.

If there's a romantic on your list, then you're in luck: finding a gift is easy when you wrap up "10 Things That Never Happened" by Alexis Hall (Sourcebooks), the story of Sam, whose job is okay, and his boss, Jonathan, who should have never hired Sam. Too late now, except for the romance.

LGBTQ INTERESTS/ NON-FICTION

For the person on your list who likes to read quick, short articles, wrap up "Inverse Cowgirl: A Memoir" by Alicia Roth Weigel (HarperOne). It's a collection of essays on life as an intersex person, and the necessity for advocating for others who are, too.

HEALTH-RELATED BOOKS

For the giftee who loves reading true medical mysteries, "Girls and Their Monsters" by Audrey Clare Farley (Grand Central) will make a great gift. When researchers studying schizophrenia heard of quadruplet sisters who'd been recently diagnosed, they hoped that the women could unlock secrets. Instead, they found secrets that resonate even today. Wrap it up with "Scarcity Brain: Fix Your Craving Mindset & Rewire Your Habits to Thrive with Enough" by Michael Easter (Rodale Books), for a better

PLEASE SEE BOOK | D7

SPORTS

FROM PAGE D5

favorite teams. These family-friendly gatherings tend to happen in the weeks leading up to the start of a new season. A handful of current and former players typically attend fan fests, which are hosted by the

Word search grid with letters and some words highlighted in grey.

Festive films that make for a perfect family movie night this season



COURTESY PHOTO

When hosting overnight guests this holiday season, hosts can plan a family movie night and line up any of these family-friendly holiday movies.

A family movie night makes for a great way for families to bond and enjoy some relaxing time together. Such nights are a tradition in households across the globe, and they can even become a fun way for extended families to celebrate the holiday days together. When hosting overnight guests this holiday season, hosts can plan a family movie night and line up any of these family-friendly holiday movies.

A CHRISTMAS STORY (1983)

This beloved classic based on the writings of author Jean Shepherd focuses on young Ralphie Parker and his humorous family. That family includes his father, played to much laughs by legendary actor Darren McGavin. All Ralphie wants for Christmas is a coveted Red Ryder air rifle, and generations of fans have enjoyed watching this film to see if Ralphie's dream comes true.

HOME ALONE (1990)

Not unlike "A Christmas Story," this instant classic devotes much of its

story to a young boy. Eight-year-old Kevin McAllister (Macaulay Culkin) awakens to an empty house after his parents forgetfully leave him behind as they depart on a holiday trip to Paris with their extended family. That proves to be bad news for bungling burglars Harry (Joe Pesci) and Marv (Daniel Stern), who are outwitted by Kevin at every turn.

ELF (2003)

Middle-aged Buddy (Will Ferrell) grew up in the North Pole believing he is an elf, despite being significantly larger than the kind-hearted elves who raised him. Upon learning he is not an actual elf, Buddy is determined to reunite with the father (James Caan) he's never known. Hilarity ensues as the innocent Buddy ends up in the big city in search of his father.

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE (1946)

Among the most beloved holiday movies ever made, this classic stars Jimmy Stewart as George Bailey, a devoted family man who set aside

his own big-city dreams to save the family business and, ultimately, his small hometown of Bedford Falls. Lamenting some bad luck that leaves him on the cusp of financial ruin, George wishes he'd never been born, only to be shown by an especially kind and patient angel-in-training (Henry Travers) how much worse off Bedford Falls and its residents might have been had George Bailey never existed.

JINGLE ALL THE WAY (1996)

Featuring a future Governor of California in the lead role, this hijinks-filled holiday classic follows the efforts of Howard Langston (Arnold Schwarzenegger) as he tries to secure the must-have gift of the season for his son, Jamie (Jake Lloyd). Howard soon finds himself competing against a father (Sinbad) who's equally devoted to find the coveted Turbo-Man action figure.

A holiday movie night makes for a fun, family-friendly evening when hosting overnight guests during this special time of year.

BOOK

FROM PAGE D6

look at how our minds work and how we can enhance them.

For the person who remembers the pandemic all too well and wants to know what the heck just happened there, wrap up "Foreign Bodies: Pandemics, Vaccines, and the Health of Nations" by Simon Schama (Ecco). More than a health book, this is also a history of how pandemics have been perceived and investigated through the centuries, what people in the past did about them, and what we can anticipate in the future.

Your giftee professes to want to live forever, so wrap up "The Well-Lived Life: A 102-Year-Old Doctor's Six Secrets to Health and Happiness at Every Age" by Gladys McGarey, MD (Atria). McGarey is considered to be "The Mother of Holistic Medicine" and this book explains how she's stayed healthy and active for more than a century. Readers will love the advice here, but they'll also love the biography inside.

SCIENCE

If there's a person on your list who loves animals, then "Beastly: The 40,000-Year Story of Animals and Us" by Keggie Carew (Abrams Press) may be just what they'll love. It's a long, deep look at creatures, including us, and it includes tales and true anecdotes your giftee will enjoy.

The environmentalist and the gardener on your list will both love "How to Read a Tree: Clues and Patterns from Bark to Leaves" by Tristan Gooley (The Experiment). It's the story of trees, of course, but it's also a volume of information and all the things we can learn by looking at or living near a tree. Give it to your homeowner, too, for a great holiday.

KIDS AGES 1-6

The littlest kid on your gift list will love reading "Mister Kitty is Lost!" by Greg Pizzoli (Little, Brown for Young Readers). A little girl's kitty has gone missing. Young readers will be delighted with the hunt

and surprised at the solution.

KIDS AGES 9-12

The kid who loves a bit of history with a great adventure story will want to read "White House Clubhouse" by Sean O'Brien (Norton Young Readers). It's the story of two kids whose Mom is the new President of the United States. That's cool and all, but it's even cooler when they find a secret tunnel inside the White House...

Your giftee who loves the Baby-Sitter's Club books will truly want to unwrap "Curlfriends: New In Town" by Sharee Miller (Little, Brown Young Readers). It's the story of Charlie, who's starting at another new school and struggles again with making friends. Can the Curlfriends, a group of Black girls who hang out together, make her year better? Middle-schoolers who wrestle with the preteen years will love this graphic novel.

TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS

For the romantic on your gift list, try "Chaos Theory" by Nic Stone (Crown). It's the story of two teens who are outcasts in their new school. They gravitate toward one another as friends with something in common. Could it be more than just that, though?

For the teen who needs to read the story of bravery and history, wrap up "The Girl Who Survived Auschwitz" by Sara Leibovits & Eti Elboim (Harper Collins / One More Chapter). It's the tale of Leibovits' family's journey to a concentration camp, and it's not for the faint of heart or the weak of mind.

And now for the housekeeping: books change, publishing dates change, and if you can't find these books or something like them, be sure to ask the elves at the bookstore for the exact thing you need. They know books and they'll help you find the best gift for that hard-to-find person and they might even wrap it for you.

Hint: you're almost done with your shopping. Buy yourself a book.

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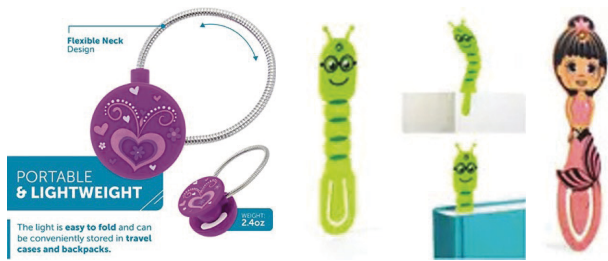


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