

# Give your children toys that help them learn while they have lots of fun

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Special Writer

Whether purchasing gifts for their own child or for someone else's, many adults want to buy educational gifts.

David Gans, Lecanne LaMarre and Joan Peterson Littman have suggestions for these gifts.

Gans of Bloomfield Hills is the owner and president of Baby Depot in Canton. He considers his store a one-stop supermarket with 8,000 items for newborns to three-year-old children. He and his staff know how to help shoppers when they want suggestions for educational gifts.

"Very young children are learning something new at every different age, whether the child is one day old, one month or one year," said Gans. "We have toys that are educational for every age."

His store, for example, stocks a large selection of red toys and black and white toys. "Studies show the first color an infant sees is black and white. Red is the next color they see. We have many items in those colors choices for very young children," he explained. Shoppers can find a different type of gift at Kid Kingdom, also in Canton. Owned by Pat and Cindy Harrington of Okemos, Kid Kingdom is a giant indoor play park for children of all ages.

"We offer an alcohol free, smoke free, safe environment where adults and children can spend time together," said associate LaMarre.

Although playing may not sound educational, playing at Kid Kingdom provides youngsters a chance to explore their environment and have fun while they are challenged to think, interact and achieve something.

Kid Kingdom features an air bounce system, human gerbil tunnels, roller runs, giant ball pits, swinging bridges, twisting slides and games of skill. It has a separate toddler area, rooms for private birthday parties and a dining area.

"We condone all good things for children. Bringing youngsters to Kid Kingdom is a positive experience for children and adults. They get to interact while the children feel safe and are safe to learn and have fun at the same time," LaMarre added.

Littman advocates gifts that are engaging, open ended and that encourage independent activity. She is a Chapter One Parenting Consultant in the Pontiac school system.

"I recommend several gifts that are educational and meet the other requirements as well," said Littman of Auburn Hills.

One of her favorites is subscriptions

to children's magazines. "Everyone likes to get mail," she said. "Magazines can teach so much, yet give so much enjoyment."

Something as simple as bookshelves and flashlights are educational gifts. Littman explained how important it is for children to have a special place for their books, even if it is just a colorful milk crate.

"Flashlights, or a small reading lamp, allow children to get cozy in bed with their animals and their books. These are great gifts to encourage reading," she added.

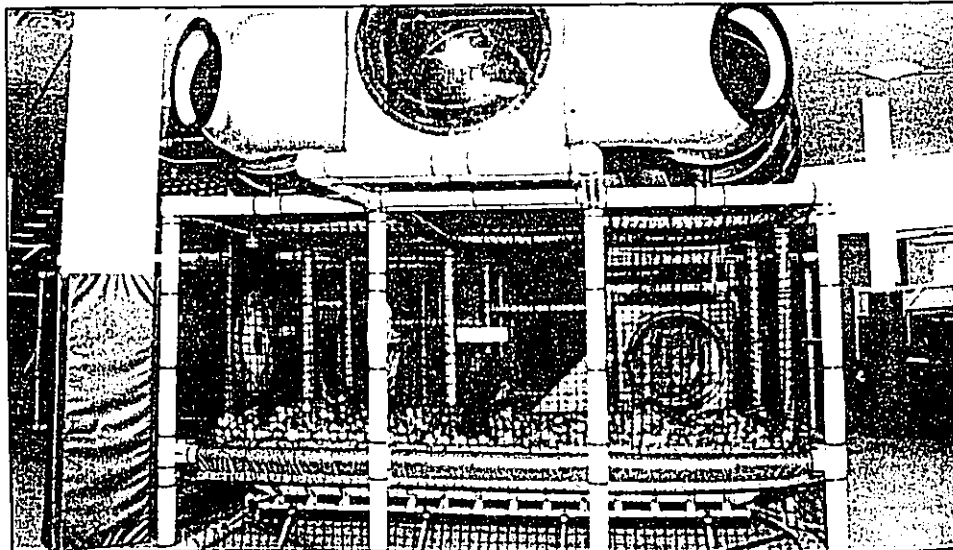
Here are some other gifts she recommends: age appropriate dictionaries; post cards or small size sheets of stationery; toys that allow creativity such as Legos and building materials; Wee Sing tapes that aid vocabulary development; sidewalk chalk, a cloth retractable tape measurer and a solar calculator.

"Even a deck of cards makes a good educational gift. Card games develop memory and teach math facts as well as cooperation," Littman said.

Littman practices with her daughters Sarah and Anne what she teaches. When they were younger, she shopped garage sales for dress up and make-believe clothes.



Patrick Campbell and David Hines love to visit Kid Kingdom in Canton, where the only limit to the fun is imagination.



At Kid's Kingdom, children get to interact and are safe to learn and have fun at the same time. Above, a giant jungle gym of fun.

"I saved them until I had a box full. Then I gave them to the girls as a gift. The nice thing about dress up clothes is they cross age barriers. Younger and older children play with them together." Another practical hint for people

buying gifts for children — "Sometimes it's worth investing in two of an item if it's practical to do. Adults shouldn't expect very young children to share," she said. "They have to be done playing with something before they can share it. I

even keep an extra bicycle on hand so my children and a friend can ride bikes together."