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"Gifts Kids on a Small Budget Can Give"  
Gift Ideas for Kids that Won't Break Their Bank  
by Kimberly Blaker

As holidays and birthdays roll around are your kids scrounging to purchase gifts they can barely afford? There are many ways for children to give without it costing them a cent—or very little at most.

Share these ideas with your kids to give to siblings, parents, grandparents, teachers, friends, and others on their list.

**Tell a story with photos.** Create a page to add to a friend's or relative's scrapbook. Buy a package of blank scrapbook pages and choose a theme, such as 'my best friend,' 'sport car shows,' or 'when I was little.' Design each page using stickers, markers, colored pencils, construction paper, photos, magazine pictures, and cute sayings or descriptions according to your theme.

**Give coupons for services.** Offer a free evening of babysitting, a week of taking out the trash, lawn mowing, ironing, making your sister's bed, pet sitting, or other task that you can manage.

**Shape decorative soaps.** Grate bars of inexpensive white soap then mix with approximately  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of warm water per cup of shredded soap. To create colored soaps, add food coloring to the water. Knead the mixture and add additional warm water as necessary until it forms like dough. Next, fill cookie cutters with the mixture, or flatten it on a sheet of waxed paper, and trim into shapes. Let the soap dry slightly, then press with small leaves or other designs. Finally, allow the decorative soaps to dry for 24 hours, flipping them occasionally.

**Design your own pens and pencils.** Purchase sheets of large white labels and cut them into 1- $\frac{1}{2}$  inch strips. Design the strips with colored markers. Then wrap the design around the length of the pens or pencils. Personalize them by adding a smaller label to the center of the pencil with “World’s Greatest Grandma” or other catchy phrase. To protect your pencil design, wrap it with a strip of self-adhesive laminating sheet.

**Make a placemat.** Choose a subject that the person on your gift list likes or collects, such as model cars or Barbie dolls. Clip pictures from magazines and catalogues and glue them to an 11” x 17” sheet of paper. Overlap the pictures to create a collage or spread them apart and label or give details about each. When you’re done, laminate the design with self-adhesive laminating sheets or have it done at an office supply.

**Create bookmarks.** Cut colored paper into 2” x 7” strips then design them with colored pencils and markers, or clippings of borders from magazines. Determine who the recipient’s favorite author, artist or historical figure is and look that person up in a book of quotations. Choose a quote, type or write it out, and add it to the bookmark. Then laminate it for protection.

**Give magnetic photos.** Cut a piece of cardboard from a cereal box and glue it to the back of your photo for support. Then stick your photo to a magnet.

**Fashion a holiday pin.** Purchase a package of large safety pins and small various colored beads. Thread several safety pins onto the point of another through the eye at the bottom of the pins. Close the pin then thread colored beads onto the dangling safety pins to create a pattern or design such as a United States flag, Christmas tree, heart, or other design.

**Construct a puzzle photo frame.** Cut a piece of firm cardboard to your desired frame size. Then ask your parents to trim out the center with a razor knife, leaving a 1” to 2” wide frame. Next, cut a thin piece of cardboard the size of the outside edge of your frame. Place a sheet of colored paper between the two pieces of cardboard and glue the paper and two pieces of cardboard together. Glue jigsaw puzzle pieces around the frame, overlapping each other to cover the entire edge. When the frame is dry, brush a layer of glue over the puzzle pieces to prevent them from falling off. Stick your photo in the opening of the frame with double sided tape.

**Give a poster.** Find out your friend’s favorite rock star, actress, or sport. Then tear three or four full-page photographs or pictures from magazines. Trim the tattered edge and then laminate.

**Compose a memory book.** Buy a composition book from the office supply, cover it with construction paper, and design the cover. Inside write your memories of special times with the person to whom you’ll present it. Memories could include a trip to the zoo, a favorite holiday celebration, a special gift, something funny, and many other experiences together.

**Produce glittery pens.** Buy a package of pens and different colors of glitter. Pour glue onto a sheet of waxed paper. Roll one side of the pen lightly in the glue up to one inch from the tip. Coat the pen with glitter and then let it dry. When the glue dries, repeat the steps and cover the other side.

Kimberly Blaker is a Michigan author, freelance writer, and mother of two. Her syndicated articles have appeared in more than 100 parenting and women's magazines around the country.

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