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Sesame Family Newsletter

November 26, 2008

Holiday Gifts for Tough Times

by Jordan D. Brown

Homemade, heartfelt gifts are one remedy to financial stress.

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Send a Sesame Street e-card and make a donation to celebrate learning!

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Win a Free Elmo Live!(TM) for a friend

We're celebrating the season by giving Fisher Price's Elmo Live!(TM) toys to some lucky winners.

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American Greetings: A Proud Sponsor of Sesame Street

American Greetings is proud to offer products featuring Elmo, Big Bird, Abby Cadabby, and the rest of the beloved Sesame Street Muppets. The iconic characters are featured on greeting cards, stationery, gift wrap, and party goods.

KIDS' WISHES VS. ECONOMIC REALITY

During a recent visit to a toy store with my children, Olivia (age 4) and Finian (age 7), I had to keep reminding them the reason we were there -- to buy a birthday gift for one of their friends. But my kids clearly had other things in mind.

"What do you think Santa will bring me this year?" Olivia asked, mesmerized by all the toys around her.

"I don't know," I replied. "What do you think?"

"Maybe a new princess dress... like THAT one!" she answered, pointing to a pink, poofy, glittery gown. I glanced at the price tag and gulped. How could some cheap fabric and sequins be so expensive?

"When I write my letter to Santa," Finian chimed in, "I'm going to ask for a remote-controlled rocket. And maybe some new Star Wars ships... really big ones." Spotting a nearby shelf, he added. "Or maybe an awesome sled like that one!"

I'm not all that wild about shopping to begin with, but in these difficult economic times, I like it even less. The holiday season is fast approaching, and like many parents, my wife Ellen and I are feeling stressed and overwhelmed. A number of our friends and relatives have lost their jobs, and others are very worried this might happen soon. As you know, many people's retirement investments are now in peril. Add to this the pressure of having to buy holiday gifts, and it is easy to see why so many of us feel panicked.

What can be done? With a little creativity and flexibility, it is possible to make gift giving less stressful and more meaningful.

As you probably know, "Black Friday" is a few days away. Traditionally, millions of people take off work to shop. The stores, eager to make a fast profit, offer special discounts and promotions. There are massive traffic jams at malls, and mobs of crazed parents fight over the latest "must have" toys. Not exactly a picture of the positive, cooperative spirit we'd like to associate with the holidays and model for our children.

I recently read about a group of people who said, "enough is enough" and proposed a radical idea: Turning "Black Friday" into "Buy Nothing Day." Rather than get caught up in the mad-buying frenzy, people could devote this day to being grateful for all they have already, making homemade gifts for loved ones, and thinking of ways to help the less fortunate.



[CLASSIC VIDEO: TRUE BLUE MIRACLE](#)

A song about what happens at Christmas.

WHAT DOES "FINANCIAL CRISIS" MEAN, AGAIN?

Last week, Olivia attended a friend's birthday party. The party favor was a kid's wallet featuring a popular movie character. Later at home, Olivia filled the wallet with a thick wad of homemade cash, which she cut from green construction paper. She then asked Finian and me to help her "make it into real money" by "putting words" on the bills. Olivia suggested we play supermarket, using her play shopping cart, and some food items pulled from our kitchen cabinets. Finian took on the role of the cashier, and Olivia was the shopper. Finian dutifully "beeped" each item across the scanner then said, "Sorry, Olivia, you don't have enough money. You'll have to put some of the things back." Olivia smiled and replied, "Don't worry! We can just make more money!" and headed over to the construction paper. If only it were that easy.



[TALKING CENTS](#)

Activities and strategies for helping children learn about financial basics.

Helping children understand the value of money can be challenging. That's why I appreciated reading Sesame Workshop's "Talking Cents," an initiative which includes a series of online materials (see link at right). Click the links in the upper right corner to get tips and activities for helping your children understand basics of financial matters.

THE VALUE OF SIMPLE, HOMEMADE GIFTS

Like many families, we know it is not realistic to eliminate all store-



bought toys from our holiday gift giving. However, I also recognize that there is no need for every single present to come from a store. Here are special homemade gift ideas, several of which we plan to make for our children this year. Some take a little time -- a precious commodity that most of us don't have. But if you start early (maybe this weekend?) you can prepare and wrap them long before your kids will joyfully open them. You can also make these gifts with your children.

HERE IS YOUR LIFE

The story of a storybook.

- **An Extra-Special Storybook Starring... YOU!** -- What egocentric preschooler would not love to hop on your lap and have you read a special storybook featuring him or her? With a few supplies from a crafts store, and a healthy sense of humor, you can create a homemade book that your children will treasure. Over the years, Ellen and I have created several such books for birthdays and other holidays. Our homemade books include the classic "Super Olivia to the Rescue" and "Finian's Wild and Wacky Space Adventure." Our kids love to look at photos of themselves, so we usually include cutout photos of their heads glued onto simple, hand-drawn bodies. For backgrounds, we draw simple doodles, clip pictures from magazines, or print out images from the Internet.
TIP: Before we put a book together, we sometimes organize a little "photo session" during which the kids make a variety of facial expressions, including happy, sad, surprised, angry, and so on. Some extreme close-ups make for some extra humor. Then we look at the photos and come up with a simple storyline. Kids love when a phrase repeats. In Olivia's superhero book, for example, we included the phrase, "But then someone else was in trouble!"
- **Homemade Dress-Up Box** -- For Olivia, we have created a homemade dress up box using a large cardboard box. First, we painted the outside of the box with lots of bright colors and decorated it with bows and glitter. Then we wrote Olivia's name in BIG letters. When the paint dried, we glued on dozens of pictures of people and animals she likes pretending to be -- pirate, princess, police officer, lion, and so on. We filled the box with a bunch of fun hand-me-down clothes suitable for pretend play. If you work together with a few other parents, you might be able to pool your hand-me-downs and find some costume-worthy clothes. Hats are always a hit, as are props like pretend jewelry.
- **Let it Grow, Let it Grow** -- Watching flowers and plants grow from bulbs or seeds is a magical experience from a kid's point of view. Even during the winter, we've helped our children make a simple window garden. Include a few different kinds of seeds, a zip-bag of topsoil, and a plastic watering can. It is also fun to provide a photo (from the Internet or magazine) of what the full-grown plant will look like hopefully. You might include a special notebook and crayons for the child to draw pictures of their plant's progress. You could label the pages Day 1, Day 2, Day 3, and so on.

Parents who come up with creative ideas for homemade gifts love to share their discoveries. If you're stuck, go online and search for phrases such as "homemade gift ideas" or "homemade gifts for kids" and you'll discover many exciting and fun possibilities.

Good luck!

Jordan D. Brown
Sesame Workshop


WEEKLY TRIVIA

Secret Fact: Super Grover's secret identity is Grover Kent, ace doorknob salesman for Acme Inc.

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP



Sesame Workshop is a nonprofit educational organization making a meaningful difference in children's lives around the world. Founded in 1968, the Workshop changed television forever with the legendary *Sesame Street*. Today, the Workshop continues to innovate on behalf of children in 120 countries, using its proprietary

 research methodology to ensure its programs and products are engaging and enriching. Sesame Workshop is behind award-winning programs like *Dragon Tales* and *Sagwa, The Chinese Siamese Cat, Pinky Dinky Doo* and ground breaking multimedia productions in South Africa, Egypt and Russia. As a nonprofit, Sesame Workshop puts the proceeds it receives from sales of *Sesame Street*, *Dragon Tales* and *Sagwa* products right back into its educational projects for children around the world. Find the Workshop online at www.sesameworkshop.org.

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 **Sesame Workshop | 1 Lincoln Plaza, New York, NY 10023 | 212-875-6119**

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