

Green Gifts



Now that the holiday gift-giving season is almost upon us, we at the Green Team wanted to offer up some ideas for sustainable class gifts for teachers this season. Giving gifts feels fabulous, but the trick is to bring balance. According to <http://www.storyofstuff.org/>, most of everything we buy ends up in a landfill within 6 months. Skip the stuff that isn't necessary and remember there are many easier ways to go easier on the planet, without skimping on the wow factor.

But first, a note on teacher gifts: Last year Superintendent Lupini sent out a clarification of the gift-giving policy as it pertains to teachers, who are barred from receiving individual gifts from their pupils (Bah humbug! But we understand). As he explains, "gifts made for public rather than private use do not violate the ethics laws...a donation made to a non-profit organization such as the local education foundation in the name of an employee, or a fruit basket that is accepted on behalf of a public employee's agency and shared with all agency employees and/or the public, if applicable, would not violate the ethics laws."

--nor do gifts that benefit the whole classroom (and since teachers often reach into their own pockets to purchase their classroom supplies, this really can be a great gift to them).

So this year, when you as room parents are considering what to give as a class gift to teachers, why not consider also using it as an opportunity to promote sustainability in the classroom?

In addition to ideas like making a donation to the Brookline Education Foundation in your teacher's name <http://brooklinefoundation.org/about/donate>

here are a number of ideas for classroom gifts with a green emphasis:

Green Gifts or the Classroom:

1. Nontoxic, eco-friendly Auspen marker set (AusPen Kit is the equivalent of over 246 disposable dry erase (white-board) markers!) <http://www.auspen.us/pages/about-us>

2. Full set of Greenware or non-breakable, reusable plates for class breakfast events <http://www.target.com/s/melamine+plates#?ref=tgt_adv_XS000000&AFID=google&CPNG=dining&adgroup=dinnerware&LNM=Melamine%20plates&MT=broad&LID=16p1009375&KID=1e85691-b7bc-ec88-2358-00004e96cec8>

3. A set of silverware (mainly spoons) from a secondhand

store in a mug to be used at lunch by kids who forget their utensils (and commitment of a parent to take the cutlery home once a week to run it through the dishwasher).

4. A pitcher to serve water or juice for class events or breakfasts.

5. Gift certificate to a local bookstore like Brookline Booksmith (which has a great used section!) or The Children's Bookshop. Also, Eureka! puzzles and games in Coolidge Corner.

6. Recycled classroom supplies, such as those found at:
<http://www.thegreenoffice.com>
<http://www.guidedproducts.com/shop>
<http://www.treesmart.com>

Specific items to source include reclaimed denim pencils, recycled newspaper pencils, Prang soybean (non-petroleum) crayons, eco-friendly colored pencils, staple-free staplers, folder and binder alternatives.

A gift card to an art supply store would also surely be appreciated.

7. A basket of non-toxic, eco-friendly cleaners (Ecover and Seventh Generation are easily available brands).

8. Plants

Indoor plants like bamboo and hanging greens in a beautiful planter can bring energy to any classroom.

9. A donation to a charity relating back to the class curriculum or a teacher's interest in honor of the classroom teacher. i.e. Heifer International, World Wildlife Fund.



If you are considering other options for classroom gifts, consider these guidelines:

*Buy local: By giving a gift that hasn't been transported (or even manufactured), you help avoid the use of limited natural resources.

*Avoid gifts that come in excessive packaging. Go for recycled content where applicable.

*Choose from eco-conscious brands. All the traditional gifts we've been giving for years now have a greener side.

*Pick something classic that will hold its value and last the longest. i.e. Legos are plastic, but nobody ever throws these away!

*Give an experience as a gift for the classroom. Working with the teacher, you could select an artist to come into the classroom to demonstrate a sketching lesson or other skill related to the curriculum or classroom interest.

*A homemade gift (i.e. crafts, artwork) from the class would be very meaningful and remembered most fondly.

*Try some creative wrapping paper or skip it all together. Consider a hand-made card from the class instead of purchasing a card. Reuse wrapping paper, bows, boxes, and ribbons.



Have any other good ideas for sustainable gifts? Send them on! By making small changes and lighter choices it all helps the planet.

Happy Holidays!

-the Lawrence Green Team

p.s. Although teachers are not allowed to accept individual gifts from students, it's normal that families would like to express their thanks in some way--and luckily, most of the best ways are inherently sustainable. Remind parents that a heartfelt letter of appreciation, a gift of service (like chaperoning a field trip or taking pencils home to sharpen), or even a small, homemade treat that can be shared are always great ways to express gratitude.

p.p.s. For suggestions on giving amazing eco-friendly gifts to your friends and family (aside from Lawrence teachers), see this link:

<http://blog.practicallygreen.com/2011/05/eco-friendly-gifts-bring-meaning-joy-to-giver-and-recipient-amazing-guide-from-inlus-founder/>

There are many original and beautiful gift ideas from one of our favorite websites- check it out!