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The three best gifts we ever gave our kids

by LISA A. BEACH

If you asked my two teens to name the best gifts they ever received, they would undoubtedly mention their videogame console, cell phones and other technology-related presents.

But as a parent, I know better. Technology will be replaced every few years, upgraded to smaller, better, faster versions. But *some* gifts? They last a lifetime.

When I think of the best gifts my husband and I have ever given our boys, these three “intangible gifts” top the list:

Gift #1: The value of education

For various reasons, we chose to homeschool our boys for almost ten years. We found when the public school wasn't meeting their needs, we could provide a better education for our two boys. Both gifted and with special needs (autism spectrum for the oldest, ADHD for the youngest), our boys thrived with a flexible schedule and a custom-tailored curriculum.

By homeschooling them, we exposed them to a learning lifestyle, where education takes place anywhere at any age. We filled their childhood with field trips, hands-on experiences, co-op classes, books, art, music, service opportunities, documentaries, games, experiments, projects, recipes, real-life learning activities, plays and concerts. *Everything* was a teachable moment.

Gift #2: The love of reading

My dad nicknamed me “Booka” because, as a child, I absolutely *loved* to read. Books ignited my imagination and fueled my love of language, which led me to pursue a writing career. And I wanted to pass on this same gift—this love of reading—to my boys.

So, visits to bookstores and our local library became part of the pages of their lives. They enjoyed the library's story time programs, puppet shows and magic shows. They participated

in the library's reading challenge every summer. They even volunteered at the library as teenagers.

We artfully instilled a love of reading, which only got

stronger through the years as our family bought and borrowed thousands of books, both for leisure and for homeschooling.

Gift #3: The gift of boredom

With all the “enrichment” opportunities available—from art classes and music lessons to soccer clinics and taekwondo classes—we wanted to make sure our kids were never bored.

Big mistake.

Boredom is often the catalyst for inspiration, allowing creativity to flourish. It gives kids the unstructured time and space to cultivate their creativity, big ideas and out-of-the-box thinking. This holds true even more so now, as


the pervasiveness of technology infringes on the free time they *do* have.

One summer, after a ridiculously busy homeschool year, we decided against letting organized activities swallow up yet another one of our kids' summers. Instead, we chose to give them the gift of boredom.

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What a payoff! When my kids got bored, they got creative. They explored, thought of new ideas, played together (and by themselves), daydreamed, read books, tackled new projects, experimented, invented things, collaborated and wondered. Now *that* is enrichment.

These days, I think of giving in different terms. I don't need to focus exclusively on buying gifts in a store or presenting them in beautifully wrapped packages. Instead, I ensure that, among the many tangible gifts I give my children over the years, I am also giving them bigger, immaterial gifts that will last far beyond their childhood.

LISA A. BEACH is a freelance writer, blogger, mother of two teenagers, and recovering stay-at-home mom & homeschooler. Her writer's website is www.LisaBeachWrites.com, and at www.TweeniorMoments.com, she writes about midlife, family and friends. 



Children can learn to entertain themselves if allowed unstructured time, especially in summer.

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