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FAMILY ALMANAC

Rewarding Gifts for an Expectant Mom and Dual-Holiday Kids

By Marguerite Kelly Special to The Washington Post Friday, December 12, 2008; Page C02

Q. The holidays are daunting to me and I don't even have children yet.

I never seem to get the right gifts for my sibs or their kids and I really want to make good choices this year, especially for my sister. She is in her first pregnancy and it's a rough one; she doesn't know much about kids and she lives far from the family. Since she may deliver early, I want to give a special present that will be truly helpful.

I also have to buy both Hanukkah and Christmas gifts for my two sweet, busy nephews, 8 and 12, because their mom is Jewish and she and my brother celebrate both holidays. And what do I do about my younger brother's child -- a 4-year-old who has so much more than she needs?

A. It's always hard to choose the right gifts -- but it can be done.

Your sister would bless you for giving her a Zaky (Zakeez; \$50) -- a long, soft, lightly filled, washable glove with fingers, which looks rather creepy but it can calm and comfort a newborn, even a preemie. The mother just has to lay it on her chest for a few hours, to be scented, before tucking it next to her baby. To order, go to http://www.TheZaky.com. Or buy "Baby's First Year" (miBook; \$130), which describes the techniques of child care, in picture and sound. Once your sister has learned all the tricks, she can use the miBook as a digital picture frame. And for the baby? He'll like Eebee, the floppy doll with the colorful dreads and the wide, wide smile (FAO Schwarz; \$25) or an Eebee cloth book called "Have a Ball!" (Sterling; \$15).

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For Hanukkah, your nephews might appreciate the \$8 pewter pendants from the Mitzvah-Hebrew collection sold on http://www.nirvanaonline.com. Or give "Moishe's Miracle" by Linda Krauss Melmed (Chronicle; \$7) to the younger boy and "Brooklyn Bridge" by Newbery winner Karen Hesse (Feiweil & Friends; \$18) to his big brother. This well-told tale -- about a Jewish immigrant family in New York in the early 1900s -- is fascinating and full of suspense.

If you buy nightly Hanukkah presents or stocking stuffers, look for the collectible Japanese erasers (Iwako; \$1-\$7) which come in many shapes -- including sushi -- and for singing Tooth Tunes (Hasbro; \$12). These amusing toothbrushes will sing for your niece and your nephews, but only while they're brushing their teeth.

You may not know which music or video games your nephews want, but there are plenty of toys you can give. Look for ones that encourage a child's imagination; that are safe, sturdy and classic; and that are probably made by such manufacturers as Playmobil, Bruder, Plan and Ravensburger, Gund, and Melissa and Doug. You may have to shop in the smaller toy stores and in catalogues such as HearthSong, Chinaberry and Back to Basics to find them, but it's better than buying cheap, trendy toys that quickly fall apart and make the child think

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that he's a careless person. If that happens, he'll get careless with everything he owns.

It's also more fun to look for unusual gifts, such as "20 Questions" (Radica; \$15), which can supposedly read a child's mind, or the soft, simple Uglydoll -- an underground bestseller. Each style has its own history and comes in several sizes (Uglydolls; \$5-\$23).

The 12-year-old -- and his parents -- are bound to like "Apples to Apples" ([Mattel](#); \$25) and his little brother should enjoy the Puzzle Ball, a 3-D geography game that comes in eight versions (Ravensburger; \$15-40).

Consider music for your niece, like "The Story of Swan Lake" (Maestro Classics; \$17), which is one of four classical music CDs made for children by the London Philharmonic; "Pop Fly" by Justin Roberts (Carpet Square; \$16); or the witty picture book called "If You Give a Cat a Cupcake" by Laura Numeroff ([HarperCollins](#); \$17). But best of all: Give her a colorful, 35-inch square of silk called -- what else? -- a silkie so your niece can turn herself into a queen one day, a fortuneteller the next. For \$13 at <http://www.chinaberry.com>.

Your younger nephew should like "Smart-opedia Junior" by the editors of Maple Tree Press (\$25), which can probably answer more questions than his parents can; the older boy will devour "Ghost Files" by Eugene and Mary Kuryla Yelchin (HarperCollins; \$22), which can answer his ghostly questions; and both boys should be enchanted by "The Book of Totally Irresponsible Science" by Sean Connolly (Workman; \$13), which will tell them how and why science works and do it in a clear, clever (and responsible) way.

And then there's "Lincoln Shot" by Barry Denenberg (Feiwel & Friends; \$25). This well-researched history of the president's assassination is riveting; the text is laid out like a newspaper from 1865 and the results are terrific. This book should be in every child's library, and every school library, everywhere.

Questions? Send them to advice@margueritekelly.com or to Box 15310, Washington, D.C. 20003.

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