



# *Holiday* GIFT GUIDE II

FUN GIFTS FOR FUN  
PEOPLE ON YOUR LIST

WHEN ALL THEY WANT  
IS A GIFT CARD...  
SHOPPING FOR YOUNG ADULTS

FUN GIFTS FOR  
FURRY FRIENDS

# OUTDOORSY GIFT IDEAS

By Jesse Darland  
CTW Features

**P**assions and hobbies are always great tools to use while shopping for gifts. If you have someone in your life that enjoys camping, hiking or just lazing away afternoons in the yard, these gifts are the ticket.

## Portable hammock

**Grand Trunk Double Parachute Nylon Hammock, MSRP \$69.99**

A portable hammock is an essential item for lounging around, whether at the campsite, near a picnicking spot or even just hanging out in the backyard.

When looking for a hammock, you want two things.

First, the hammock should be lightweight so that it can be folded and packed easily. It should also be strong enough to hold your weight and stand up to repeated use.

This particular hammock is made from parachute nylon and it's extra large, so that you can spread out or share your lounge spot some a friend.

## Water bottle

**Hydro Flask 24 oz. Standard Mouth MSRP \$34.95**

Keep water extra-cold on a hike with this double-layered bottle. It features two layers of stainless steel with a vacuum layer in between that helps keep the liquid inside cool, no matter how warm things get outdoors. This manufacturer also offers wide-mouth bottles, but even the standard mouth is wide enough to accommodate ice cubes. The screw-on cap has a strap to fasten to your belt or pack and is BPA free.

## Lightweight Binoculars

**Carson VP-842, MSRP \$240**

These are for serious birders, wildlife



PHOTO: GFREIMANN

watchers and outdoor enthusiasts. (If you're looking for a quality pair of binoculars, you're probably going to spend at least \$100.) With a field of view of 393 ft. at 1,000 yards and weighing 1.54 lbs., this pair will help you spot rare birds and animals or far-off rock features while you're out and about. They're full size and come with a pouch, neck strap, lens covers and a lens cloth.

The disc-shaped paper filters keep sludge from getting in your cup, unlike a French press. It's BPA free, and you can usually find a set that comes with a nylon travel bag. You'll need to have a source of hot water – that's what fires or camp stoves are for – and then you'll be all set.

## Baby hiking carrier

**Osprey Poco AG, MSRP \$250**

For parents who want to take their little ones on a hike with them, nothing beats a backpack baby carrier. Of course, these are useful for more than just jaunts in the great outdoors. Enterprising parents can also use one to take the little one to the neighborhood.

Most quality baby carriers feature metal frames to create structure and support the weight of a child. This one also has zippered compartments and side pockets, as well as a removable sunshade to protect young ones from the sun.

The pack itself weights just under 7 lbs. and can support children up to 48.5 lbs.

## Campfire coffee maker

**AeroPress, MSRP \$29.95**

Everyone has a preferred way of making coffee, so a recommendation can be a bit tricky. But if you're looking for an easy, low-cost way to consistently get a great cup of coffee (especially in a gray early morning campsite) the AeroPress is a great option.

This coffee maker brews both espresso-style coffee and American-style coffee, depending on how you use it.



## Portable solar panel

**Aukey 28w Dual USB solar charger MSRP \$59.99**

Even when you're out on the trail, you might need to charge a phone, tablet, fitness tracker or something else. This foldable, waterproof solar charger features two USB ports so that two devices can be charged at the same time.

The flexible, multi-panel design means that it can be spread out on the ground or attached to a pack to passively charge gadgets and gear while you hike.

The solar panels have an impressive 23.5 percent efficiency (a good rate for solar power) and it includes a stand.



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# The must-have toys for 2017

By MATTHEW M. F. MILLER  
CTW Features

One of the great joys of the holiday season is the sound of children squealing with joy at the sight of a perfectly wrapped present. If you want to make sure the kid on your shopping list still loves the gift once it's unwrapped, it's important to know what's big with kids these days – and we've got you covered.

Small toys remain popular in 2017, especially so-called blind bag toys (Shopkins, Tsum Tsums, L.O.L. Surprise), which come in tiny concealed packages and range in price from \$3-10+ depending on the size of the set.

Fidget spinners are so spring 2017, and since it's more-than-likely most kids already have one (or 5!), check out some other fun fidget toy options: Kawaii Squishies (super squishy toys shaped like food, animals, etc.), fidget cubes, fidget putty, Flippy Chain stress reducer, art balls and fidget dice.

Technology is a no-brainer, of course, especially toys that have a coding element and incorporate the use of apps (our list offers several such options). Movies are a can't-miss go-to, and this year's top options include "Diary of a Wimpy Kid: The Long Haul", "Captain Underpants", "The Boss Baby", "Lego Batman", "Descendants 2", "Spiderman: Homecoming" and "Cars 3". As with all popular kids and family movies, any product tie-in to a kid's favorite movie (books, clothes, headphones, dolls, building sets, etc.) will be a welcome addition to any collection.

If you want to avoid last year's fruitless search for Hatchimals, we recommend shopping early.

## Fingerlings (\$15)

An interactive baby monkey that can grab onto things, and also responds to sound, motion and touch. Blow the monkey a kiss and it blows one back!



## littleBits Star Wars

### Droid Inventor Kit (\$100)

A complete kit to build and operate your very own Star Wars droid. Includes a free app download that allows kids to teach the droid new tricks.

## Hatchimals Colleggtibles (\$30)

A new addition to the insanely popular

Hatchimals franchise. Place each egg in the palm of your hand and rub the purple heart until it turns pink. Kids can then press down on the pink heart to crack the shell to reveal a surprise character.

## Soggy Doggy Board Game (\$20)

Players race around the board taking turns giving the fluffy dog a bath. If he shakes himself dry on your turn – and gets the players wet, of course – you start back at the beginning.

## Play-Doh Touch Shape to Life Studio (\$25)

Create real-life objects and scan them with the app to unlock digital characters and worlds to take playtime from table to tablet in a flash.

## Dance Code Belle (\$100)

Make the Belle doll dance by creating your own choreography in the app, or she performs 10 dances with the touch of her necklace, no additional device required. Belle says more than 100 phrases, plays seven songs and teaches kids how to dance.

## Huffy Electric Green Machine Trike (\$130)

Think big wheel with joysticks and a bucket seat. The levers turn the rear wheels to allow for spinning, sliding and whipping around.

## Lego Boost Creative Toolbox (\$160)

Build, code and play with one of five different creations, including a robot, a guitar and a cat.

## Fisher-Price Think & Learn

### Smart Cycle Toy (\$150)

Get your kids moving this holiday season. Pedal to ride, race or play games. Explore new missions and worlds via the Bluetooth technology that allows kids to play on a tablet or TV.

## Mega Bloks Elephant Parade

### Building Kit (\$30)

This pull-along elephant will enchant young ones with a spinning block tumbler in its belly. Includes blocks to build a hippo, monkey, toucan and giraffe.



## Nerf Rival Nemesis MXVII-10K (\$100)

Shoot 100 round, foam balls from this motorized blaster that is ideal for the thrill-seeking older kid in your family (and probably the parents, too).

## Disney Junior Doc McStuffins Baby All-in-One Nursery (\$80)

Doc McStuffins is a toy doctor, and this brings to life her world for your kids. It includes every imaginary doctor tool kids need to take care of their baby dolls.

## L.O.L. Surprise Fizz Factory (\$40)

Make bath-bomb-like creations with this slick contraption that allows kids to put small toys inside of the fizz balls that can then be dissolved in water.

## Paw Patrol My Size Lookout Tower (\$100)

Nick Jr.'s hit TV show is huge with toddlers, and this oversized replica of the pups' home base offers kids the chance to recreate their favorite Paw Patrol episodes.

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# NOT ANOTHER GIFT CARD

By Lisa Iannucci  
CTW Features

Ask any pre-teen, tween and teen what they want for the holidays and most will probably respond, “a gift card.” Gift cards have been the most requested item on holiday wish lists for the years.

If you’re tired of such an impersonal gift, but want to please the youngster in your life, there are alternatives.

## Give an experience

“Buying gifts for the gift card generation requires a little thought,” says Cherie Corso, parenting expert. “Teens today like ‘experience gifts’ so instead of a gift card, buy them tickets to a concert or show or event.”

Corso also explains that many parents are remembering to include the friends as well, organizing groups of children to go to concerts as holiday gifts instead of just purchasing one ticket for the child.

## Think charitable

“Instead of going holiday shopping this year, go holiday ‘giving’ by choosing gifts that benefit children and families in need from around the world,” says Christine Connolly Bell, Public Relations Manager at World Vision. “A retail gift card gives a pre-teen, teen or college student pleasure for a short period of time, but a charitable gift, like a child sponsorship through World Vision, ensures that the young person learns about and stays connected with important global issues.”

Through World Vision’s #GenerosityEffect movement, your teen will go online and send a stuffed goat to a friend. “We’ll match that gift with a real goat sent to a family in need,” Bell says. “The chain reaction of generosity will be viewable online through a tracking tool – truly bringing the gift’s impact to life and showing each individual’s influence.”

World Vision also offers a gift catalog on their website.

## Think out-of-the-box

Well, out of their room, that is. Kids don’t typically buy things that mom and dad supply such as pictures and bedding, etc.

“Teens like these items because it’s fun to do a mini-bedroom makeover,” Corso says. “Some gift examples include a fuzzy pillow, picture, bean bag, a cool makeup mirror and artwork for their wall.”

Corso says to remember that today’s teens also enjoy status items they can post photos of on Instagram.

“Gift cards are fun but not as much fun as seeing Justin Bieber or posting a photo with your new designer purse,” Corso says.

## Think indie

Despite the perception that nobody – especially young people – reads today, Nicole Brinkley, an independent bookseller and founder of YA Interrobang, says kids and teens today are reading more than ever, between the stories available on their phones and the hardcovers they collect for their shelves.

“We see this in the success of events like BookCon and subscription boxes like Parnassus’s ParnassusNext book box,” she says. “ParnassusNext sends a first-edition signed YA hardcover to its teen subscribers once a month.”

She also suggests that if you have to buy a gift card, buy one to an independent bookstore, where they can use the



card in-person or online. “With this and ParnassusNext subscriptions, it keeps kids and teens actively reading and excited to build their own little library.”

ParnassusNext offers 3, 6 or 12 month subscriptions and monthly subscribers are billed for only the cost of the book (typically between \$17 and \$19), plus \$6 shipping. Prepaid plans are available for \$75 for 3 months; \$150 for 6 months; or \$300 for a full year of books. Sales tax and shipping are built into the cost of prepaid plans.

## Think gift cards

Wait, what? We just said to think about ideas other than gift cards, but it is still OK to give some out.

“These days, gift cards and eGifts are the norm, but

that doesn’t mean they have to be boring,” says Elisabeth Vezzani, the CEO and co-founder of Sugarwish, an online candy store where recipients purchase the candy they want with their gift card.

Vezzani explains that many e-gifts and some gift cards provide an interactive experience, not just a purchase.

“This allows them to compete with traditional gifts in a way that they never could before,” she said. “This gifting trend is all about keeping it simple for the buyer while delighting the recipient in unexpected ways ... exactly the types of gifts that today’s teens are looking for.”

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## 10 great reads for young readers

Not sure what to buy? Anything from the Young Adult Library Services Association’s list of 2017’s Top Ten Best Fiction for Young Adults is sure to please.

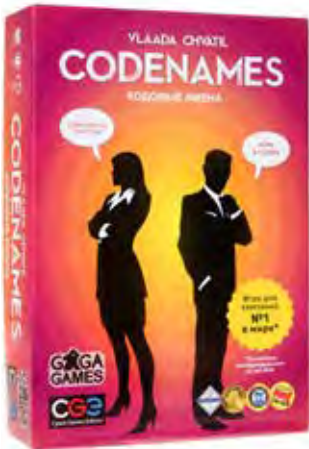
Here are the titles:

- “The Passion of Dolssa” by Julie Berry (Viking Books for Young Readers, 2016)
- “The Reader” by Traci Chee (G.P. Putnam’s Sons Books for Young Readers, 2016)
- “The Lie Tree” by Frances Hardinge (Harry N. Abrams, 2016)
- “The Female of the Species” by Mindy McGinnis (Katherine Tegen Books, 2016)
- “Burn Baby Burn” by Meg Medina (Candlewick, 2016)
- “Ghost” by Jason Reynolds (Atheneum/Caitlyn Dlouhy Books, 2016)
- “Salt to the Sea” by Ruta Sepetys (Philomel Books, 2016)
- “Scythe” by Neal Shusterman (Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers, 2016)
- “The Sun is Also a Star” by Nicola Yoon (Delacorte Press, 2016)
- “The Serpent King” by Jeff Zentner (Crown Books for Young Readers, 2016)

# Let's play the best family games!

By Lisa Iannucci  
CTW Features

When families and friends get together for the holidays, it's the perfect time to break out the board games and have some fun. Unfortunately, some players become a bit too competitive or argumentative and the fun goes out the window. However, there are board games to play that don't



cause conflict, but still allow you to get in some good competitive fun.

W. Eric Martin recommends Codenames, a spy game created by Vlaada Chvátil that is good for players aged 14 and up. "It's incredibly clever," says Martin, who is the news editor of Board Games Geek. "There are teams, clue givers, and super agents and you need to give teammates a one-word clue to guess agents. One person is also

a secret assassin and you need to avoid that person. You, as the clue giver, have to be clever to give as much info to your team as you can and it's fascinating to see what type of clues people give."

Martin also recommends Mysterium, good for ages 10 and up, where one player takes on the role of a ghost and other players are mediums. "You're murdered and have to communicate the information about the murderer to the other players until someone guesses the actual murderer," Martin says. "The only problem is that you're a ghost so you can only communicate to them in their



dreams. They have to try to interpret the dream and guess the object. It's an extremely visual game with gorgeous art."

Finally, Martin recommends games based on the popular escape room craze. "You need to work together to solve the problem within an hour," he said. He recommends both Unlock! and Exit: The Game

"I recommend Pandemic because it's a totally cooperative game and great fun," says Erik Arneson who writes about games for About.com and other publications. Pandemic is a game for ages 8 and up, where players have to plan a strategy to squash a disease.

"Other cooperative games are Forbidden Island and Forbidden Desert. All three are wonderful, no-conflict games because everyone is on the same team," Arneson says.

For players who are looking for something a bit more active, Donald Dennis of On Board Games, an Inverse Genius podcast, recommends

Happy Salmon. "It has been incredibly popular," he says. "In Happy Salmon, players race to play all their cards by finding other players to perform an action that matches the top card on both of their decks. It has folks fist bumping, high fiving, and racing around the table. The frantic real-time pace usually ends up with loud outbursts of laughter and much fun being had."

Unfortunately, even the best of games end up

in confrontation, so what do you do to get back on track? "Sometimes it's better to concede to someone and proceed to the game if that's what you want to do," Martin says. "Keep any conversation about the game itself."

If all else fails, Martin suggests just playing a different game.



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# Cook up a holiday surprise

By Nancy Mattia  
CTW Features

Want to make a great pot of coffee from your bedroom? Or you're not sure if the leftover mashed potatoes sitting in the fridge are still good? Manufacturers have your back with a slew of kitchen products you can program from your smartphone or tablet once you download the apps. "Smart appliances go beyond the call of duty," says Melody Vaughn, an interior designer who owns Melody Vaughn Interiors in New York. "Not only do they give you the same functionality of a standard appliance but also of the higher-end appliances." Here are six examples that are genius.

## Pantelligent Intelligent Frying Pan

This is for hesitant cooks who aren't ever sure if the food is done. The frying pan uses temperature and time sensors to let you know when to turn over the burgers or stir the sauce, and then it tells you when everything is done.



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The app even has an on-screen tape measure so you can choose the right amount of time to cook meats and fish based on their thickness; you also can indicate your preference for rare, medium or well done.

It even has spoken notifications so, if you get sidetracked making, say, a salad, it'll tell you what's going on – you'll never serve overcooked food again.

### Mr. Coffee Smart 10-Cup Optimal Brew Coffeemaker

This brilliant countertop appliance lets you schedule brew times from your phone. Just set up the coffee grounds and water ahead of time and then program it so your java will be ready when you want it. "I bought one for a client then bought one for myself," Vaughn says. "I love making coffee as I'm walking home from the gym!"



### Crock Pot Smart 6-Quart Slow Cooker

The beauty of traditional slow cookers is that when you walk through the door at 6:00pm every night after work, dinner's ready. The downside is that if your schedule changes and you get home later, that chicken dish may have been warming for way too many hours. Technology to the rescue! Crock Pot's smart appliance not only lets you adjust the cooking time with just a few taps on your phone but the temperature, too – it can even turn the crockpot off. "And it looks good on the counter," Vaughn says.



have one of these gadgets. Just plug it into your phone to see temperature graphs and instant readouts of the food you're cooking or grilling.

It also sends you sound alerts during the cooking process so you can stay on top of things when you're busy doing something else. The containers are safe for microwaves, dishwashers and freezers.

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### Range Digital Thermometer

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# Tis pet season too

By Lisa Iannucci  
CTW Features

Generosity abounds this glorious time of year, but make sure your list is complete so no one has a bone to pick with you come Christmas day. While you're doing your holiday shopping, don't forget about buying something special for Fido and Fluffy. Whether you're shopping for your dog or your best friend's cat, one of the best ways to treat a pet to a holiday treat is with a gift basket.

What should you put inside of it though?

"Whenever I'm buying a gift for a dog or a cat, I tend to stick with toys or treats that have worked or gone well in the past," says Leah Ingram, founder of Puppieware by Pawsome Doggie, which sells dog-themed bakeware and unique gifts for dog lovers. "For example, my mother's cat loves catnip-filled fabric mice and those plastic balls with bells inside. So whenever I see them on sale at a store, I'll stock up on them for the holidays."

Ingram says her own dogs love Nyalbones and squeaky tennis balls, so

she stocks up on those when they are on sale as well for her own pups or to give a friend or loved one's dog a gift.

However, if you know an animal has allergy issues or a sensitive stomach, Ingram cautions staying away from any food gifts.

"With all the news about tainted treats coming out of China, when giving the gift of food for a pet, I want to know where the food originated," says Ingram, which is the reason she started her Puppieware company. "Our cake molds allow dog lovers to make a cake from scratch for their pup that they can feel good about serving for their pup's birthday."

According to Cory Turner, co-founder of Dogly, coming up with the perfect gift or gift basket for a dog's or cat's arrival, adoptiversary or other occasion, is pretty much a sure thing if you keep these things in mind:

## Share a discovery

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box pet store shelf,” Turner says. “Whether it’s a smaller ticket item like a bandana in a unique fabric or a slightly pricier gorgeous, handmade-in-Hawaii waterproof leash or a cool-looking treat puzzle ball, wonderful independent business founders are making truly great things now for pet parents and their favorite family members. Made with thought means given with thought.”

### Give something to the human

“Not everyone thinks to do this, so it makes a human gift even more special,” Turner says. “Former fashion designers and other clever founders who are in love with their own fur kids are now making well-designed tees, tanks, and bags making statements like “Namast’ay home with my dogs.” If you want to avoid [clothing] sizes, we love hand-poured artisanal candles and bracelets benefiting rescues.”

### Give something that gives back

“Every animal lover appreciates when any splurge for their own lucky dog or cat helps another at a local rescue who might not be as fortunate yet,” Turner says. “A gift that benefits the local rescue your friend loves or where they adopted their pet is a powerful thing.”

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## Top 2017 Pet Gifts

Cory Turner, co-founder of Dogly (<https://dogly.com>), reveals his favorite gifts for pets and their parents:

#### For the pet

- Lion + Wolf Rhombus bandana
- Pia + Michio handmade leash
- UpDog Odin treat toy
- P.L.A.Y. wobble treat ball 2.0

#### For the pet parents

- Treat Dreams tee
- Nair & Bjorn bracelet
- Sydney Hale white concrete rescue candle
- Rescued Wine Chardonnay candle



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# We've all heard of Black Friday, now there's Panic Saturday!



Consumers may readily recognize Black Friday and Cyber Monday in the holiday shopping lexicon. But what about Super Saturday? Super Saturday, sometimes called "Panic Saturday," refers to the final Saturday before Christmas. This can be a big

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# Fun for the Ages

## Social and video games, high-tech 'toys' are hot for grownups

By Marla Miller  
CTW Features

Most people think cash is king when it comes to gift-giving, but challenging new board games, geeked-out gadgets and high-tech helpers for the home are giving greenbacks a run for their money this holiday season.

They may not be "toys" in the traditional sense, like dolls, robotics and Hatchimals, but adults still want rich, engaging entertainment experiences. Mom and dad like to unwind and relax, too, and so do grandma and grandpa. Just look to the popularity of adult coloring books, Sudoku and fidget spinners; games and gadgets help with stress and keep the brain sharp.

Tech and game manufacturers have responded with new makes and models to capture an adult crowd and fill their Christmas wish list.

Social, tabletop and role-playing games have seen a resurgence industrywide, growing 15 to 25 percent on an annual basis since 2009, said John Ward, executive

director of The Game Manufacturers Association (GAMA), a nonprofit trade organization serving the tabletop and hobby games industry.

Board games and miniatures make good holiday gifts, but even collectible games like Pokeman, Magic, and World of Warcraft trading cards and role-playing games are hot.

Our increasingly online society is one reason people are looking for shared experiences and ways to connect without the use of screens. Playing board games has always had a social function, bringing families and friends together.

"There's a lot of nostalgia about that," he said. "People want to see their kids unplug; they're missing that social component."

The rise in geek culture through shows such as The Big Bang Theory and new Star Wars movies has made it more mainstream. In Europe, it's very common to see board games on coffee tables or in pubs and cafes devoted to social gaming.

"Everybody needs social interaction to

unwind, like going fishing, going for a run, or maybe you like playing a hobby game," he said. "We're seeing more and more where people want to unplug and get away from technology."

### Tabletop and social games

There has been a wave of new adventure-themed board games that can be played over and over again and never really end. Plus, it's more affordable for families.

"You can buy one of these interesting games that are challenging for about \$45 and play it all winter long," Ward said. "A lot of them, each time you play it, the outcomes are going to be different."

Gloomhaven (\$160), a classic dungeon exploration game, Near and Far (\$70), a fantasy game that travels into the wilderness and This War of Mine (\$80), where players cooperate to survive in a war-torn city, are best bets according to ign.com.

Popular Mechanics announced its list of the 50 Best New Board Games earlier

this year and recommends Steampunk Rally (\$40), Great Western Trail (\$70), Adrenaline (\$70), Terraforming Mars (\$70), Captain Sonar (\$50), Clank! (\$60), Santorini (\$30), Scythe (\$80) and more.

Actually, anything Star Wars is predicted to be hot this holiday season: Star Wars Interactech Imperial Stormtrooper Action Figure (\$30), Interactive Remote Control R2 D2 (\$150) and LEGO Star Wars Darth Vader Building Kit (\$21). There's even an R2-D2 Coffee Press (\$40).

Great for girls' night, Golden Girls Monopoly(\$40) or CLUE: The Golden Girls (\$40) has players attempt to solve the crime of who ate the last piece cheesecake. And for couples who like to throw parties, gift-givers won't go wrong with Cards Against Humanity (\$25), Never Have I Ever (\$25) or the new What Do You Meme (\$30) card game for adults.

### Video games, equipment

Based on a recent report from Entertainment Software Association,



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gamers age 18 or older represent 72 percent of the video game-playing population and the average gamer is 35 years old.

More than 150 million Americans play video games, and families are making it a family affair. Sixty-seven percent of parents play video games with their children at least once a week, according to the report on theesa.com.

Perhaps one of the most interesting findings: Women ages 18 and older represent 31 percent of the video game-playing population, versus 18 percent among boys under age 18.

Some guaranteed hot picks: Nintendo's newest gaming console, Nintendo Switch

Street Fighter.

Top accessories include:

- Xbox One Elite Wireless Controller (\$150)
- Yamaha YAS-107BL Sound Bar (\$200)
- Razer Lancehead mouse (\$140)
- Razer BlackWidow Chroma V2 keyboard (\$170)
- SteelSeries Arctis Gaming Headset (\$80)
- CORSAIR ONE Compact Gaming PC (\$1,800)
- GAEMS Vanguard Personal Gaming Environment (\$350)
- Sony PlayStation VR (\$350)

### Electronics and fitness wearables

From fitness wearables to drones to the Amazon Echo, tech "toys" and gadgets continue to transform daily life, monitoring everything from heart rate and sleep habits to answering a million questions.

When buying a fitness tracking device or smartwatch as a gift, consider the user and their exercise habits. A device with built-in GPS connectivity will come in handy for outdoor runners and cyclists, but walkers may be content with one that measures steps, calories and sleep.

The market continues to explode, but some of the best trackers out there include:

- Fitbit Alta HR
- Apple Watch Series 2
- Gear Fit2 by Samsung
- Polar M600 Fitness Tracker
- Smartwatch
- Fitbit Charge 2
- the swim-proof Fitbit Flex 2
- Misfit Ray, Garmin Forerunner 230 running watch
- Whoop, a performance optimization



(\$300, if you can find it) is a 6.2-inch tablet with small controllers called Joy-Cons that attach to the side of the screen. Praised for its portability, place the Switch in its dock and it automatically switches to allow gaming on the big screen.

Pixel Pals (\$15) are light-up displays sure to bring back a bit of nostalgia and provide some desktop diversion during the workday. Pick from 8-bit characters like Mario, Luigi, Vault Boy, Mega Man, Master Chief, Batman and characters from

system and wearable designed for elite athletes now available to general consumers.

For busy parents who needs answers, or a techie who doesn't want to sit down, The Amazon Echo (\$180), Apple's HomePod (\$350), Google Home (\$130) and other copycats are voice-activated, multitasking speakers. Ask Echo's Alexa anything – hands-free – and she will answer. Alexa has a bank of 1 million answers, everyday things like the weather report, local traffic or fun facts, plus it plays music.

Or take it one step further with the new Echo Show (\$230), where Alexa actually shows you how to do things instead of just telling you: Listen to music or watch videos, enjoy face-to-face calling, or monitor home security by asking Alexa to show you who's at the door.

Google Home can basically assist with anything (it's powered by Google), plus play your favorite music and some games, and help organize your day. Added bonus: It can recognize different Google accounts based on your voice signature.

And you might have a squealer on your hands when music lovers unwrap the latest in crisp audio technology:

- Bose QuietControl 30 Noise Canceling Wireless Headphones (\$300)
- Beats Solo3 Wireless On-Ear Headphones (\$300)
- Apple Wireless Bluetooth AirPod



Earbuds (\$160)

Bose SoundLink Portable Wireless Bluetooth Speaker (\$130), water-resistant with up to 12-hours of playtime on a full charge.

To really unleash the fun, think big – and mobile. Safe for short distances, surprise the eco-friendly commuter with an OjO Smart Electric Commuter Scooter (\$2000) for adults.

Finally, for the binge-watcher, the all new Amazon's Fire TV Stick (\$40) is a hand-held toy they won't put down. After connecting it to a TV's HDMI port, watch over 250,000 shows from Netflix, Hulu, Amazon, HBO GO and more, and it has features like Alexa voice control and over 7,000 apps and games. © CTW Features

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