

Holiday Ideas for the Talented and Gifted Student

By Cathie Brooks

About this time of year (following the Thanksgiving break) parents ask me for gift ideas which will broaden and illumine their child's academic horizons. With a Letterman type top ten, I usually provide ideas from favorite children's authors and suggestions from unique, lesser known children's catalogues. I overlay my input with knowledge of a student's interests and abilities. Most of the selections are 'value oriented', with a few pricey picks worth the additional costs. This year however, I am limiting my suggestions to three ideas, representing a stewardship approach to spending and with focus on benefiting the *whole* child.

My shortened holiday list spotlights three items, none of which will fit into a stocking or a box. These require no monetary outlay but do indeed hold the promise of providing meaningful gifts for little ones. This year's suggestions include:

- Give your child a nightly schedule that comes with **a set bedtime**, one that will provide adequate rest for an elementary child. Each day teachers see children who cannot handle the academic challenges and social interactions that accompany a full school day because they have attended extra-curricular activities or participated in running errands that resulted in a late bedtime. Dr. Paul Suratt of the University of Virginia reports that, "Sleep disorders can impair children's IQ as much as lead exposure." Neuroscientists refer to inconsistent bedtimes as 'home-made jetlag'. If education is a family priority, then scale back other activities and send your child's teacher a student who is well rested and prepared for the day's challenges.
- Linked to getting home at a reasonable hour is a second gift, **eating dinner together** (tech free). Want to increase your child's vocabulary, improve syntax development and expand critical thinking? Talk with your child at dinner. Share the events of your day, where appropriate. Model how you handle work challenges and relationships. Listen as your little recounts his/her day. Your child's perspective and insights can be precious to hear. Relaxed discussions pave the way for meaning sharing, a gift in itself!
- Lastly, purpose to give your child **the freedom to fail**. Insuring your child's academic success by having her watch you do the Science Fair project at 11:00 p.m. is the equivalent of buying a Chia pet instead of planting a garden. It looks like growth but has no roots. Students allowed to fail learn much. They learn that assignments often require planning. They learn to listen to directions and to ask needed questions in class. And, they learn that B- feels great when it is your B-. Most importantly, they learn that Mom and Dad value them, not their performance. Feeling valued and developing self-respect are gifts that your child will enjoy for years to come.

These gifts – rest, time and acceptance are my holiday selections for this year.