

What Teachers Really Want For Christmas!



Stuck for a present? Here are 21 ideas for gifts that teachers will love.

by Kate Winn

As your Christmas shopping list grows and money is tighter than ever, you may wonder how to acknowledge your child's teacher. While gifts are certainly not required or expected, the holiday season is a great time for showing your appreciation. If you're searching for suggestions for a teacher on your list this year, look no further! We've compiled ideas for the crafty, the cash-strapped, the spenders and the philanthropists. We'll also share the best gift you could possibly give a teacher and it's free! Read on for inspiration!

Do it yourself

Young children especially like to have a "hand" in their teachers' gifts. Here are some crafts you can do together.

🎁 Make a snowman decoration. Find a piece of log, 20-30 cm (8-12") long and about 13 cm (5") in diameter. Paint with white outdoor paint. When dry, paint, colour or glue on facial features (eyes, rosy cheeks). Varnish for outdoor use. Cut toe



off old sock, use for toque. Tie ribbon around neck for scarf.

🎁 Construct a photo magnet. Start with a picture of your child alone or with the teacher. Paint and decorate popsicle sticks to place around the photo as a frame. Glue frame to picture. Attach a magnet (available at dollar or craft stores) to the back.

🎁 Assemble a cookie mix. In a mason jar, layer dry ingredients for your child's favourite cookie. Attach recipe. Decorate with bow, ribbon, and hand-made label.

🎁 Turn a jar into a pencil holder. Create a collage from magazine pictures, or use your child's drawing (of teacher, himself, or whatever he chooses). Glue onto jar or can.

🎁 Decorate a tote bag. Let your child go wild with fabric paint on a canvas or cotton tote bag.

Cheap & cheerful

🎁 Visit the dollar store. There are many treasures to be found – for instance, desk accessories such as stickers and stamps, which primary teachers always need. Or choose any small item, e.g., foot lotion, and add a handwritten note, "Foot lotion because you're on the go all day!" You can also pick up some Christmas items for the classroom, such as window clings or holiday erasers, and bring them in as an early gift.

🎁 Make a CD. Choices include Christmas music, children's songs for the classroom, or music that celebrates your family's culture or heritage. What a wonderful way for your child to share a part of him or herself with the teacher!



🎁 Put together a basket of edible goodies. Helen Scott, a mother of five, recommends this option for parents who have several school-aged

children and find that the cost of individual gifts for teachers really adds up. Helen assembles a basket of Christmas delights and puts it in the staff room for all to share. This gesture also reaches the non-homeroom teachers (French teachers, educational assistants, special education teachers) who touch your child's life every day and are often forgotten.

Make money count

👉 Buy a gift card – for a coffee shop, bookstore, restaurant or office supply store. Choose the amount that fits your budget. Spa certificates are another welcome surprise. As one teacher notes: “A couple of years ago I was pregnant at Christmas time, and trudging between the school and a portable several times a day. One student gave me a gift certificate which I used for a pedicure ... what a wonderful treat!”



👉 Order personalized notepads or stationery with the teacher's name (these start as low as \$10 online). It's best not to include the school or grade since these details may change before the items are used up.

👉 Create a personalized mouse pad. It's easy to do this at a photo lab using a photo of the class, or the teacher with your child. Or you can find sites online that will personalize the mouse pad with your teacher's name and class year.

👉 Purchase a USB Flash Drive for the computer.

👉 Put together a themed basket that matches the teacher's interests (cats, hockey, music, movies, etc.).

👉 Give a plant, with thanks for helping your child “grow!” Ideas include a Christmas cactus or bulbs (such as narcissus or hyacinth), which will bloom during the winter for a bit of cheer.

Add a twist

👉 Forego coffee mugs with “#1 Teacher” logo. Instead, buy a plain mug to decorate and personalize, or choose a logo or picture with meaning to the teacher. Travel mugs have become a popular gift, especially the ones with slots to insert photos. This way the teacher can share pictures of loved ones with students and colleagues. A

Teachers Talk About Their Favourite Gifts

“One of the best gifts I ever received was from a student who wrote me a letter outlining for me all of the important moments that I had spent with her. It wasn't the normal ‘You are my favourite teacher’ card, but a detailed account. I loved it!”
Mary Jane Herlihey

“My ‘best ever’ gifts have been garden flowers and plants from my kids. Many of them have included poems or stories. I have many ‘forget me nots’ which warm my heart. Every year I look into my garden and remember the great kids who gave them to me.”
Erin Marshall

“Last year I received the most amazing letter of appreciation from one of my students. It brought tears to my eyes and made me feel what I'm doing is worthwhile. If students feel they need to buy a commercial gift, a gift card from a book store is the best for me. Often the money goes right back to buy books for the classroom, which I would have bought anyway.”
Annette Payne

“One of my favourite gifts is a recipe book from a child in my class written by some ladies from a church parish. I still use this gift for my favourite recipes that always work.” (Consider collaborating with other parents to compile a recipe book with contributions from each family.)
Elizabeth Ludgate

“One of the best gifts I ever got was a beautiful tray of an assortment of Christmas baking that I just had to plop on my table for Christmas dessert! (I hate to cook!) It was a great time saver for me at a very busy time of year!!”
Mary Lynn Rutherford

“I received a beautiful gift last year that I will always treasure. It is a framed ‘scrapbook’ page, which depicts a traditional Christmas scene (i.e. family room with fireplace, stockings hung, etc.). What makes it extra special is that there are four stockings, one for each of my family members, with our names digitally placed on the top of each. Talk about personal and everlasting!”
Julie Selby

“A gift I love to receive is a gift for someone else. We always have the toy drive at school and I ask parents to consider purchasing a gift for a child in need.” (You can take this idea one step further and purchase a toy drive gift to represent the teacher, such as a craft kit for the art enthusiast. Your child can still present the teacher with the gift, with a note directing him or her to forward it to the toy drive.)
Marlene McMurray

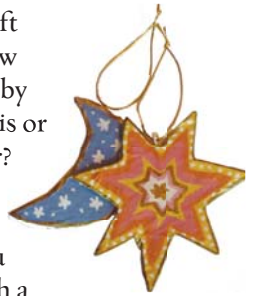
“My favourite gift ever was a burned CD with contemporary artists singing Christmas carols. I still bring it out and listen to it every year, and it always reminds me of that student and the class she was in.”
Julia Hawman

“One of the best was a letter from a student in my class who had some special needs. She told me how much I had helped her, and said that she donated money to Five Counties Children's Centre because they also help kids.”
Diane Mather

fancy reusable water bottle is another alternative.

👉 Shift away from boxed chocolates. What better way to show a primary teacher that his work has paid off than by spelling out a word with chocolate letters (e.g., your child's name or “thanks”).

👉 Choose ornaments – another fallback gift – with meaning. Show the teacher you care by choosing one to fit his or her life. Is he a golfer? Is she a bride-to-be? Pick something personal to show you really care, or go with a classic like pewter.



Keep on giving

Many teachers say their favourite gift is having a donation made in their name. There are many ways to do this.

👉 Donate books to the library or donate money to an organization that supports a cause that is meaningful to the teacher (e.g., the Humane Society or OSPCA for an animal lover).

👉 Donate to a charitable organization that benefits children. “We have students buy a chicken for an orphanage in Kenya, or donate to our adopt-a-village program,” says teacher Elaine Devlin of Lakefield.

👉 Make donations that support your child's class, and future students. Consider one of the following ideas: donate books to the classroom; offer to buy supplies for (and assist with) a class activity such as making gingerbread houses, ornaments or Christmas cookies; purchase a resource for the classroom that fits with the curriculum, such as a book on pioneers for a Grade 3 class; after consulting with the teacher, provide the class with a pet (fish, hamster).

The best gift ever

👉 Write a card. Really, that's it. But don't just sign your name. Teachers are affirmed and re-energized by positive feedback from students and parents. A sincere compliment or expression of gratitude is the best gift you can give, and the more specific the better. #1 Teacher mugs come and go, but these gifts are priceless.

Kate Winn is a mother, teacher and writer. She loves to hear that she's doing a good job at all of the above.