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Gift ideas: Encourage creativity with board games

LOCKIE HUNTER • PUBLISHED DECEMBER 1, 2008 12:15 AM

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This holiday shopping season, the shelves at toy stores are brimming with games. Which games offer an experience that is fun, educational and special? Our local experts help you make a decision that goes beyond shelf-appeal and back-of-box descriptions. Here are 10 top picks for remarkable board games that stand out from the crowd and stand up to creative play.

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1. Labyrinth

"Labyrinth is a strategy game of searching for treasure in an ever changing maze," said Gary Green, owner of the Toy Box on Merrimon Avenue. "Your strategy must change as the maze changes, and no two games are ever the same. A junior version called 3D Labyrinth is also available for ages 4-8."

By Ravensburger, ages 7 to adult, \$24.98 at the Toy Box.

2. Spy Alley

"Everyone starts with their own Spy Identification Card," says Stan Collins, owner of Once Upon a

Time. "Then you roll a die to begin your journey around the game board. Land on another player's space and guess their secret identity. Correct guess and they're out of the game. This is a younger age (6-12), version of last year's award winning game."

By Spy Alley, ages 6 and older, \$18.95 at Once Upon A Time.

3. Animal Soup

Create more than 100 unusual animals and then fish them from the soup. "This is a repeat seller," said Erika Evers, co-owner of Dancing Bear Toys. "Parents play with their children and then purchase for someone else. It has a lot of repeat play value."

By Briarpatch, ages 5 and older, \$21.99 at Dancing Bear Toys.

4. Blokus

"This multiple award-winning game relies on your strategy and visual perception to outwit your opponents," says Green. "Colorful multishaped game tiles are placed edge- to-edge to advance your position and block your fellow players. Be the player to place the most pieces and you win. A two-player travel edition is also available and a three-dimensional version will be out soon."

By Educational Insights, ages 5 to adult, \$29.98 at the Toy Box.



 Zoom

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Once Upon a Time, 7 All Souls Crescent, Asheville, 274-8788
 Toy Box, 793 Merrimon Ave., Asheville, 254-8697
 Dancing Bear Toys, 418 N. Main St., Hendersonville, 693-4500
 and 144 Tunnel Road, Asheville, 255-8697
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3. Animal Soup

5. You've Been Sentenced

"Not to jail but to create a sentence combining words from cards you've been dealt," said Collins. "Be prepared to defend your creation to the jury made up of your fellow players. It's fun and educational and winner of multi awards."

By McNeill Designs, ages 8 and older, \$25 at Once Upon A Time.

6. Ten Days In

"You have 10 days in a continent — touring by plane, car, boat and on foot," said Collins. "Pick your continent, chart your course from start, (through country after country), to finish using destination and transportation cards. First to make the connections for a 10-day journey wins. Great way to have fun learning geography."

By Out of the Box, ages 10 and older, \$25.95 at Once Upon A Time.

7. Blunders

"It's a fun game in which players help the Blunder family move through Blunderville by coming up with the correct answers about what to do in a series of 300 social and dining etiquette situations," says Collins. "It teaches children manners that will last a lifetime." Winner of seven major awards.

By Successful Kids Inc., ages 5-10, \$24.95 at Once Upon A Time.

8. The Way Things Work

"Based on the best selling book by David Macaulay, this game is chock full of materials for curious kids," says Green. "As you travel the game board, the players collect tools that help them solve mechanical problems and answer trivia questions that you encounter along the way."

By International Playthings, ages 10 and older, \$24.98 at the Toy Box.

9. Great States

This United States knowledge game is "jam-packed with questions," said Evers. "There are clues on the board, so if you don't know the answer, the game brings you into the board to learn." An Oppenheimer Gold Seal best toy award winner.

By International Playthings, ages 7 and older, \$19.99 at Dancing Bear Toys.

10. FLIBIX

Here you "learn to make a game, literally creating your own rules," said Evers. "You can create different kinds of boards. There are tiles and questions cards to make." Each play thus becomes a different game.

By Merrillian, ages 7 and older, \$39.99 at Dancing Bear Toys.

Contact Hunter at lockie@lockiehunter.com.

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