

What Makes a GREAT Operation Christmas Child Shoebox?

These recommendations are all based on Samaritan's Purse Operation Christmas Child's recommendations.

Basic information to know:

- Make sure every item is age appropriate.
- Be sure every item is **safe** and approved by OCC. Please do not include: Unsafe items, candy, toothpaste, gum, used or damaged items, war related items including toy guns, knives, or military figures. No food, chocolate, seeds, fruit rolls or other fruit, snacks, vitamins, drink mixes of any kind, liquids, lotions, medications, breakables like snow globes or glass containers, or aerosol cans.
- Questionable items that are allowed according to OCC web site: **glow sticks** and **wet wipes**, squirt guns (as long as they don't look like real guns – keep in mind water is a limited and high valued resource in many communities so it isn't used for play). **Camouflage** is allowed if the child can wear it without looking like a soldier. Colored camouflage is acceptable (but not suggested because many children receiving shoeboxes live in war-torn nations). Regular camouflage is fine if it's pencils, wallets or socks, but please consider the possible psychological implications for some children.
- Lip gloss is not allowed, but lip balm is.
- Please send NEW items only! Do not include used items. Unfortunately, it is common to find used shoes and clothing in shoeboxes at the processing center and these items must be removed.

Now that you know the basics, let's move on to what to include in your shoeboxes to make them GREAT. The KEY is to Include a good variety of items from every category. (Categories listed below.) 😊

Operation Christmas Child Shoebox Categories based on the Official OCC Gift Suggestions on [Samaritan's Purse](#).

Consider including items from each category for Every Child Boy and Girl:

Wow Item

Personal Care Items

Clothing and Accessories

Crafts and Activities

School Supplies

Toys

A Personal Note

Things to keep in mind when you are deciding what to get for your shoeboxes.

1. Choose quality items. *If it will break easily, last only one time, a few minutes or hours, consider a longer lasting item. Look for items that will last days, months, and years.

2. We recommend including a plush/stuffed animal/soft item in every box. Soft, clean, new stuffed animals and lovies and washcloths are a delight to the senses to a child who may have had anything soft before.
3. Colorful items are special in a world that may be very drab. Color is good!
4. Choose items from every category instead of all toys or all school supplies or all clothing items. Including "a variety" of items will give your shoebox gift balance.
 - WOW** (Soft stuffed animal or Beanie Baby, quality musical instrument, soccer ball with pump and needles, whole outfit, baby doll or Barbie with accessories/outfits/blanket, LEGO type building kits.)
 - Basics** – basic items should be included in every shoebox. These include school supplies (notebook, pencil pouch, pencils, pencil sharpener, pens, erasers, scissors, calculator, glue stick, paper clips) personal hygiene items (Soap/soap container or bag, covered toothbrush, nail clippers, nail files, hair brush/comb, toothbrush), tote, purse, or backpack, we highly recommend a backpack or tote of some kind so the child can more easily carry their items home and to school. Most children don't have a personal bag to put their items in.
 - A Ball** because it's nice for 1-20/universal fun, every age! So, we recommend a ball in every box. These are our favorites: soccer and playground balls with a pump and extra needles, toddler pit ball, pink ball, marbles, super balls. Those are all washable, but tennis and hacky sacks are good too.
 - Quality toys** that will last. Think quality over quantity: Yoyo, wooden toys, LEGO-type sets, puzzles, card games, action figures (keep in mind most action figures will not be recognized by most children living in other countries – especially in remote areas), Matchbox and Hot Wheels cars for older children, chunky cars for ages 2-4, jump ropes, blocks, and lacing toys are examples. Please do not include food toys as many children receiving shoeboxes live in poverty and food is a survival staple not entertainment.
 - Art materials** especially coloring books, crayons, sketch pads, colored pencils/markers, chalk and chalkboard.
 - Craft item:** sewing kit with fabric, cross stitch/needle point kit, model, beading kit,
 - Useful items** (super fun category to shop for!): tape measure, string/rope, bandana, zip ties, duct tape, clothesline/clothespins, menstrual pads and wet bag for girls 10-14, tweezers, compact mirror, bandana (head band, hair tie, head covering in hot weather, mask, bandage/tourniquet, etc.), compass, flashlight (hand crank flashlights will last longer; include extra batteries for battery operated flashlights), lantern, tools, sewing kit, fishing kit – with small fishing line reel not hand wound – it will get twisted and be useless. **See our [fishing kit tutorial](#).
 - Musical Instruments (good quality): tambourine, jingle bells, shaker egg, harmonica, maracas, xylophone, whistle, recorder.
 - Puzzles. **If sending a puzzle, open it and put items inside box with the pieces or take out of the box and put in baggie with the cardboard picture flat inside the shoebox. Lego sets are a puzzle that can be treated the same way. Use the space inside the box or put the pieces and directions in a drawstring bag to save space.
 - Clothing. Socks and underwear, gloves and hats (These are small items that can fit in the gap spaces of a box!) They are very needed and greatly appreciated. A whole outfit is a

wow item. But be aware of the space it takes up, especially for an older child. We often include a shirt rather than an entire outfit for the older age group. Also, shoes are a great addition to a box. Flip flops from Old Navy are high quality and every year they have a 99-cent sale. They are on sale in the fall usually reduced to less than \$2.

- Water Bottles and Cups. A water bottle or cup is a very useful item to include in a child's box. Avoid bottles with straws unless you send a straw cleaner (but even then, they may not know what it is so include visual instructions). Look for ways to use the space inside your bottle/cup. It's amazing how many things will fit in a water bottle!
- Soft toy or soft item in the box. A comfort item like a stuffed toy or lovie is very, very special to a child who has only known hard dingy surfaces all their lives. Some of these children have lived through wars, extreme poverty, and have never seen a stuffed animal. The sense of touch is important. Fill your boxes with bright colors and soft silky items to delight a child's senses. Think, "Is the washcloth soft? Did I include a soft toy? Is there a silky ribbon?" Last year at the processing center, my friend Lisa said most boxes did not contain anything soft!
- Dolls. The girls love getting dolls including baby dolls and Barbie dolls. Consider an additional item to go with the doll like a soft doll blanket or additional outfits.

To God be the glory for all he is doing right now to raise up a new generation of shoebox builders! Thank you for packing shoeboxes this year for Operation Christmas Child. And thank you for making the decision to make your boxes better than you ever have!

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Galatians 6:9