

# Armenta Learning Academy



## Give the Gift of Learning



Suggestions & Recommendations by Julie M. Armenta, M.A. Education & Family Specialist

What better way to give a gift which enhances learning than with some of my favorite educational toys?!

**Leap Frog Products** – My favorite educational toys! The **LeapPad** (\$59.99) is an award-winning product that introduces children to the magic of books, money, populations, music, capitals, and much more. This company also makes talking globes to increase geographical awareness, and many other games. Leap Frog has a variety of learning materials that reach the visual, auditorial, and kinesthetic learners. Another of their wonderful products, the **Turbo Twist** (\$39.99), builds vocabulary and math skills.

**Science & Excitement** – There's the **GeoSafari Talking Microscope** (\$35.99) that introduces children to the amazing world of insects and spiders with an easy to use talking microscope. There are so many science kits out there, that it was difficult to pick a favorite. Some common kits include Geography, General Science, Volcanoes, Geology, Problem Solving, and more. Try the **Mystery Rock** (\$24.99) and unearth four real gemstones including a genuine emerald, three prehistoric fossils, and much more.

**Word Wonders** – **Read Spin** (\$13.00) magnetic letters are one of my favorite vocabulary enhancing toys. These letters can be used to aid spelling, reading, vocabulary, and grammar. Kids love the fun colors. I recommend purchasing two sets of letters for use in longer sentences. Another fun reading and magnet related toy is the **Magnetic ABC Book** (\$14.99). I highly recommend checking it out. Books in general make wonderful gifts. I personally love books on tape, books that involve music, and ones with bright illustrations and pictures. For the younger children, pop-up books are a wonderful idea. Next time you're at the bookstore, take a look at **The Tin Forest** (\$15.99). It's a book full of rich and detailed illustrations, lyrical text, and empowering messages. I'm certain that someone on your shopping list would benefit from such a book.

**Q & A** – I highly recommend encyclopedias, children's dictionaries, and thesauruses with pictures. Books of this nature are not only informative, but interesting. Reference books like **Question & Answer Library** (\$39.99) can be on specific topics such as the United States of America or nature. Perhaps one of the most enjoyable Q&A toys is the **Brain Quest** (\$10.95) series. Each deck comes with over a 1,000 cards with questions and answers drawn right out of school materials. The series covers everything from math and science to English and history, and many more subjects. They make their card decks for all grades Pre-K through 8<sup>th</sup>. That way you can play with your friends, quiz your parents, or test yourself.

**Electronics & More** – **Word Warp** (\$24.95) reinforces spelling skills with an entertaining 'twist.' Quickly turn each spherical knob to the correct letter, press the button, and beat the clock! As the game progresses, it gets faster and crazier – spelling has never been so much fun! This game is appropriate for ages 8 and up. For more word practice for the younger children, try the **Phonics Firefly** (\$39.95). Children learn the alphabet, letter sounds, and over 500 three-letter words! This is a musical and colorful light-up keyboard game. Through interactive learning toys, children build their phonics, reading, and spelling skills, and confidence. If you're a little worded-out, why not try some math for a change of pace? Numbers come alive with **MathShark** (\$39.95). Children will want to practice their math on this hand held toy that plays more like a video game than a math quiz. Addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, decimals, or percentages are just a few of the

topics covered by this math-smart game. It is even a fully functional calculator. There are eight skill levels to choose from, so pick the one that best suits your personal mathematical talents. Keep in mind computer games too!

**Group Learning** – To spice up the classroom or to make a long car ride a bit more interesting try a multi-player game like **Eggspert** (\$49.95). Teams or players test their knowledge on such topics as math, science, spelling, and history. Two different game modes let you either play the “Jeopardy” mode or the “Wheel of Fortune” mode. This game involves bright colors, flashing lights, and out loud questions or activities. This is a wonderful educational gift – I’d be excited to find it under my own Christmas tree.

**Back to Basics** – **Sidewalk Chalk** (no more than a few dollars at the local drug or toy store) is a great way for your children to have fun while practicing spelling and math. How often is it that a child’s workspace is the entire driveway? Make some lemonade or hot chocolate and stake out a clean piece of sidewalk. Try studying for vocabulary and spelling tests or testing your multiplication tables this way. It’s fun, a wonderful learning experience, and a great time for parent-child bonding. Another variation, but on a smaller scale, would be personal chalkboards or **white boards** and dry erase markers. These are wonderful study tools that encourage students to be creative in their learning processes. This definitely reaches out to the visual learners. The colors enhance the memory, interest, and creativity.

**Fitness Fun** – Other toys and activities that can be wonderful and beneficial gifts are those that involve health and sports. Perhaps a new **basketball** and a coupon for a free game of horse would be a fun and creative gift to give. I personally enjoy fast paced games and activities such as bike riding, roller-skating, and jet skiing! How about a new **helmet** to promote safety, or a **Walkman** for long walks? Even the simplest gifts can be fun and encourage fitness. When was the last time you used a **Hula-Hoop** or a **Frisbee**? Although December isn’t the ideal time for water sports, pool toys and beach games are great ideas too. Since it is winter, maybe **winter sportswear and gear** would be a wonderful choice. Also, for colder weather, indoor sports and activities can be loads of fun. **Trampolines**, **treadmills**, and **table tennis** are great fun, healthy, and played with a roof over your head.

No matter what gifts are given, remember that they come from the heart. I always thought that the best part of the holidays was watching my friends and family members open the gifts that I personally bought them, watching their expressions of excitement and pleasure, and listening to how “perfect” my gift was... That’s one of the best feelings in the whole world. Knowing that others appreciate your care and creativity is a heartwarming experience. I have found the educational toys are the ones my nieces, nephews, and students enjoy the most; gifts that children can play and learn with at the same time. What better way to make a meaningful and lasting impression, than making a difference in the lives of those you love? Good luck in your shopping, and have a wonderful holiday season! Have a happy New Year too!



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