



We Are Thankful for YOU!

Thank you for sharing your precious children with us!

Thank you for opening your homes and arms to us!

Thank you for taking our recommendations to heart and putting them into action with your children!

Thank you for your advocacy!

And if you are thankful for VIPS and are able to give a gift to VIPS this Holiday Season...

- *Please consider making a donation to our annual holiday fundraiser ~ or ~*
- *Purchase an item or two from one of our wish lists.*

[VIPS CKY](#)
[VIPS Indiana](#)
[VIPS Louisville](#)

VIPS Staff Toy Recommendations

Age recommendations for toys are typically listed by each manufacturer but should be taken as suggestions. Depending on your child's level of development and physical and cognitive skills, a toy recommended for a three-year-old might be appropriate for a much younger child and a toy recommended for a three-month-old might be appropriate for an older child.

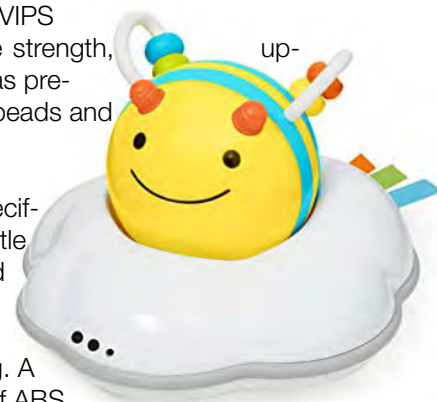
VIPS does not endorse any seller – we have used Amazon links for convenience. If you decide to purchase from Amazon, please consider going through AmazonSmile, which is exactly the same as ordering directly through Amazon, but offers a percentage of your purchase to a charity of your choice. And, of course, we would love for you to select Visually Impaired Preschool Services, Inc. as your AmazonSmile charity.

The blue product name contains the link.

Christina Allen, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, VIPS - Louisville

The [Skip Hop Explore and More Follow-Bee Crawl Toy](#) is awesome! One of my friends who has a baby loves this toy for her typically developing baby. Her baby visually tracks this toy and seems more motivated to crawl, attracted by its colorful lights, energetic tunes and sweet buzzing sounds, all of which are very motivating for VIPS kiddos. This would encourage tracking, tummy time/core strength, per body strengthening, grasping and picking up, as well as pre-crawling/crawling. The removable bee features moveable beads and rubberized details for teething.

There are three stages of development encouraged by specific aspects of the toy: pre-crawling – the removable bee rattle wobbles but won't fall over; beginning crawlers – the cloud moves in a circular pattern yet stays close so new crawler won't have to go too far; and advanced crawlers – the cloud moves in a random pattern that encourages chasing. A sensor helps the cloud avoid obstacles. The toy is made of ABS Plastic/Polypolypropylene/Steel and can be spot cleaned with mild detergent and a damp cloth. Three AA batteries are required but not included. The toy is available from Amazon for \$21.99.



**Kim Berghoff, Blind/Low Vision Specialist,
VIPS - Indiana**

Kings Dragon Baby Musical Keyboard/Drum Set has three modes: three differently and brightly colored hand drums, a six-key keyboard with animal pictures on them that make the sound of that animal, and three differently colored and shaped buttons that make the sound of a guitar, trumpet and saxophone. The set is made of eco-friendly ABS plastic material that is BPA-free, lead-free and accordant with Food Grade standards. The edges are rounded and safe for baby's touch and the soft LED lights are safe for baby's eyes. The piano/drum set encourages eye-hand coordination and finger flexibility along with color recognition and requires very little hand pressure to activate. Three 1.5 V AA batteries (not included) provide the power for the instrument. Amazon sells this set for \$23.99; a set with additional keys, cymbals and a microphone sells for \$39.99. Michelle Flora also recommended this toy.



Fisher Price Think and Learn Rocktopus (\$59.55 from Amazon) is an octopus shaped toy that plays 15 musical instruments in 5 musical styles with 3 ways to play (Math, Music, and Game). As the child inserts or taps her choice of instrument fitted into the octopus's arms, the Rocktopus will make the sounds of that instrument, placing the child in control of her musical creations. She can add or remove instruments, control the tempo and add sound effects. By downloading the free Rocktopus

app, she can create cool music videos with the Rocktopus. Suggested age is three through six years.



The **Baby Einstein Curiosity Clutch Sensory Toy** helps parents introduce their babies and toddlers to shapes, sounds, colors, and textures early on—and it helps build their understanding of cause and effect. Little hands and minds are busy and engaged as they grasp, pop, twist, press, and interact with the many activities on this infant fidget toy. It encourages fine motor skills and cause-and-effect concepts through active two-handed play while also stimulating the senses with rattle sounds and high-contrast patterns that



capture children's attention and promote sensory development. This sensory toy features Tinker the Tiger, a popular character from Baby Einstein's books and videos. It's hand washable and made with BPA-free materials. It is considered appropriate for children ages 3 months and up. See it at Amazon for \$7.98.

The **Picasso Tiles Double Sided Magnetic Alphabet Board** features a two-sided magnetic alphabet board with upper case (capital) letters; lower case letters; and numbers. It includes a stroke/letter formation guide that promotes writing, reading, problem solving ability, and hand-eye coordination.

The included stylus/pen attracts the magnetic beads, bringing them to the surface with an audible clicking sound. The stylus traces the letters (capital on one side of the board and the lower case on the other side), with clear directions for the sequence, stroke and direction of each letter with an instruction guide next to each alphabet letter. The other end of the stylus is used to redo/erase chosen letters. The lightweight pad can be easily held by children or placed on a desk or lap, making it a great toy for travel. The stylus fits into a compartment on the board. The alphabet board encourages learning the alphabet and geometrical shapes. Amazon sells it for \$19.98.



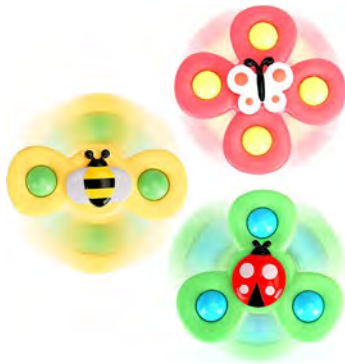
**Ashley Emmons, Teacher of the Visually Impaired/
Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist/Preschool
Teacher, VIPS - Louisville**



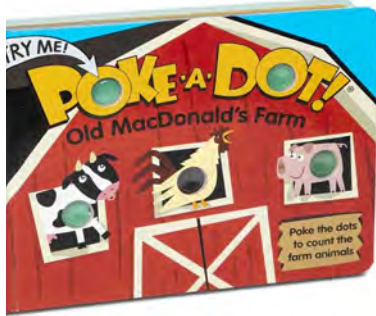
Light Stax are light up building blocks that connect with STAX System blocks as well as all major toy brick brands. This set of 36 toy bricks contains colorful rechargeable LED lights which makes building with them exciting and visually stimulating. A second power supply base for the LEDs is included in the set. Amazon sells it for \$39.99.

Suction Cup Spinner Toys are brightly colored spinning toys that stick to any flat surface (glass, ceramic, plastic, refrigerators) with strong suction cups. They come in four styles, each having different characteristics that are interesting to very young

children (Farm, Toy, Panda, Sili-cone). These work well as safe fidget toys having rounded edges but with enough color and patterns to keep children ages 1 to 3 years interested. They encourage visual attending, fine motor coordination-reaching and color recognition. Amazon sells spinners for \$12.97.



Melissa and Doug Poke A Dot Books are children's sturdy board books with 20 pages of pictures with buttons to press and pop on every page, making different clicking and popping sounds depending on how they are poked. They encourage language development, counting, and fine motor skills. Poke A Dot Books come in a variety of topics: Old McDonald's Farm, Christmas, Dinosaurs, etc. Prices range from \$9 to \$19 at Amazon.



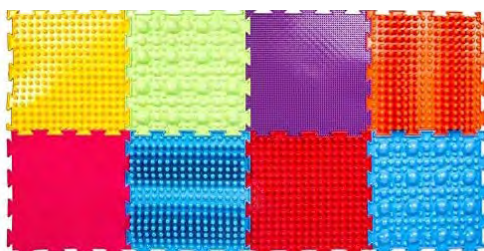
Nothing But Fun Toys Lights & Sounds Shape Sorter has six unique colorful shapes, with lights and sounds and can be used as a shape sorter or a game. It introduces children to three different languages (English, Spanish and French) and encourages fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination. The sorter is designed for children ages 9 months or older. Three AA batteries are included. The sorter is \$34.99 at Amazon.



Michelle Flora, Blind/Low Vision Specialist, VIPS-Indiana

Here are several toys I have come across lately that are great for our kids!

The **Massage Sensory Floor Game Mat** includes brightly colored textured mats, each almost ten inches square, with interlocking edges so that they can be grouped together as a puzzle. The mat encourages strengthening of overall motor abilities including



muscles to prepare to crawl, can enhance hand-eye coordination and self-awareness and be used in tummy time or in a sitting position. Gentle exposure to varied textures can help desensitize children who are overly responsive as well as stimulate children who are under-responsive. Massage Mats are available on Amazon for \$59.99. This mat was also recommended by Kim Berghoff.

Sensory Balls for Babies and Toddlers are six colorful soft, squeezable sensory balls in different textures designed to be safely handled. One built-in teether ball contains a bell and the shower stacking cups, also included, are perfect for bathtub play. As babies' perception of colors and shapes move from black and white to color (typically at 3-6 months), these balls appeal to developing vision and can encourage color recognition skills. As children begin crawling, chasing the rolling balls encourages tracking both visually and tactually as some balls contain bells. (The balls serve double duty as "fidget" toys for adults!). Amazon carries the balls for \$10.99. These balls were also recommended by Kim Berghoff.



Edushape Sensory 7 inch Toy Ball for Babies and Toddlers contains multi-colored mini noisemaker balls inside. Fine motor skills and visual/sensory development can be enhanced through gripping, tossing, bouncing, rolling, catching and shaking this ball. Edushape products are made with BPA and phthalate free plastic. The ball is recommended for age six months and above. This ball is sold by Amazon for \$17.60. Kim Berghoff also recommended this ball.



Learning Resources' Spike the Hedgehog encourages fine motor skill development with chunky, peg-shaped pieces that fit to the back of the hedgehog. Spike can also be used for occupational therapy exercises. His colorful quills encourage color recognition, sorting, and counting skills as well as fine motor skills. Spike can also be used for tactile skill development! His quills are easy to grasp, just the right size for little hands to hold. The set includes a 2-piece hedgehog (6" in diameter), 12 quills, and



an activity guide. Suggested age is 18 months through toddlers. You can find Spike on Amazon for \$13.49. This toy was also recommended by Kim Berghoff.

Teytoy Tummy Time Developmental Baby Mirror is a versa-



tile cloth mirror with high contrast black and white graphics (\$15.99 on Amazon). It is excellent in capturing the attention of infants as a step toward developing visual ability to see colors, typically between birth and three months. The mirror and graphics

can be used for baby's tummy time as a mat that is a mirror or as high-contrast graphics. The mirror can be unfolded and hung, laid flat on a surface or secured as a three sided, stand-up toy. There are soft toys suspended beside the mirror and crinkly stuffed cloth toys featured in the graphics.

There is a protective film on the mirror that needs to be removed before using to make the reflection clearer. Kim Berghoff also recommended this toy.

Pam Holladay, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Developmental Interventionist, VIPS - Louisville

The **PinTreeLand Crawling Crab** is a terrific tummy-time toy that encourages babies to sit up to play with the crab as well as to crawl or chase after it, following the music it makes. When the crab encounters an obstacle while moving, the built-in sensors on the crab's claws will automatically move it in the opposite direction. The walking crab toy is powered with a rechargeable battery and comes with a USB charging cable.



The crab is made of sturdy, non-toxic, high quality ABS material with no sharp parts. The soft LED light protects children's eyes. Playing with the crab encourages fine and gross motor coordination and visual and auditory tracking skills. Amazon sells it for the special price of \$13.59.



The **Singing Cactus Plush Toy** starts to dance energetically to the music it plays when

you turn it on, playing more than 60 popular songs in English. If you speak to the cactus, you will get a specially processed tone, just like a parrot repeating what you say. Colorful LED lighting is synchronized with every movement of the toy, allowing it to also be used as a night light. This toy can encourage language development as well as being a cute, fun toy. It is \$12.99 at Amazon.

Leslie Lusher, Developmental Interventionist, VIPS - Central KY

Sesame Street's book with Elmo, "So Big!" is a board book

based on the familiar game So Big or How Big is Baby? Using repetition and imitation, it ends with a triumphant finale in which the parent and child answer the question "how big is baby?" by announcing: Sooooo big! The 14-page book features Baby Elmo and a big pop-up of Elmo with his arms spread wide across two pages at the end. This book has very simple pages and bright colors (suggested for a 1 to 2 year old) and is perfect for a child with CVI or other visual impairment. \$8.99 will buy it at Amazon.



Fisher-Price Linkimals Interactive Music Toys are available in a variety of animals. They are great for working on cause and effect and using a visually guided reach. The round circle on the front lights up when music plays after the button on the foot is pressed. If there are two of these toys, they will both play music and light up when one is activated.



One can be moved to a further location to encourage use of distance vision in varying fields (upper, lower etc.). These light up toys can be used at bath time to help little ones use their vision at bath time too! They range in price from \$12.99 to \$42.99 depending on the animal chosen at Amazon.

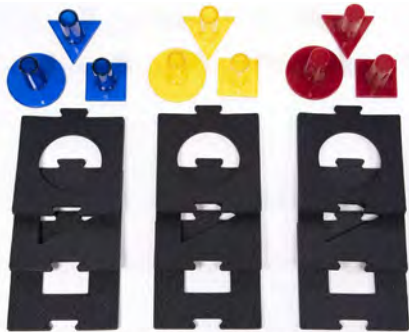
Paige Maynard, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Developmental Interventionist, VIPS - Louisville

Did you know that puzzles with a few simple geometric shapes are easier for young children to complete than those with many oddly shaped pieces? The **Montessori First Geometric Shapes Wooden Puzzle** (Amazon for \$13.99) has large knobs



(screwed on for permanence!) that are easy to grasp. Because this puzzle has four pieces in simple shapes, it is a **FANTASTIC** option for your child's first puzzle! It has low visual complexity and the spaces where the pieces fit are colored, so that if your child has usable vision, she can perceive the spaces more easily. This puzzle helps strengthen fine motor skills, matching skills, hand-eye coordination and visual perception skills.

If your child benefits from backlighting, the [**American Printing House for the Blind's Bright Shapes Knob Puzzle**](#) (\$169.00) made of translucent acrylic with easy to grasp knobs is one of my favorites! This puzzle can be used on any light box, including the one available from APH. The interlocking black foam frames, three of each shape, help focus the child's attention on the exact spot where the pieces fit! There are three shapes (circle, square, triangle) of each color acrylic (red, blue, yellow) as well as three of each shape of solid black foam shapes.



This puzzle can encourage the development of grasping, hand-eye coordination, relational concepts such as in/out, directionality, shape and color recognition, comparison, and patterning. A quick start guide in large print and in UEB braille accompanies this puzzle.

(Federal Quota* funds can be used to purchase this puzzle as well as a Light Box from APH **through your VIPS provider**, which means **NO COST** to you!)

Grasping, releasing, feeling, looking, batting, waving, in and out! These are all skills that your child can learn from this [**Creative Kids Sense & Grow Sensory Magic Tissue Box**](#) (\$25.99 from Amazon) toy! Unlike other available tissue box toys, this one comes with a variety of colored and **TEXTURED** pieces of fabric! If the tissue box is too visually complex for your child, you could hang the fabric "tissues" from a play frame or light box, or even place them in your own empty wipes container.

The Sensory Tissue Box promotes the development of fine motor



coordination, hand-eye coordination, dexterity and color recognition. It can encourage exploration of the sense of touch with the multi-textured scarves of interesting fabrics: sheer, tulle, cotton, felt and even adding auditory stimulation with the corduroy crinkly scarf.

I'm always looking for a simple cause/effect toy that lights up and has low visual complexity, and the [**Fisher-Price Laugh and Learn Counting and Colors UNO**](#)

is just the one! It is an electronic toy with multi-color lights, phrases and music for infants and toddlers (\$11.87 from Amazon). It is simple to activate, and the entire button lights up, making it easy to see. The reader lights up when a card is inserted into the slot offering a choice of more than 30 songs, sounds and phrases that teach counting, colors, familiar objects and Spanish words. The reader, 5 UNO toy cards, and a convenient ring for take-along play are included.



This toy could also be paired with a battery interrupter and an adaptive switch to help your child activate it more easily and independently.

The [**battery interrupter**](#) I like is available through Amazon for \$14.99, enabling you to adapt your child's own toys to work with capability switches. There is a version available for AA or AAA batteries and one for C or D batteries. These interrupters can be used on most toys with an on/off switch and is simple to install and use. Its molded Connector increases reliability and safety and the single wire construction prevents tangling.



(**Your VIPS provider** can order an adaptive switch for you from Federal Quota* funds, so **NO COST** to you!)

**An article on Federal Quota funds will be in the next newsletter issue.*

Staci Maynard, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Developmental Interventionist, Kids Town Preschool Teacher, VIPS - Louisville

I've been thinking about the kinds of gifts that have tended to mean the most to me both when I was young and still today. Books are some of my favorite objects, and as a parent of a child with visual impairments, **you have the opportunity to give your child the gift of literacy at no cost to yourself thanks to a few amazing organizations.** All you have to do is apply, and they will send you a designated number of free books each year. One of my current favorites is *Stir Crack Whisk Bake*, a book whose text encourages completing actions to help tell the story. It also came with a realistic cooking utensils play set that could be great for concept development and

pretend play, perhaps building toward trying a recipe together with your child. I received this book through the [Braille Institute Special Collections](#), which will allow you to order two books with accompanying props or activities twice a year.



[American Printing House for the Blind's Braille Tales](#) will send families six dual print books per year, and [Seedlings](#) will send applicants five books per year that parents can choose from their catalog. In addition, your VIPS providers would love to work with you to build book boxes or other means to increase your child's engagement with braille and print literacy.

Another great gift is a hands-on experience as a family. For example, there is so much for the senses to explore at [Bernheim Forest](#). In addition to the textures, smells, and sounds of the forest, Bernheim is developing their Playcosystem, a sensory rich play space to get children immersed in nature. Their team consulted with VIPS teachers to obtain ideas to make this area more accessible for children with visual impairments, so a membership to Bernheim could be a great way to spend fun time as a family as well as work on different skills with your child. Consider other memberships or visits to places that your child can encounter with multiple senses such as the [Kentucky Science Center](#), a farm, or petting zoo. Children develop concepts most efficiently through experiencing them hands-on, and these types of experiences as a family will also make memories that will last a lifetime.

Tammy Maynard, Developmental Interventionist,
VIPS - Central KY

The [Bright Starts Safari Beats Musical Drum Toy](#) is used by many families with infants. It has two different play modes: drum with animal sounds and melodies. Most children find the toy very entertaining; it lights up easily with a child's light touch that encourages cause and effect learning. The child can easily move it herself as it is not heavy, or bulky. It can fit snugly in front of the child for easy access to the buttons to play music. The music and lights encourage the child's participation. (Some parents of very sensitive children have found the music too loud and/or the lights too bright. A piece of tape over the speaker can soften the sound and colored duct tape over the drum heads can dim the light.) This toy provides many learning opportunities including cognitive, visual and fine motor skills. Three AAA batteries are required but not included. Amazon sells this toy for \$10.89.



The [Best Learning Musical Mushroom Garden](#)

plays music when the mushroom is activated by a slight push, pat or spin of the toy. The colorful mushrooms play music and the lights and sounds encourage eye-hand coordination along with cognitive and fine motor skills. The child can build memory skills by following the pattern of the mushrooms as they light up and learn colors and numbers. The mushrooms also promote problem-solving, logical thinking and concentration along with creativity and imagination. It is intended for ages 1 to 5 year-olds. Three AA batteries are included. Amazon sells it for \$32.98.



The [Visual Quiet Cloth Book](#) is a favorite because of the high contrast black and white designs, bright colors and crinkly texture that so many babies enjoy. Babies are born with blurred vision that typically develops over their first year of life (Premature babies' vision typically develops based on their due date.) The fabric book provides a contrast in colors that assist children with visual impairments. It stimulates children's brain and visual development.



This soft cloth book has six high contrast colors and nine different patterns that aid visual development in the early months. The different textures of fabrics are exciting to touch. The Visual Quiet Book is considered appropriate for birth to three year olds. It is available at Amazon for \$12.99.

Amy Nichols, Teacher of the Blind/Low Vision,
VIPS - Indiana

[Chuckle & Roar Pop It Braille Fidget and Sensory Toy](#)

makes learning the braille alphabet fun. This toy is a great way to expose our youngest braille learners, their siblings, and other family members to braille. Educators and the visually impaired collaborated on the product design and created two unique sides so everyone can enjoy the learning and sensory experience this Pop It provides. One side has the braille alphabet while the other side includes both braille and the letters A to Z in each bubble! It is suggested for ages three and up. It is lightweight for travel and washes easily with soap and water.

The Pop It is also great for developing other skills such as sensory regulation, fine motor coordination, finger strengthening (important for writing and using the Braille writer), finger isolation (index finger), bilateral integration (using both hands/sides of the body at the same time - requires both sides of the brain to communicate) and visual motor integration (eyes and hands working together).

Some fun ways to use the Pop It include:

- Put a small colored pom-pom into one of the Pop It wells, then pop it out and encourage your child to use her visual scanning skills to locate the pom-pom.
- Fill the Pop It with water in the pool or bathtub and pop or pour it out.
- Use a “tool” (spoon, fork, Q-tip) for popping (here’s a link to a video demonstrating this idea:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bs_eSeJLDt8

(VIPS teachers Kim Berghoff and Ashley Emmons also recommended this toy.)



**Lainie Reed, Kids Town Preschool Twos Teacher,
VIPS - Louisville**

From a teacher and a mom’s point of view, painting is so much fun but can be messy. I love the [Crayola Easy Clean Finger-](#)



paints (\$26.19 at Amazon) because the nontoxic paint is contained under a snap-on lid. The kiddos get to feel the paint and create without a mess to clean up afterwards. Open the top lid, insert the paper, squeeze the

paint, lock the lid and paint. The flexible covering allows kids to experience the tactile feel of finger painting without all the mess. Clean up is easy -- rinse the unit under the faucet!

The paints include three 5 ounce bottles of washable paints (yellow, red, and blue), 10 sheets of coated finger-painting paper and the washable paint unit. Additional Crayola washable fingerpaints and the fingerpaint pad are sold separately.

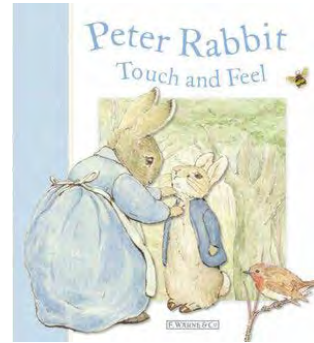
**Julia Sleder, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Developmental Interventionist, Kids Town Preschool Teacher
VIPS - Louisville**

[Learning Resources Wiggleworms!](#) encourage fine motor skills development along with color recognition and sorting skills. The basic Activity Set of 47 pieces includes four colors of worms that can be sorted into color-matched “corrals”, dig-

ging for worms while skipping the dirt. The included tri-grip tongs help develop pencil-grasping skills although the worms can be pulled out of their “soil” with fingers alone. The included spinner can be used as a sample for matching and as a game for more than one child. Wiggleworms! are suggested for children 3 years old and up. They are sold for \$23.50 by Amazon.



The *Tale of Peter Rabbit Touch and Feel* book (\$10.00 from [Seedlings](#)) is the classic tale of Peter



Rabbit, Flopsy, Mopsy and Cottontail written by Beatrix Potter but with a tactile twist, 11 different textures for little hands to explore. It contains ten cardboard pages and is suggested for ages 2-5. It also features pictures and contracted braille, encouraging pre-literacy braille skills. The same book is also available without textures in print and contracted braille (\$7.50 from Seedlings).

[Seedlings' Book Angel Program](#) is a fantastic small nonprofit organization that provides free and low-cost braille books to children in the U.S. and Canada. A simple registration and order form is available online. Five free braille books/calendar year are available although others can be purchased at very low cost. The available books are listed online. For more information, contact Seedlings at seedlink4@ameritech.net or call 800-777-8552 x307. Seedlings' TVIP Program provides five free books/calendar year to certified Teachers of Visually Impaired students in the U.S.

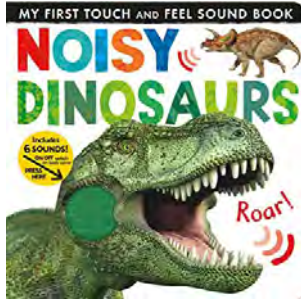
The [Seedlings Adopt-A-Reader](#) program allows children with vision loss, ages birth to 21 in Michigan, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio, to receive 10 free braille books of their choice each calendar year! A simple form can be completed online and Seedlings will match your child with one of their donors.

[Tiger Tales Dinosaurs](#) is an excellent tactile and auditory, book (\$7.99 Amazon). Touch, feel, and hear the dinosaurs in this interactive, sturdy board book that features appealing photo-real illustrations of dinosaurs, tactile textures, and exciting sounds. Press the touch-and-feels to hear five exciting sounds, with a button on the last page to play all five sounds again!



[Noisy Dinosaurs Board Book](#) is part of the My Touch and Feel Sound Books by Jonathan Litton. I find it an excellent re-

source for children age 3 and up because it appeals to so many senses: tactile, auditory, and touch. Children can feel the different textures of dinosaurs while hearing five exciting sounds and looking at the realistic illustrations of dinosaurs. (Be sure to notice the on-off switch on the back cover that extends the life of the battery.) The sturdy 12-page board book holds up well and is \$7.99 at Amazon.



**Leah Springer, Blind/Low Vision Specialist,
VIPS - Indiana**

The [Crayola Light-Up Activity Board](#) is a light box that encourages the development of shape recognition, color mixing, and creativity along with improving dexterity and solving problems. It provides colorful ways to play: constructing pictures with the 22 reusable colorful cling shapes, using the three included washable markers to color or build the cling shapes on the three Complete the Scene Transparency sheets, using the markers to color on the board itself, or pushing the button to change the light-up colors. There is built in storage for the markers and cling shapes for quick and easy cleanup and the artwork can be erased with a damp cloth. The board requires 3 AA batteries, not included. Order it from Amazon for \$19.11. (The light box is not as bright as the APH light box but it is still motivating to VIPS kids aged three and up.)



**Malinda Vogel, Kids Town Preschool
Classroom Assistant, VIPS - Louisville**

The [TOYPIX Music Mat for Toddlers](#) includes a musical mat with three interchangeable sound modes. This floor mat can be used as an electronic drum set, a dance mat with a drum arrangement and also makes animal sounds. Each sound mode can make seven different sounds. The mat is made of easy-to-clean, lab-tested non-toxic material and is lightly padded. Amazon sells the music mat for \$9.99.



**Tracy Webb, Developmental Interventionist,
VIPS - Louisville**

[Off to the Park!](#) by Stephen Cheetham is a tactile board book designed to be an interactive sensory experience for all children, including those with visual impairments and/or multiple disabilities. The pages contain tactile features, braille-style numbering, play elements, high-contrast images, and a rhythmic rhyming text. There is a wavy glitter path across the bottom of the page to encourage the development of tracking skills for both visual and tactile learners. Other tactile books in this series with similar features include [Off to the Beach!](#) and [Getting Ready](#). Suggested age for this book is birth and up. This book can be found on Amazon for \$12.70.



[Guidecraft Grippies Shakers](#) magnetic building sets include magnetic rods and metal ball connectors with soft molded plastic that promotes tactile exploration. Shakers come in varying sizes, textures, and sounds providing opportunities to strengthen eye-hand coordination, two-handed play, and understanding of big/little while providing auditory, tactile, and visual input. Sets vary in numbers of pieces with prices. Suggested age is 18 months and up. Grippies shakers can be bought online from Childcraft, Target, Macy's, and Amazon. The 20 piece set starts at \$54.45 at Amazon.

**Brittany Williamson, Teacher of the Visually Impaired
and Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist,
VIPS - Louisville**

[LED Light Up Pop Tubes](#) are a great sensory experience! They light up in rainbow colors and include an on/off switch that allows solid or flashing lights. The slinky stretchy tubes can be connected to one another and can be shaped into letters and shapes, encouraging development of fine motor skills or even used as a fidget toy for children and adults. These are great for students who have CVI as they have both light and sound qualities. Their uneven texture



and satisfying popping sound not only capture the child's attention but can provide needed stress relief. Frequently used as party favors and piñata fillers, these thick, durable plastic Montessori tubes can be worn as well as popped, stretched, pulled and bent. They are high quality BPA and lead-free plastic with child friendly edges. Tubes come with a two-year manufacturer's warranty. Many sellers offer the tubes but Amazon sells a pack of eight for \$9.97.

LED Light Up Shaker Maracas are a great find for students with CVI. They can change colors with each shake (all the colors of the rainbow!) or the color can remain the same solid color (red, yellow or blue). They are lightweight for little hands to be able to grasp; even a small shake activates the LED light inside. The handle contains an On/Off switch for power control while the "FUN" button toggles through the varied lighting modes. A removable battery compartment unscrews to replace the included LR44 batteries (3 batteries required per maraca). Amazon sells a pack of two maracas for \$16.99.



The **Early Learning Centre Little Senses Glowing Stacking Rings** is a shape sorter that is a great addition for many of our students because it not only includes lights and sounds but



each brightly colored ring has a different element that makes it either tactual or auditory. It is also a great size for little hands. This toy stimulates the senses and encourages hand/eye coordination, fine motor skills and problem-solving skills. The rings can double as a nightlight that provides ten minutes of soft, color-changing light. It is available on Amazon for \$19.99.

The **Toy Safety Straps** are AMAZING! They are great for keeping toys or cups near your child especially if she likes to toss items! They can be attached to highchairs, wheelchairs, strollers, etc. ...the options are endless! These straps have been a lifesaver in our preschool classroom, keeping pacifiers, sippy cups and toys off the floor and within easy reach! They are soft and won't hurt tender skin.

The straps are made of food-grade silicone and are washable and stretchable. They boast a slip-resistant rubber grip, just the right length to keep bottles and cups from falling far. If the straps become really dirty, just boil them in water or put them in a microwave oven. Toy Safety Straps are for sale at Amazon for \$10.99 for a pack of 5.



Kathy Mullen, VIPs Director of Education

There's one more item I would like our VIPs parents and caregivers to consider as they sprinkle their children with holiday gifts and love. That's the magical "All Done Basket"! What does it look like? You decide. How big is it? You decide. Does it have to be a basket? You decide. Can there be more than one? You decide.

The magic of the **All Done Basket** is simple: It gives a child with limited expressive language skills a way to end an activity they are not enjoying. In other words, it can replace crying or throwing of items. It gives the child control. Even if the VIPs child needs assistance with putting the object in the basket, the control is theirs. The magic continues with embedding the concept of "finished/end/over/ALL DONE" in a developmentally appropriate way. It introduces the concept of cleaning up when finished - not only a responsibility, but a recognition of how the child can be a helper, too! Finally, fine motor skills are being reinforced as the child is learning to release an object into a target.

Your child's All Done Basket can be a box if you prefer. It can be any size. There can be as many as you like - one for each room (living room, bedroom, bathroom) and one for different activities (think bath time). They can be purchased (plastic or canvas storage totes) or recycled boxes (Amazon delivery boxes or tissue boxes)! You may even want to consider a portable/foldable All Done Basket to add to your diaper bag.

The All Done Basket really is a gift for the whole family!!

Have a Multisensory Holiday Season

By Pauletta Feldman, Special Projects, VIPs - Louisville
(Reprinted from VISability, 36/3, 2020)

Christmas has always been my favorite holiday. But when I became the parent of a child with no vision, the holidays were not the same. I'd feel crushed, watching my baby missing the things that my sighted children were so excited about and enjoying so much. It was all so visual and he seemed so left out.

When I learned how to make the holidays a multisensory feast for my child, my own enjoyment returned. We focused on bringing the spirit, sounds, smells, tastes and touch of the season to life and forged a whole set of holiday traditions for our child and family that have lasted a lifetime.

If you, like me, have a child with little or no vision, you might find that focusing on the multisensory features of the season will make holidays merrier for your whole family. For your little one who is visually impaired, they will provide so many fun and

learning opportunities, and for the adult your child will become, they will provide wonderful memories and a pattern of loving interactions to carry into his or her own family some day.

Even though the following suggestions are geared to Christmas, most are applicable for those celebrating the wonderful holidays of other faiths and traditions, as well.

Fill your home with the tastes and smells of the season (see recipes below). Bake cookies and make candies. Prepare special dishes and meals that your child will learn to associate with the holidays and look forward to year after year. Burn scented candles. If your child is not allergic, use a seasonal, scented soap for bath time. Involve your child in the baking and cooking process. Help him scoop flour and sugar, smell spices, taste individual ingredients, grind nuts and spices, roll dough into logs or balls, grease cookie sheets and baking pans with butter, and help clean up and wash dishes after. Let her taste dough or batter not made with eggs, and compare the textures and flavors of foods when unbaked and baked. Do the same with uncooked and cooked vegetables and fruits. Make scented ornaments for the tree!

Take your child Christmas tree shopping. Even if you use an artificial tree, or your faith tradition does not include celebrating Christmas, going to a tree lot offers great multisensory learning opportunities. There is the feel of excitement among the shoppers; the crisp, cold air; music playing; and the wonderful aroma of the trees. There are many types of trees, with different names, needles of different lengths and thickness, and varying branch structures. Some trees are fat, some are short, some are soft, and some are prickly. (Be sure to follow COVID safety precautions when outside the home.)

When decorating the tree, let your child help. Let her tactually explore ornaments. Tell stories about ones that are special – e.g. baby's first Christmas, ones that have been gifts from loved ones and friends, ones that have been purchased while on vacation or for special occasions. Decorate her room with lights and maybe even her own tree. Have a tactual Christmas countdown calendar – we used to have one that was a big Santa face painted on a piece of wood, with nails, numbered 1-25, placed throughout Santa's beard, from which Life Savers candies dangled. On the first day of December, my son got to hang the Life Savers on Santa's beard (a great fine motor activity); then he got to remove and eat one each day of the countdown!

Fill your home with happy sounds of the season. Musical decorations or toys that only come out during the holidays will always be cherished and awaited with anticipation. [Musical Christmas lights](#) are available from Target, Walmart and Amazon. There are musical ornaments as well. Sing songs of the season. Use props (jingle bells, carrot nose, etc.) as you sing. Visit loved ones and friends and sing at their doors, or walk your neighborhood Christmas caroling for your neighbors. You can carry a bag of props with you, so your child(ren) can put on a little show as they sing – red nose, top hat, jingle bells, baby doll, robe for Mary or Joseph or a Wise Man, wings for an angel.

Label your child's stocking with braille or a special tactile symbol. Wrap his presents in different textured fabrics and label them with a tactile symbol, a jingle bell, or a scented ornament to add to the fun. And, if possible, put his name in braille on them (your VIPS teacher can help with this). Use a noisemaker under the tree near his presents so that he can find them himself, or select a spot under or near the tree that will always be where his presents are placed. And don't forget to help your child learn the joy of giving as well as receiving. Wrapping presents offers opportunities to work on a variety of fine motor skills –cutting with scissors, folding, taping, tying -- and concepts of putting the gift **in** the box or bag, putting a bow **on top**, placing presents **under or beneath** the tree,

As the mother of a 38-year-old former VIPS child, I can say that one of the best gifts I've been given in this life, is the necessity of learning to see the world in a new way through my child. From my family to yours, wishing you wonderful holidays filled with the goodness of things to see, hear, smell, touch and taste!!

Easy Mint Candies*

1 lb. confectioner's sugar
 ¾ stick (6 T.) butter
 2 T. milk or half-and-half
 1 t. peppermint extract

Blend first three ingredients together and add peppermint extract. Divide into four parts. Roll into little logs and slice. You can texture the mints by pressing them with a fork or shape them into smooth, flat coins. Your child can help make these candies, even if in a high chair or wheelchair – spread candy mixture on the tray and let her roll and shape them (and of course, taste!).

**Recipe from Mary Ann Reynolds, Visually Impaired Program Specialist, Jefferson County Public Schools, and mother of former VIPS child Ashley, now 35 years old.*

Spicy Applesauce Ornaments*

¾ c. ground cinnamon
 1 c. applesauce
 1 T. ground nutmeg
 1 T. ground allspice
 1 T. ground cloves

Let your child help make dough by mixing ingredients. Roll out the dough to a 1/4-inch thickness (dust table top and rolling pin with cinnamon to prevent sticking). Let your child use cookie cutters to cut Christmas shapes out of the dough. Place shapes on waxed paper and poke a hole in the top of each shape. Allow ornaments to air-dry for several days (or bake them on a cookie sheet for several hours at 250 degrees). Turn the shapes over to prevent curling. To complete the spicy ornaments, tie on loops of ribbon or yarn for hangers, decorate with gilt paint or glitter, or glue on silver balls and/or red hots.

**Recipe from Joy Stelly, mother of former VIPS child Christopher, who is now 29 years old.*

For the Crafter In You!

Make some tactile gifts for your child

The ideas below are not really difficult or expensive to create and they can provide so much enjoyment for your child.

Advent Calendar

<https://pin.it/AkLUoP3>

What you will need:
A piece of solid color flannel for background 36" x 52"; Felt in a variety of colors; Glue; Scissors; Threads; Embellishments.

Cut out 24 pockets, number them and sew/glue them onto the background. Cut out a felt Christmas Tree. Cut out felt shapes for ornaments and embellish them. Tuck them into the pockets at the bottom.

Each day, let your child pull the one corresponding to the date out of its pocket and "stick" it on the Christmas tree. Below are some links to patterns and instructions for some felt ornaments (very simple to a bit more complex). This project would be fun to make with an older child(ren).



<https://pin.it/4zS77zK>

<https://pin.it/OP8nCwp>

<https://pin.it/2Ps5Z40>

<https://pin.it/1xG0ygl>

Quiet Books

If you are a fan of Pinterest, there is a wealth of information and ideas about making Quiet Books. These are books made (mostly) from felt and have moveable parts that are also made of felt. They can have themes, such as color matching or counting or activities of daily life. Just go to Pinterest and search quiet books and you will be hooked!

These little books help your child development of concepts, encourage tactile exploration, and foster use of imagination.

This is a darling book about cooking breakfast! Check out the link for how to's:

<https://www.imagineourlife.com/patterns/Cooking-Breakfast-Pattern.pdf>



A little book about making a pot of vegetable soup would be fun. Let your imagination run wild. You could make a page with removeable carrots "growing" underground, and others with peppers and tomatoes "growing" on plants, and drumsticks on a chicken. Maybe a page for a kitchen cabinet shelf with stacked soup bowls and another with a table to set with bowl, napkin, and spoon. Possibilities are only limited by your imagination.



Below are ideas for a camping book. <https://quietbookblog.blogspot.com>



This cute ladybug is a great way to teach counting! Her spots pull out of the slit of her wings. The pages could challenge the child to put the correct number of spots on the ladybug.

<https://pin.it/6UEkWK3>



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Texture Matching Game

It can be simple and cheap to make some fun matching games for your child.

Use standard index cards and collect fabrics of varying textures (velvet, burlap, flannel, wool, cotton, brocade, satin, fake fur); you could also use textured papers.

Take the number of index cards for which you have different fabrics (10 cards for 10 fabrics). Draw a dark line down the center of each of these cards. Cut out two 3" squares of each texture. On the left side of each card, glue a textured square; leave the right side blank.

Cut 3.5" squares from other index cards and glue one of each of the textured pairs onto it. Lay the cards needing a mate on the floor or the child's tray. Put the smaller 3.5" squares of fabric-covered cardboard into a bag or spread on the floor and have your child draw one and make a match by laying the small square onto the empty right hand side of the matching index card.

Item counting and matching game

Gather 10 each of a variety of tactile items that you can glue **firmly** onto a piece of cardboard (pennies, acorns, tiny pinecones, small shells, macaroni, beans, 1" squares of sandpaper, etc.). Cut cardboard into 2" x 5" strips; you can use different colors of posterboard/matboard for contrast or interest.

On each strip, glue 1 to 5 of the same item. Place 5 of each of the remaining items in the wells of an egg carton or ice cube tray. Let the child select a card, count and identify the items on it (i.e. 4 beans), and then find and pull a matching

number of beans (4) from the well in the egg carton. This can be a fun game to play with siblings who can be blindfolded and try to tactually identify and locate matching items.

Inclusive Wrapping Paper

VIPS teacher, Ashley Emmons, found that Target has wrapping paper that is inclusive of children and adults with disabilities!! A 55-sq. ft. roll is \$3.



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