

What To Pack in an Operation Christmas Child Shoebox



A “Wow” Item (choose 1)

Every shoebox needs one special item the child will take out and start playing with immediately. [Operation Christmas Child’s website](#) refers to this as A “Wow” Item. Here are some items that brought the biggest smiles as reported by shoebox distributors.

1. **Soccer ball** – Deflate the ball and include a manual pump. This allows plenty of room to pack additional items and the pump is a useful gift as well.
2. **Flashlights with extra batteries** – Distributors reported kids immediately taking flashlights out of boxes and happily shining them all around the room. They absolutely love them! Be sure to select a sturdy, bright light and long lasting batteries. LED flashlights are a great choice.
3. **Dolls or stuffed animals** – Even though one expert did not recommend stuffed animals, many others did. Some of the most loved stuffed animals included horses, ponies, and even a chicken! Dolls with light brown skin and no hair are also great choices.
4. **Large toy car** – This is a great item to include in a box for a younger boy. Boys love cars!
5. **Musical Instrument** – In every video I watched of children opening shoeboxes I could hear musical instruments being played in the background. Excellent choices include recorders, slide whistles, and harmonicas.

Toys (include 2-3)

Once you’ve selected your Wow Item, be sure to include a few smaller toys as well. Yes, these kids need useful, practical items, but they are kids. You don’t want them to feel disappointed when the other children around them all seem to have toys. Select 2-3 inexpensive, smaller toys from this list.

1. **Foam ball or small bouncy balls**
2. **Small frisbee**
3. **Small Etch-A-Sketch**
4. **Marbles**
5. **Hacky sack**
6. **Toy cars** – These were suggested by every expert I read!
7. **Finger puppets**
8. **Slinky**
9. **Plastic toys and figures** – Avoid soldiers or anything war-related.
10. **Small Lego set**

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Personal Care Items (include 3-5)

These items are useful luxuries in many countries. Include 3-5 of them in your shoebox.

1. **Hairbrush or comb** – folding hair brushes can be found at stores like **The Dollar Tree**. Takes up less space in the box and protects the bristles of the brush.
2. **Toothbrush** – Consider including a cover or toothbrush holder. Many recipients won't have a nice bathroom cabinet for sanitary storage.
3. **Bar soap** – Avoid strong smelling deodorant soaps. The scent tends to permeate everything in the box. **Ivory brand soap is recommended because of its mild smell and also because it floats. Floating soap** is handy when you bathe in a stream! Including a **soap cover is also a good idea**.
4. **Washcloth or towel** – Soap can be wrapped inside of a washcloth and placed inside a plastic bag to help contain the scent.
5. **Adhesive bandages**
6. **Plastic dishes or containers with lids** – Cups, plates, utensils and containers made of thick, sturdy plastic are special and practical.



School Supplies (select 3-5)

1. **Wood Pencils, Wood colored pencils and a manual sharpener**
2. **Erasers**
3. **Pens and crayons**
4. **Notebook or journal**
5. **Solar powered calculator**
6. **Safety scissors**
7. **Ruler**

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Clothing & Accessories (include 1-2)

1. **Plain t-shirts** – Clothing should have no words or logos on it.
2. **Flip-flops**
3. **Wrist watch**
4. **Sunglasses**
5. **Hats**
6. **Princess crowns** – Little girls love princess crowns. Volunteers noticed several girls wearing crowns just minutes after opening the shoeboxes with huge smiles on their princess faces.
7. **Jewelry**
8. **Tote bag, purse, or backpack**
9. **Hair accessories** – clips, ribbons, elastic bands, bows, headbands
10. **Socks**
11. **Water Bottle** – Don't let the space inside the bottle go to waste. Fill it with items, pencils and the like.

Crafts & Activities (choose 1-2)

1. **Travel games** – Select games that are universally recognizable. Avoid complicated games with instructions in English only.
2. **Binoculars**
3. **Sewing kit** – Include thread, needles, safety pins, ribbon, elastic, even a yard or two of fabric. Use a small container to hold your sewing kit such as a used prescription medication bottle, a water bottle, a soap cover, or a small container with a lid.
4. **Playing cards**
5. **Jump rope**
6. **Coloring books** – The more generic the better. Don't include coloring books that tell a story in English only.
7. **Small tool set** – Perfect for older boys and useful, too.
8. **Rubber band bracelets** – This is a double-duty gift. Kids can wear them as jewelry or disassemble them and have lots of useful rubber bands.

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Pray and Personalize

Pray for the child who will receive your Operation Christmas Child Shoebox. Make a personal connection by including a photo, note, or a hand-drawn picture from your kids. Take the opportunity to make a child feel loved.

More Expert Tips:

The experts had lots of great advice about what not to include and tips for packing an Operation Christmas Child shoebox.

- **Remove packaging from all items inside your shoebox in order to maximize space and produce less garbage to dispose of.**
- Even hard candies were reported to melt during transit and created a sticky mess all over the other items in some shoeboxes. If you must include candy, Smarties are recommended. They don't melt and are small enough not to be a choking hazard.
- No fragile or cheap toys. If a toy is fragile enough to get damaged in transit or to break the first time it's played with, it isn't a good choice.
- **Water bottles are great to stuff with personal care items or school supplies.**
- **Pack small items inside plastic zipper bags. The items will stay contained, and the bags are useful as well.**
- Don't include anything with instructions only in English. Many of these gifts will be distributed in non-English speaking countries.
- Don't over-do the Christmas theme. While Samaritan's Purse collects most of these shoeboxes in November, they are actually distributed throughout the year.
- Place 1-2 large rubber bands around your finished shoebox. One distributor noticed it was much easier for the children to hold their boxes together with the rubber bands.
- Silly putty and Play-doh are **not recommended**. Most children had no idea what to do with the Silly Putty, and Play-doh is not a long lasting toy in many climates.
- **Include items for which boys and girls can make money for themselves and their family members:**
 - **Sewing kits – make your own**
 - **Clothes line and clothes pins**
 - **Fishing kits**
 - **Small tool kits**

Every Operation Christmas Child shoebox you pack should be something special. Try to include items from each section of the lists above. Most importantly, pray over your shoebox before sending it. Pray the child and his or her family is blessed with the love of Jesus Christ.