Resource Guide for Sustainable Gifting this Holiday Season

Especially Created for University of Washington (UW) Seattle Students and Family and Friends of UW Seattle Students

Created by Jasmine Lao with the UW PCC UCo | November 18, 2026

KEYWORDS: sustainable gifts, sustainable presents, economical gifts, budget gifts, specific gift ideas, gift-giving, presents, environmentally friendly, eco-friendly, environmentally conscious, eco-conscious, climate conscious, climate-considerate, green, ethical, affordable, free, inexpensive, Seattle, PNW, greater Seattle area, University of Washington, UW



Drone photo over the University of Washington's Quad in winter | Image credit to alanminimax, YouTube

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INTRODUCTION

You've probably heard all the reasons why you should give sustainable gifts a thousand times over, so we won't beat the dead horse.

You've also probably heard all the same broad suggestions for what kinds of sustainable gifts you can give (giving time instead of things, charitable gifts, gifting products from sustainable companies, etc.).

...But just in case you need a recap or even more ideas than what this guide provides, check out any of these excellent articles!

- "Student Voices: Gift Giving Guide to Green Your Holiday Season" by Kendall Colenbaugh on the University of Virginia Sustainability Blog
- "Our Guide to Sustainable Gifting: Ideas for Mindful and Ethical Gifts this Season!" by the University of Maryland Office of Sustainability
- "Sustainable Gift Guide" by the Chicago Environmentalists
- "The Dos and Don'ts of Sustainable Gift Giving" by Marley Flueger for Commons

Instead, this guide aims to give you specific suggestions if you're in the greater Seattle area and/or if you or your gift-receiver is a University of Washington (UW) Seattle student.

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As a little encouragement: a sustainable gift doesn't only have to mean the gift itself – it can be what you use to wrap the gift and how you got the gift! And while the ultimate goal is to tackle all these considerations, we know it's easier said than done. But a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, so start where you can! **Whether this means hand-making each and every gift, or wrapping your store-bought gifts in magazines/newspapers or putting them in old Amazon boxes instead of using the latest wrapping paper or tissue paper, you are still making a step in the right direction.**



"Magazine Gift Wrapping Ideas: Homemade gift wrap from cutout magazine pages" | Image credit to Aracely Arechiga on Pinterest

Remember, you can combine multiple ideas from this guide for one person.

Also, keep in mind that gift-shopping itself can be a fun gift! Grab a friend and take them to wander Pike Place (they have events late November and early December), the Fremont Bridge Market, or to go thrifting – and if you happen to pick up gifts for your other friends/family on the way, that's two birds, one stone.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide aims to combine all areas of sustainability, and the suggestions within each section are generally ordered by preference in which you choose the options.

These areas of sustainability are...
1) climate and environment considerations in how the gift was made and transported,
2) ethics in how the gift was made, and
3) your personal budget (as much as we wish otherwise, many sustainable alternatives are still more expensive than traditional options).

Use the table of contents above to jump to whichever section will be most useful to you!

You can also Ctrl+F (on Windows) or Command+F (on Mac) to quickly find specific suggestions you're looking for based on **KEYWORDS**. Try synonyms or simplifying your search if nothing's turning up!

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LOCAL EXPERIENCES AND ACTIVITIES

KEYWORDS: experience, activity, adventure, fun things to do, outdoors, outside, indoors, inside

Not all adventures need to be flashy or need a plane ticket!

Enjoy the Great Outdoors

In the greater Seattle area, we're spoiled by how close we are to the mountains – take advantage of it! Bring your loved ones to enjoy the fresh air together.



"Lenticular clouds over Mount Rainier, Washington" | Image credit to Delrious/Shutterstoc

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- Hiking or Camping

  These articles can be used as a jumping-off point for hikes close to Seattle, but we recommend exploring further! Especially in western Washington, you can pretty much just point on a map and find some trails near there.
  - "Hikes Within 30 Minutes of Seattle" by Washington Trails Association
  - "Best trails in Seattle" by AllTrails

  If you're going to state-managed lands (e.g. Washington State Parks) by car, you'll need to buy a Discover Pass online beforehand or on-site (with cash, at select locations).

  Don't have equipment or need a free Discover Pass?

  - Rent gear for all sorts of outdoor activities from UW's Gear Garage (UW students get a discount)

  - Borrow a Discover Pass from your Washington-state library (if you're an in-state resident).
    See if your local library is participating in this program through DiscoverPass.wa.gov's "Check Out Washington" page; if yes, search up "check out Washington" or "Discover Pass" in your library's website to check one out. Libraries lend out a Discover Pass and/or a full kit (see below picture) including a Discover Pass.



"Adventure Pack showing contents including binoculars and nature guides" | Image credit to Moments and Mountains Photo and Film

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    - See other free ways to visit through this article by DiscoverPass.wa.gov

    - See a more detailed list of where anyone (not just UW students) can rent gear from Washington Trail Association's "Where to Rent or Borrow Outdoor Gear" page

- Skiing or Snowboarding

  If it's your first time and you don't want to invest in skis or a snowboard, take a lesson and rent your gear directly from the ski area!

  Other places you can rent equipment:

    - Rent gear for all sorts of outdoor activities from UW's Gear Garage (UW students get a discount)

    - See a more detailed list of where anyone (not just UW students) can rent gear from Washington Trail Association's "Where to Rent or Borrow Outdoor Gear" page

- Spend a few hours at a self-guided ziplining and obstacle courses park – up in the trees!
  Search up "zipline and treetop adventures", "aerial adventure park", or "zipline and ropes course park" in your search engine (e.g. Ecosia or DuckDuckGo)

- Take a road trip to see the wonders of Washington State!
  Visit everything from sandy beaches and rocky coastlines, to forests and mountains, to Leavenworth (our "Bavarian Village"), to the boundless fields of eastern Washington, and to our state waterfall (Palouse Falls).

- Splurge on a paragliding session – the closest to UW is at Tiger Mountain in Issaquah, through Northwest Paragliding (next availability in May 2027)

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Stay Cozy Inside

Aside from potlucks or making meals together at home, there's plenty of things to do indoors!

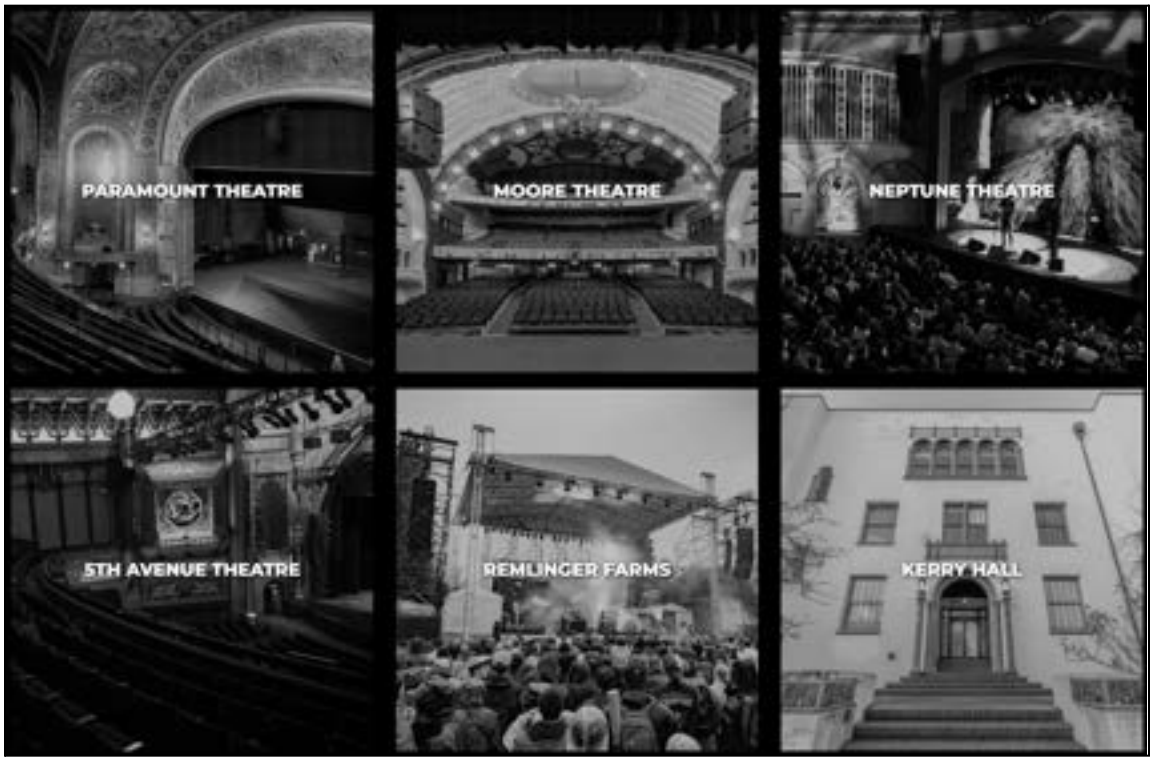
- Visit a local museum as a group
    - Museums so close they're basically on-campus:
        - Henry Art Gallery (free for ALL)
        - Burke Museum (free for UW students)
    - If you're a King County resident with a King County Library System card, you can book a free museum pass (see participating museums here)
    - If you qualify for a Pierce County Library, Tacoma Public Library, or Puyallup Public Library card, you can also borrow a free museum pass (see participating museums here)
    - UW students living in Seattle are eligible for a Seattle Public Library card and book free museum passes too (see participating museums here)
    - These King County museums are free for ANYONE!
    - If you're an **out-of-state student**, Jen33Travel has compiled a list of libraries in the U.S. that offer free museum passes
- Go pottery-painting
  The closest to UW is Paint the Town in UVil, but there are many other places.
- Go to a climbing gym (there's one on the Ave called Bouldering Project)

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- Seattle has a thriving music, performing arts, and sports scene.

  Grab some friends to catch a show at...

  - Neptune Theatre right in UDistrict
  - UW's very own Meany Hall
  - Climate Pledge Arena
  - Benaroya Hall
  - Lumen Field
  - Find events and venues through the Seattle Theatre Group!



Seattle Theatre Group venues | Image credit to stgpresents.org

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CRAFTS

KEYWORDS: craft, DIY, make, homemade, handmade, handmake, create, arts, cook, bake

Make your gift using tools at home or at makerspaces on campus (i.e. The MILL, The 8, or Area 01)!

The MILL and The 8 are open to all UW students for free, and Area 01 free for HFS residents or open to UW students for a fee; all locations are available to UW faculty/staff for a fee. Just make sure you've completed the user agreement and safety training quiz before going.

- Crochet/Knit
  Extra points for clothes, coasters, blankets, and bags that your gift-receiver can use, and not just stuffed animals (no matter how cute they are)



"Crochet Succulent Coasters in a Basket Pattern" | Image credit to MakeItYourselfPapari

- Make a scrapbook of your time together so far, a trip you made together, etc.
- Embroider their clothes, tablecloth, tote bag, etc.

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- Sew/mend their clothing or a tote bag



"Shopping Bag with Rope Handles" | Image credit to SewCanShe.com

- Weld (bookends, etc.)

- Woodwork/carve/whittle (bookends, bookmarks, mini statues, etc.)

- Paint/photograph something to hang in their home – a landscape or animal they love, a mashup using your knowledge of their interests, etc.



April Ludgate (Aubrey Plaza) holding up a gifted canvas of her and Andy Dwyer (Chris Pratt) declaring victory over the Black Eyed Peas. | Image from *Parks and Recreation*, created by Greg Daniels and Michael Schur

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Food-Related Homemade Ideas

- Blackberry jam from the multitudes of blackberry growing everywhere in the PNW
- Your prized sourdough starter (if anyone still does this)
- The recipe to your signature dish



George Cooper Sr. dedicating his all to preparing a brisket, while following (what he believes to be) his mother-in-law's prized brisket recipe | Image from *Young Sheldon*, created by Chuck Lorre and Steven Molaro

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THRIFT SHOPPING

KEYWORDS: thrift shopping, thrifting, shop, secondhand, flea market, clothes, clothes/clothing, buy, purchase

Thrift shopping is a great way to give clothes and household items a second life and keep them out of the landfill. For example, containers and household items you find can be cleaned up or repurposed into something else for your loved one.

If it's your first time or you're never successful on your trip, here's a short guide by Commons on how to make the most of your trip!

Still, thrifting for others can be hard, especially if you're trying to find secondhand clothes that your friend/family will love. Instead, **go thrifting together – if you each find something you love, buy it for each other**! It's a physical gift and memory bundled in one.

And even if you don't end up buying anything, it goes without saying that thrifting together is still a nice time to spend with friends/family.

- Some thrift shops and secondhand stores close to UW:
  - Goodwill (multiple locations, most convenient is the Capitol Hill location accessible by lightrail)
  - Red Light Vintage & Costume (on the Ave)
  - Lucky Dog (on the Ave)
  - Crossroads Trading Co. (on the Ave)

- Fremont Sunday Market (aka Fremont Bridge Market)
  (every Sunday, Nov. - Mar. | 10am - 4pm | under the Fremont Bridge)

  Enjoy music, food trucks, and the flea market! The Fremont Bridge offers some shelter from rain, while the patio heaters and lively energy keep you warm as you wander.

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BUYING A GIFT THROUGH MORE CONVENTIONAL MEANS

KEYWORDS: shop, store, buy, purchase, food, meal, book, secondhand, home goods, household item, clothes/clothing, underwear/underclothes, hygiene, hygienic care, cleaning supplies, cleaning products, gift card, local, convenient, convenience, easy gifts

When you think "buying sustainably", your mind might first jump to shampoo bars or beeswax food wraps, or ethnically-sourced products by small businesses. However, if your gift-receiver ends up never using that Swedish dishcloth or those fair-trade coffee beans, your gift might not be as appreciated as much, and your gift might not have the sustainable impact you intended.

Consuming sustainably comes down to whether your gift is thoughtful, used, and appreciated! So **buying something that isn't immediately environmentally-conscious but is often used or personally meaningful can still be a fantastic sustainable gift**.

Here's some specific gift item ideas and suggestions for where to go to buy something you already know your gift-receiver will love!

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Farmers' Markets

At your holiday get-together, a smaller, but still very thoughtful, gift you can bring are some local fresh fruits or a dip/spread!



Vendors and produce at the UDistrict Farmers' Market | Image credit to udistrictseattle.com

- UDistrict Farmers' Market
  (every Saturday year round | 9am - 2pm | University Way NE (aka the Ave) between NE 50th and NE 52nd)

- Capitol Hill Neighborhood Farmers' Market
  (every Sunday year round | 11am - 3pm | East Barbara Bailey Way)

- Ballard Farmers' Market
  (every Sunday year round | 9am - 2pm | Ballard Ave NW between 2nd Avenue NW to 20th Avenue NW)

- South Lake Union Farmers' Market
  (most Saturdays, last day this year on Nov. 21 | 10am - 3pm | 6th Ave between Bell Street and Lenora Street, next to Amazon's Spheres)

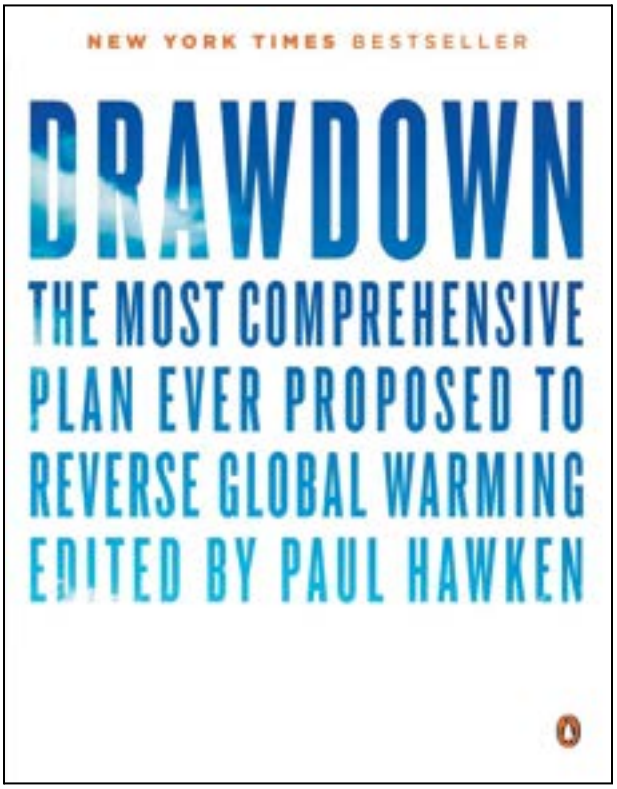
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Secondhand Books

Secondhand books make a great, thoughtful gift. Pair with a handwritten note on why you thought they'd appreciate the book and how much they mean to you!

The book can be from...

- You! Have a book a loved one would like? Gift it to them!
- Magus Books (on the Ave)
- Twice Sold Tales (Capitol Hill)
- Ophelia's Books (Fremont)
- (Secret Seattle lists more places near campus)



Cover of "Drawdown: The Most Comprehensive Plan Ever Proposed to Reverse Global Warming", edited by Paul Hawken | Image credit to drawdown.org

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Everyday Items

Notice your friend's everyday-use item is on its last life and they haven't gotten a new one yet? Preemptively buy them a new one before they do!

Examples include...

- Headphones or earphones
- Backpack
- Laptop case
- Computer mouse
- Pencil case
- Brita pitcher or just a pack of filters
- Portable power bank
- Replace their singular kitchen utensil (we see you) with a set of eating utensils, plates/bowls, etc.

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Decor, Underclothes, Hygiene Care, Cleaning Products, and Much More

Does your gift-receiver want something to spruce up their bare dorm/apartment walls, or are they in need of comfy home clothes and a new hygienic care product to get them through Winter quarter? Not only do these gift item ideas check all these boxes, but by buying these you'll help support independent creators and small businesses too! (And bonus points if you know the creators from YouTube or other social media.)

- UW Husky Union Building (HUB) Makersfair
  (Tues, Dec 1st – Thurs, Dec 3rd | 11am – 3pm | HUB Street/Lyceum)

- Pike Place Market (e.g. gift a stockpile of dried fruit as a healthy snack)

- "The Good News Book" filled with 2026's biggest success stories in clean energy, human health and rights, and ecological restoration – written by the Good News channel on YouTube.

  Sometimes we need a tangible way to remember all the good things happening in our world too! Perfect to brighten up a shelf or coffee table, and read (and/or look at the pretty pictures) when you need a break from doom-scrolling.

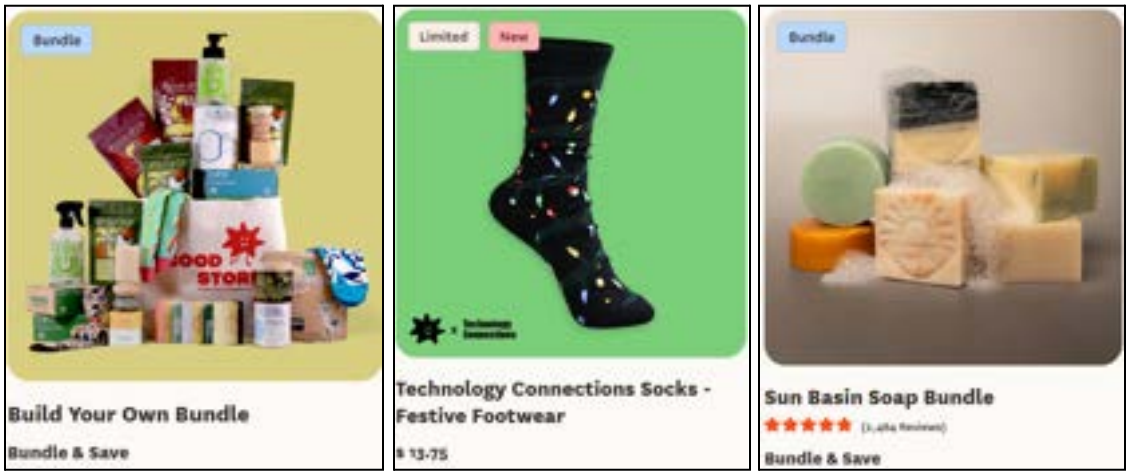


Mockup of a page in "The Good News Book" | Image credit to shop.good-news.io

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- Green and ethnically-made alternatives for tea, hygienic care, underclothes/socks, sleepwear, and cleaning products through Good.Store (Good Store was founded by Hank and John Green)

  Special mention to Awesome Socks Club – get a subscription for fun socks for the runner in your life who goes through socks fast

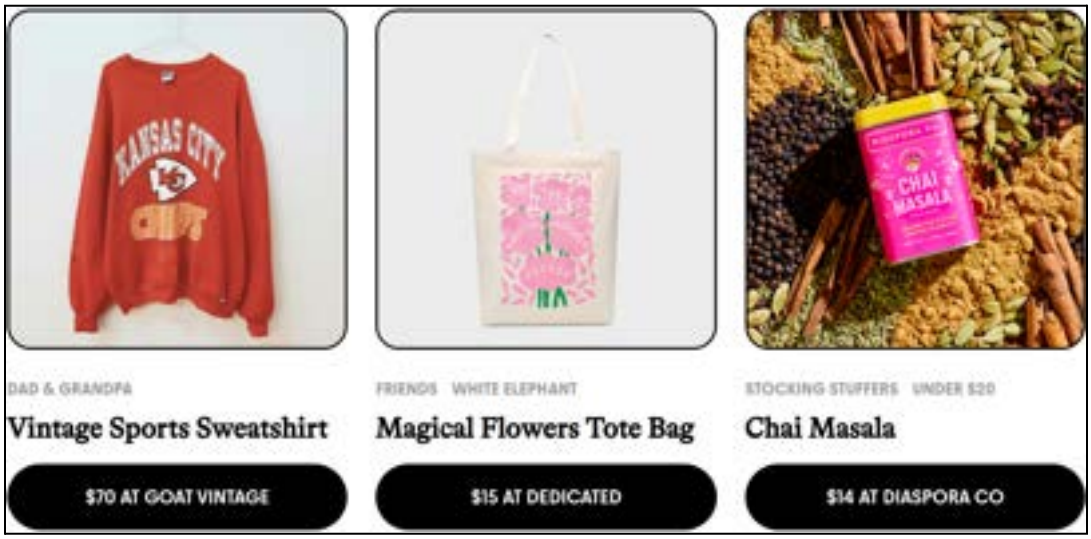


Examples of products found in Good Store | Image credits to good.store

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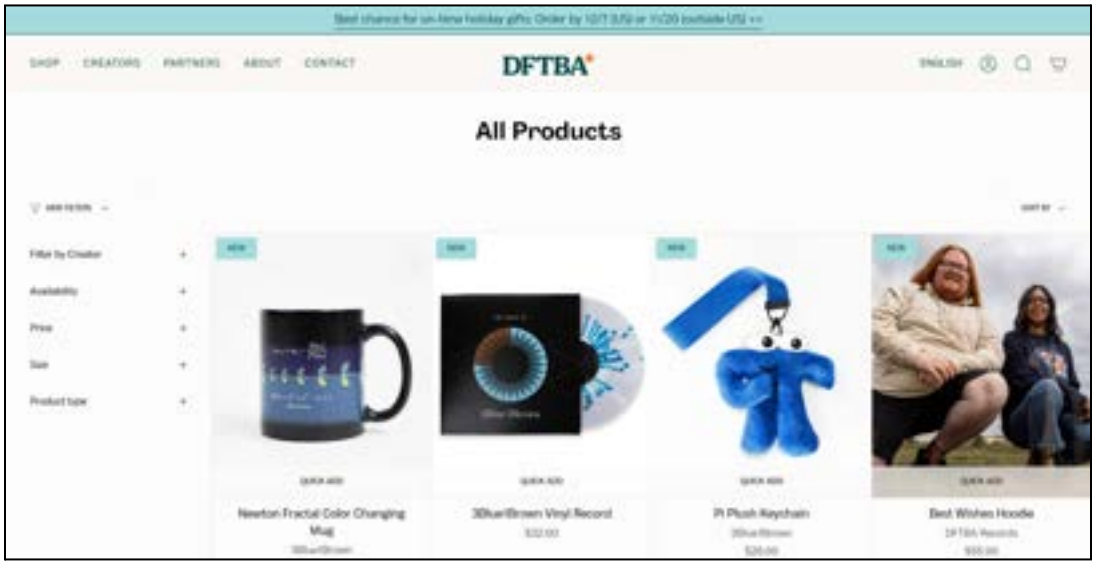
- A giant [collection] of green and ethnically-made alternatives for hygienic care, underclothes/socks, sleepwear, home goods, and physical games curated by Commons ([the Commons app])

  By the way, Commons also has an awesome [(short) article about charitable gifts] if you want to try something new this holiday season!



Examples of items listed on Commons | Image credit to Commons

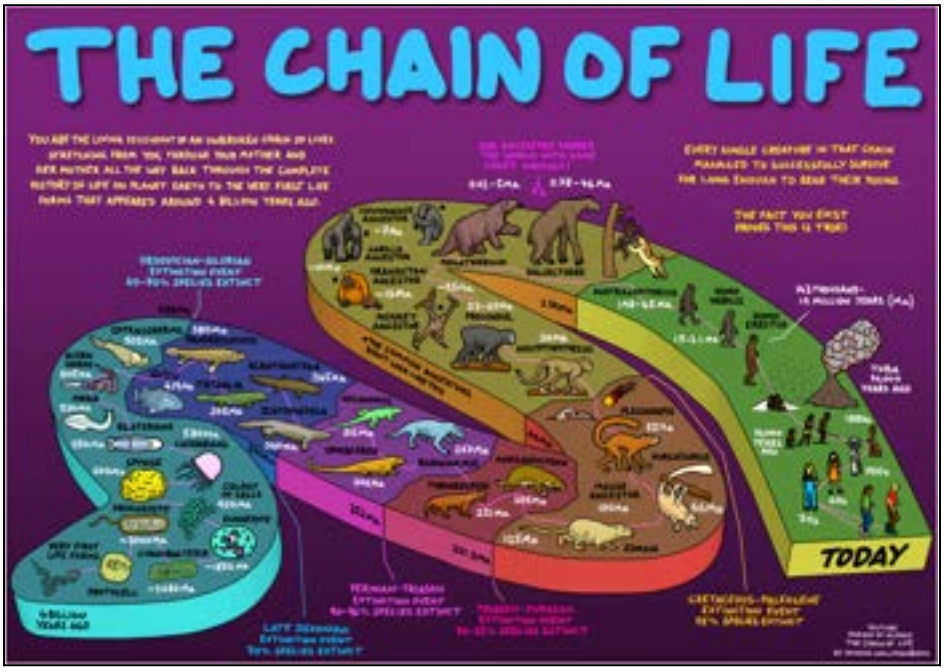
- Merch by MinuteEarth, CGP Grey, 3Blue1Brown, and MANY more through [DFTBA] (DFTBA is co-owned by Hank and John Green)



Opening “Shop” tab view in DFTBA website | Image credit to DFTBA

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- “Maps” of different STEM subjects by [Domain of Science]



Domain of Science’s “The Chain of Life” map | Image credit to Dominic Walliman

- Minimalist topographic & population density maps by [JerryThink]



JerryThink’s “Washington State Topographic Map: Black” | Image credit to JerryThink

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- Merch by [Natural Habitat]



Examples of merch by Natural Habitat | Image credit to Natural Habitat

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Gift Cards (yes, gift cards!)

If you know a UW student that needs that caffeine or sweet pick-me-up, or just should really stop living off of snacks, get them a local gift card!

Some businesses in UDistrict that offer gift cards include...

- Cafe Allegro
- Yan Tea
- Scorpio Cafe
- Sweet Alchemy Ice Creamery
- Portage Bay Cafe
- Trader Joe's (must buy in-store)
- Safeway
- HMart (must buy in-store)

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FOR STUDENTS STAYING ON CAMPUS WITHOUT A CAR

KEYWORDS: local, free, cheap, money, no car, travel, public transportation, transit, bus, train, lightrail, link, ferry, taxi, water taxi, out-of-state student, non-resident, non-Washingtonian, international student, foreign student

Aside from the suggestions in previous sections, here are some things to do if you're an out-of-state or international student in the Seattle area for Winter Break!

- Museums so close they're basically on-campus:
  - Burke Museum (free for UW students)
  - Henry Art Gallery (free for ALL)

- Use your U-PASS (included in your Husky Card) for a King County Water Taxi or Kitsap Fast Ferry ride



Still image of the Kitsap Transit System Map, which includes Fast Ferry routes | Image credit to kitsaptransit.com

- Use your U-PASS (included in your Husky Card) for transit to the Eastside

- Take the Washington State Ferry to Bainbridge Island

- Rent a car or book a rideshare to Anacortes, then take the Washington State Ferry to the San Juan Islands

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AI was not used for the writing or designing of this guide, including but not limited to the brainstorming, researching, gathering resources, writing, designing, or editing this guide.

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