



# Toys and Their Role in Creative Play



- 12 MOST-PLAY-FOR-THE-MONEY TOYS**
- Magnifying glass
  - Wood blocks
  - Inexpensive flashlight
  - Nesting toys—eggs, blocks
  - Large magnet
  - Take-apart trucks, houses
  - Bells, drums, other simple rhythm instruments
  - Bean bags, basket/bucket
  - Collection of old hats
  - Large wooden beads (to sort, string, count)
  - Tea set
  - Fabric for "tunnel"

## A parent's guide to children's play—and to the kinds of toys that make the most of it

By Mary Jean Pramik

Recently, scientists have begun to study children at play, looking at how it enhances a child's creativity and intellectual development. As part of this research, toys are undergoing new scrutiny: Which ones will give joy and encourage creativity?

### WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT PLAY

"On a certain level *all* play is creative," says Adele Eskeles Gottfried, Ph.D., professor of educational psychology at California State University at Northridge, Calif. Dr. Gottfried and her husband, Allen W. Gottfried, Ph.D., an associate professor of psychology and pediatrics at California State University at Fullerton, have studied the many aspects of play and toys. With two small children of their own, ages 5 years and 8 months, they understand well the questions parents have.

According to Adele Gottfried, *all* toys are creative and educational. "Children learn about the world through their exploration of toys."

She has observed that children who derive inner pleasure from play, whether with a toy or just a pot and pan, will get the most out of the experience. Look closely, but unobtrusively, at your children as they play,

she advises parents. Is the child attentive to the toy, persistently playing with it, actively manipulating it? If you can answer yes to these questions, then most likely that toy arouses your child's curiosity, and this will lead to what psychologists call cognitive development, or a learning experience. The more learning experiences, the more a child will be able to use these experiences creatively.

Fred Rogers, the originator of the TV series *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*, has pointed out that creative artists (painters, musicians, writers,

dancers) use play to create new works. Most successful business executives and scientists do too. Play becomes the process they use to find new combinations, new solutions to problems, and new inventions. And this is what your child is doing.

### BUILDING SELF-CONFIDENCE

Toys can also enhance a child's feeling of mastery of his world.

"The more responsive a toy is, the more the child feels in control over it," says Adele Gottfried. "One of the best first toys is a rattle—the child can roll it, shake it, bang it, turn it upside down, look all over it."

When buying a toy, ask yourself whether the child would receive feed-

*continued on page 128*

#### AT THIS AGE

- First weeks . . . . . Lots of love, cuddling, people's faces and voices
- At about 5 weeks . . . . . Mobiles, toys strung across crib, baby's own hands
- At about 3 months . . . . . Lots of stimuli: rattles, music, chimes; all sorts of shapes and colors, from balls, paper streamers, dolls, stuffed animals, cloth books
- At about 6 months . . . . . Bath toys, everyday objects (boxes, jars, bottles), toys that give lots of feedback (squeak when squeezed, etc.), blocks, balls, nesting toys, pop-up toys, ring toys, wheel toys, a safety mirror, baby's own cup and bowl
- At about one year . . . . . More elaborate toys—pull toys, push toys, fitting toys (hammer-peg toys, easy take-apart toys) for hand-eye coordination

#### BABIES RESPOND TO . . .





## TOYS AND THEIR ROLE IN CREATIVE PLAY

*continued*

toy. You're there to elaborate or show the child things about the toy."

Older sisters and brothers can also aid in creative play, says Robert Bradley. "One of the best ways to teach a child how to ride a bicycle is to have a slightly older sibling or friend show the younger child. He'll learn in about five seconds!"

### NONSEXIST TOYS

Traditionally, boys' toys have allowed the child to be more creative and original, but creative play, and toys enhancing creative play, should be available to *all* children, regardless of sex. Playing with a tea set will help a boy later in the boardroom. Playing with a fire truck and building blocks will help a girl get into the boardroom as an active participant, achieving and doing her active best.

### THE HAZARD OF TELEVISION

Television is odorless, tasteless, almost touchless. It is visual, yes, but studies point out that the thousands of hours youngsters spend in front of the television screen during their formative and creative years actually reduce active play.

Television does nothing to induce your child to discover, to learn on his own. When watching television, the child becomes "hypnotized," stops all movement. True play is active and interactive, with people or things. Except for a few programs, most "educational" TV programs stop play, and the imagination.

Teachers today have noticed children do not play as they once did—a certain passivity has set in. Dramatic play is not so dramatic. Imagination seems to be less imaginative. Most blame television for this turn of events.

Play experts advise a maximum of one hour of television per day for children of all ages. It may be a hard rule to enforce, but your child's resourcefulness, independence, and creativity may depend on it.

