***Title:*** *Creating Earth-Friendly Toys that Teach About Endangered Species*

**Project Description and Goals:**

This project aims to help children learn about endangered animals in an exciting and engaging way: through toys. There are many species that are at risk of becoming extinct, and it is vital for the future generation to understand the importance of conserving both the species and their habitats. The project brings together my interests in child development and learning, toys, and art design. It will give me the opportunity to work through the process of toy design, from conception to prototype.

My main goal is to create a collection of earth-friendly toys that each resembles a different endangered animal. For this project, I will create designs and prototypes of five endangered species toys. Each toy will be made out of sustainable materials, and designed to be appealing to children. I will create posters with information about the species, their habitats, and why they are facing the threat of extinction. My hope is to create toys that are appealing and help children to learn and care about wildlife and habitat conservation from a young age.

The project will involve research on several topics, including endangered species and their habitats. Based on this research, I will select five endangered species from various ecosystems around the world. Preliminary investigations suggest the following species as possible ones to further explore: Vacquita, Javan Rhino, Saola, Amur Leopard, Irrawaddy Dolphin, and Sumatran Elephant. I will also conduct research on different approaches towards animal representation in toys and popular media. Next, I will examine studies of children’s reception to animal toys and what makes them appealing. Finally, I will search for materials that are eco-friendly and can be effectively used to create toys.

The next step in the project is the design and making of the prototypes. I will work to create prototypes that are representative, capturing the essence of each animal. They should also have visual and sensory appeal, and be enjoyable for children to play with. In the final stage of the project, I will create posters or postcards that could be packaged with each toy. These materials will provide information about each animal, for example; fun facts, their habitat, and their role in their ecosystem.

**Project Significance:**

My project is driven by a passion for informing people about the threat of extinction faced by many of Earth’s species. I believe that there is not enough awareness of the scope and seriousness of the problem, with over 42,100 species being classified as endangered. Representing endangered species in the form of toys provides a way for children to connect with these animals, many of which are not familiar to them. By bringing perspectives from child development and learning into the project, I hope to create toys that are appropriate and effective in teaching children. Since most toys on the market are not made with eco-friendly materials, I hope that the designs and prototypes I create will be useful in showing that it is possible to create toys that are appealing and eco-friendly.

**Methodology:**

Research and identify five endangered species as the focal points of the educational toy collection. Evaluate each species’ significance in biodiversity conservation efforts.

* Done, need to edit the text though

Explore sustainable, functional, sensorially enriching, and aesthetically pleasing materials for the production of the toys. Materials that are eco-friendly and made with ethical standards will be prioritized.

* This is more complicated than it sounds. I found websites offering sustainable alternatives to plastic, such as biodegradable plastic or wood-plastic. I also considered wood, as it is an all natural material and also deemed as better for development. However, it is not viable to use wood, as it would still need to be carved, which takes more labor, and ultimately leads to very expensive wooden toys. In theory, I would like these animal toys to be made with biodegradable plastic that allows the product to be available to a wide range of socio-economic statuses. The biodegradable plastic toys, when thrown away, would be able to break down into natural materials, lessening pollution.

Research animal representation in toy design and other media, and use this information to develop an aesthetic for the toys that are realistic, but also inspiring and allowing children to use their imagination.

* There were many factors to consider in the design of the animals. Through research I discovered that the more human traits an animal character has, the less children will associate it with real animals, instead thinking of the character as a person. Anthropomorphic animals have stood the test of time and remain popular to this day, but I needed my characters to be both engaging and educational. To maximize appeal, the toy figurine was created in a cute chunky aesthetic, but still retains most of the animals’ characteristics, with only the expressions being more people-like.

Detailed prototypes will be designed, and will be refined for optimal appeal and educational functionality.

* Rhino and elephant are done, they need to be painted next

Comprehensive educational materials will be developed to accompany the toys. These materials will promote awareness about endangered species in an engaging, informative way that will enhance the learning experience of children.

* Studies show that children in the target age demographic (7 to 12 year olds) enjoy collecting and completing sets of various objects. It is satisfying to them. Trading cards are a good way to appeal to kids, as they want to complete their set. Using Pokemon cards as inspiration, I created trading cards for each of the animals, including their ‘stats’ and other information.
* The prototype figurines are very stylized, though realism helps children learn and associate characters with real life animals. I’m not sure where to add in my realistic illustrations, but I want to include them for the sake of education. However, part of the appeal of trading cards like Pokemon is that they have cute, visually appealing designs. Unsure of where to go from here, I decided to create both realistic and stylized trading cards for each of the chosen animals. These designs can be rated by children for both cuteness and education, but ultimately the kids will decide which trading card format, stylized or realistic, is more appealing to them.
* A primary concern of mine is that all of my text won’t fit onto a singular trading card. I will consider only including the most crucial information on the trading cards, and then also including a tiny ‘guidebook’ that shows the rest of the information, along with a glossary.

Preliminary packaging and marketing strategies will be identified in order to effectively show not only the inspiring quality of the toy collection, but also its educational and environmental value. This packaging will not only highlight the importance of animal and habitat conservation, but also resonate with children and their parents.

* I wanted to create sustainable packaging, but this presents the same problem as the material of the toys: there is no realistically sustainable alternative. Ideally, I would use one that is made from 100% recycled material.

**Timeline:**

January: *Research*

* Research endangered species and their habitats
* Understand animal representation in toy design to ensure they are appealing to children
* Research materials for sustainable toy production

February: *Design*

* Sketch and design prototypes to help visualize ideas
* Obtain feedback and revise prototypes to make sure they align with the objectives of the project
* Obtain sustainable materials in preparation for creating the prototypes

March: *Prototyping*

* Create the physical prototype of each animal
* Receive feedback and do revisions to address any issues

April: *Educational Materials*

* Develop materials that educate children about the endangered animal in a fun, engaging way
* Receive feedback and revise educational materials to guarantee that they are informative for children

May: *Finalization*

* Create presentation materials that showcases the project
* Develop packaging/an effective way to present the toys to viewers

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