



## TOYS

Toys and children go hand-in-hand. When we think of one, we automatically think of the other. Toys have been part of society since recorded time. Toys have been found at archeological sites related to the Egypt of the Pharaohs, the city-states of Greece, and the Roman Empire. Dolls, marbles and hoop-and-stick games seem to be the toys found in every civilization. Toys and children share special relationships.

Toys help children grow physically, mentally and emotionally. Playing with toys builds coordination and agility. Toys help children's brains and bodies grow as they solve problems and concentrate on improving skills. Sharing toys allows children to learn empathy for others and how to resolve conflicts. Toys support the development of imagination, reinforce creativity, and assist in mastering new concepts. Literacy, story-telling and communications skills are all involved in playing with toys, especially when children play together. Toys help children develop an awareness of the world they live in and how people act and interact in that world. Toys open the door to understanding our modern complex world.

For most of recorded time, toys have helped to teach children how to be good adults. Because of this, toys have traditionally been identified with either girls or boys. We call this being **gender specific**. Dolls, marbles and hoop-and-stick games are associated with every society and era in history. Dolls helped to teach girls how to be caring mothers. Marbles taught boys strategy and planning and, with hoop-and-stick games, improved their hand-eye coordination and physical conditioning. Until recently, toys have been gender-specific and have been used to teach the skills needed to be successful adults.

The kinds of children's toys have not varied much over the centuries. The principal differences appear to be the materials from which toys have been constructed and the number of toys available at any given time. Marbles in the ancient world were made of hardened and fired clay. Wood and wax were the primary materials used to make dolls. As society expanded, so, too, did the technology and availability of toys.

As urbanization and specialization began to emerge in the Late Middle Ages, toy construction became more sophisticated as well. Wooden horses, knights, and wooden images of monarchs were popular, while iron bands began to replace the wooden hoops of earlier days. The Early Modern Era brought dolls with porcelain or "china" heads and hands along with a proliferation in the numbers and availability of marbles. The changes that came with the Industrial Revolution brought changes in toys as well.



The coming of the industrialization affected toys in a positive fashion. Mass production created more toys, more cheaply while improvements in transportation allowed for their wider distribution. Dolls remained popular, but they now had moveable arms and legs. The game of “Jax” for girls began to rival the popularity of marbles for boys. Model trains, tin cars and building sets became “must-have” toys for boys at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Erector sets, Lincoln Logs and “American Bricks” allowed children to imitate the expanding urban world around them. As the 1920s and ‘30s arrived, glass marbles in a wide variety of colors and types emerged as did die-cast models of planes and cars. For girls, the Raggedy Ann doll arrived in the 1910s. Dollhouses became more complex. Model kitchens and model ovens, popular since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, changed to reflect the advent of electricity. “Easy Bake” ovens were immensely popular throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Dolls became more complex highlighted by the addition of eyes that opened and closed, and “walking-talking” features as the century progressed.

Electronic games have dominated the innovation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As our society becomes increasingly dependent upon computers and cell phones, children’s toys have become more electronically oriented as well. Electronically enhanced dolls remain the most popular toys overall. Six of the top ten toys of 2012 were dolls of some sort. Electronic games offered two of the remaining four best sellers. Marbles have been replaced by computer games like “Angry Birds,” which, when you think about it, is the same as marbles, but played electronically. The final two most popular toys were building toys (Lego sets). Today’s toys appear to be not that much different from those of ancient times. The principal differences between the two eras seem to be technological advancement, not change in preferences.

Toys and children go hand-in-hand. Children play with toys, and, as they play, they grow physically, mentally and socially. Toys both entertain and teach. The types of toys have not really changed over time, while the availability, composition and complexity has increased dramatically. Toys are important for children, for parents and for society in general.