



TOYS

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 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 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 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. 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.

The Early Modern Era brought dolls with porcelain or "china" heads and hands along with a proliferation in the numbers of marbles. Mass production in the Industrial Age created more toys, more cheaply, while improvements in transportation allowed for their wider distribution.

Electronic games have dominated the innovation of the 21st century. Six of the top ten toys of 2012 were electronic dolls of some sort. Electronic games offered two of the remaining four best sellers. "Angry Birds" has replaced marbles, 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 similar to 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 have increased dramatically. Toys are important for children, for parents and for society in general.