

# Toy

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A **toy** is an item that is generally used for children's play. Playing with toys is supposed to be an enjoyable means of training young children for life in society. Different materials like wood, clay, paper, and plastic are used to make toys. Many items are designed to serve as toys, but goods produced for other purposes can also be used. For instance, a small child may fold an ordinary piece of paper into an airplane shape and "fly it." Newer forms of toys include interactive digital entertainment. Some toys are produced primarily as collector's items and are intended for display only.

The origin of toys is prehistoric; dolls representing infants, animals, and soldiers, as well as representations of tools used by adults are readily found at archaeological sites. The origin of the word "toy" is unknown, but it is believed that it was first used in the 14th century. Toys are mainly made for children.<sup>[1]</sup> The oldest known doll toy that has been found is thought to be 4,000 years old.<sup>[2]</sup>

Playing with toys is important when it comes to growing up and learning about the world around us. Younger children use toys to discover their identity, help their bodies grow strong, learn cause and effect, explore relationships, and practice skills they will need as adults. Adults on occasion use toys to form and strengthen social bonds, teach, help in therapy, and to remember and reinforce lessons from their youth.



A variety of traditional wooden Channapatna toys from India

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## History

Most children have been said to play with whatever they can find, such as sticks and rocks. Toys and games have been unearthed from the sites of ancient civilizations. They have been written about in some of the oldest literature. Toys excavated from the Indus valley civilization (3010-1500 BCE) include small carts, whistles shaped like birds, and toy monkeys which could slide down a string.<sup>[3]</sup>

The earliest toys are made from materials found in nature, such as rocks, sticks, and clay. Thousands of years ago, Egyptian children played with dolls that had wigs and movable limbs which were made from stone, pottery, and wood.<sup>[4]</sup> In Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome, children played with dolls made of wax or terracotta, sticks, bows and arrows, and yo-yos. When Greek children, especially girls, came of age it was customary for them to sacrifice the toys of their childhood to the gods. On the eve of their wedding, young girls around fourteen would offer their dolls in a temple as a rite of passage into adulthood.<sup>[5][6]</sup>



Little horse on wheels, Ancient Greek child's toy. From a tomb dating 950-900 BCE, Kerameikos Archaeological Museum, Athens

The oldest known mechanical puzzle also comes from Greece and appeared in the 3rd century BC. The game consisted of a square divided into 14 parts, and the aim was to create different shapes from these pieces. In Iran "puzzle-locks" were made as early as the 17th century (AD).

## Enlightenment era

Toys became more widespread with the changing attitudes towards children engendered by the Enlightenment. Children began to be seen as people in and of themselves, as opposed to extensions of their household and that they had a right to flourish and enjoy their childhood. The variety and number of toys that were manufactured during the 18th century steadily rose; John Spilsbury invented the first jigsaw puzzle in 1767 to help children learn geography. He created puzzles on eight themes - the World, Europe, Asia, Africa, America, England and Wales, Ireland and Scotland. The rocking horse (on bow rockers) was developed at the same time in England, especially with the wealthy as it was thought to develop children's balance for riding real horses.<sup>[7]</sup>

Blowing bubbles from leftover washing up soap became a popular pastime, as shown in the painting *The Soap Bubble* (1739) by Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin. Other popular toys included hoops, toy wagons, kites, spinning wheels and puppets. The first board games were produced by John Jefferys in the 1750s, including *A Journey Through Europe*.<sup>[8]</sup> The game was very similar to modern board games; players moved along a track with the throw of a dice (a teetotum was actually used) and landing on different spaces would either help or hinder the player.<sup>[9]</sup>

In the nineteenth century, the emphasis was put on toys that had an educational purpose to them, such as

puzzles, books, cards and board games. Religiously themed toys were also popular, including a model Noah's Ark with miniature animals and objects from other Bible scenes. With growing prosperity among the middle class, children had more leisure time on their hands, which led to the application of industrial methods to the manufacture of toys.<sup>[9]</sup>

More complex mechanical and optics-based toys were also invented. Carpenter and Westley began to mass-produce the kaleidoscope, invented by Sir David Brewster in 1817, and had sold over 200,000 items within three months in London and Paris. The company was also able to mass-produce magic lanterns for use in phantasmagoria and galanty shows, by developing a method of mass production using a copper plate printing process. Popular imagery on the lanterns included royalty, flora and fauna, and geographical/man-made structures from around the world.<sup>[10]</sup> The modern zoetrope was invented in 1833 by British mathematician William George Horner and was popularized in the 1860s.<sup>[11]</sup> Wood and porcelain dolls in miniature doll houses were popular with middle class girls, while boys played with marbles and toy trains.

## Mass market

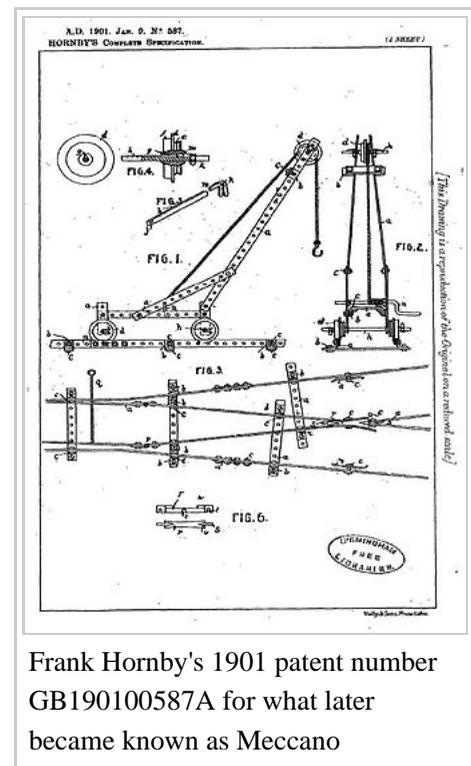
The golden age of toy development was at the turn of the 20th century. Real wages were rising steadily in the Western world, allowing even working-class families to afford toys for their children, and industrial techniques of precision engineering and mass production was able to provide the supply to meet this rising demand. Intellectual emphasis was also increasingly being placed on the importance of a wholesome and happy childhood for the future development of children. William Harbutt, an English painter, invented plasticine in 1897, and in 1900 commercial production of the material as a children's toy began. Frank Hornby was a visionary in toy development and manufacture and was responsible for the invention and production of three of the most popular lines of toys based on engineering principles in the twentieth century: Meccano, Hornby Model Railways and Dinky Toys.

Meccano was a model construction system that consisted of re-usable metal strips, plates, angle girders, wheels, axles and gears, with nuts and bolts to connect the pieces and enabled the building of working models and mechanical devices. Dinky Toys pioneered the manufacture of die-cast toys with the production of toy cars, trains and ships and model train sets became popular in the 1920s. The Britain's company revolutionized the production of toy soldiers with the invention of the process of hollow casting in lead in 1893<sup>[12]</sup> - the company's products remained the industry standard for many years.

Puzzles became greatly fashionable as well. In 1893, the English lawyer Angelo John Lewis, writing under the pseudonym of Professor Hoffman, wrote a book called *Puzzles Old and New*.<sup>[13]</sup> It contained, amongst other things, more than 40 descriptions of puzzles with secret opening mechanisms. This book grew into a reference work for puzzle games and was very popular at the time. The Tangram puzzle, originally from China, spread to Europe and America in the 19th century.



A boy with a hoop. Hoops have long been a popular toy across a variety of cultures.



Frank Hornby's 1901 patent number GB190100587A for what later became known as Meccano

During the Second World War, some new types of toys were created through accidental innovation. After trying to create a replacement for synthetic rubber, the American Earl L. Warrick inadvertently invented "nutty putty" during World War II. Later, Peter Hodgson recognized the potential as a childhood plaything and packaged it as Silly Putty. Similarly, Play-Doh was originally created as a wallpaper cleaner.<sup>[14]</sup> In 1943 Richard James was experimenting with springs as part of his military research when he saw one come loose and fall to the floor. He was intrigued by the way it flopped around on the floor. He spent two years fine-tuning the design to find the best gauge of steel and coil; the result was the Slinky, which went on to sell in stores throughout the United States.

After the Second World War as society became ever more affluent and new technology and materials (plastics) for toy manufacture became available, toys became cheap and ubiquitous in households across the Western World. Among the more well known products of the 1950s there was the Danish company Lego's line of colourful interlocking plastic brick construction sets, Rubik's Cube, Mr. Potato Head, the Barbie doll and Action Man.<sup>[15]</sup> Today there are computerized dolls that can recognize and identify objects, the voice of their owner, and choose among hundreds of pre-programmed phrases with which to respond.<sup>[16]</sup> The materials that toys are made from have changed, what toys can do has changed, but the fact that children play with toys has not.

## Culture

The act of children's play with toys embodies the values set forth by the adults of their specific community, but through the lens of the child's perspective. Within cultural societies, toys are a medium to enhance a child's cognitive, social, and linguistic learning.<sup>[17]</sup>

In some cultures, societies utilize toys as a way to enhance a child's skillset within the traditional boundaries of their future roles in the community. In Saharan and North African cultures, play is facilitated by children through the use of toys in order to enact scenes recognizable in their community such as hunting and herding. The value is placed in a realistic version of development in preparing a child for the future they are likely to grow up into. This allows the child to imagine and create a personal interpretation of how they view the adult world.<sup>[18]</sup>

However, in other cultures, toys are used to expand the development of a child's cognition in an idealistic fashion. In these communities, adults place the value of play with toys to be on the aspirations they set forth for their child. In the Western culture, the Barbie and Action-Man represent life-like figures but in an imaginative state out of reach from the society of these children and adults. These toys give way to a unique world in which children's play is isolated and independent of the social constraints placed on society leaving the children free to delve into the imaginary and idealized version of what their development in life could be.<sup>[18]</sup>

In addition, children from differing communities may treat their toys in different ways based on their cultural practices. Children in more affluent communities may tend to be possessive of their toys, while children from poorer communities may be more willing to share and interact more with other children. The importance the child places on possession is dictated by the values in place within the community that the children observe on a daily basis.<sup>[19]</sup>

## Child development

Toys, like play itself, serve multiple purposes in both humans and animals. They provide entertainment while fulfilling an educational role. Toys enhance cognitive behavior and stimulate creativity. They aid in the

development of physical and mental skills which are necessary in later life.

One of the simplest toys, a set of simple wooden blocks is also one of the best toys for developing minds. Andrew Witkin, director of marketing for Mega Brands told *Investor's Business Daily* that, "They help develop hand-eye coordination, math and science skills and also let kids be creative."<sup>[20]</sup> Other toys like Marbles, jackstones, and balls serve similar functions in child development, allowing children to use their minds and bodies to learn about spatial relationships, cause and effect, and a wide range of other skills as well as those mentioned by Mr. Witkin.

One example of the dramatic ways that toys can influence child development involves clay sculpting toys such as Play-Doh and Silly Putty and their home-made counterparts. Mary Ucci, Educational Director of the Child Study Center of Wellesley College, demonstrates how such toys positively impact the physical development, cognitive development, emotional development, and social development of children.<sup>[21]</sup>

Toys for infants often make use of distinctive sounds, bright colors, and unique textures. Through play with toys infants begin to recognize shapes and colors. Repetition reinforces memory. Play-Doh, Silly Putty and other hands-on materials allow the child to make toys of their own.

Educational toys for school age children often contain a puzzle, problem-solving technique, or mathematical proposition. Often toys designed for older audiences, such as teenagers or adults demonstrate advanced concepts. Newton's cradle, a desk toy designed by Simon Prebble, demonstrates the conservation of momentum and energy.

Not all toys are appropriate for all ages of children. Some toys which are marketed for a specific age range can even harm the development of children in that range.

## Gender

Certain toys, such as Barbie dolls and toy soldiers, are often perceived as being more acceptable for one gender than the other. It has been noted by researchers that, "Children as young as 18 months display sex-stereotyped toy choices".<sup>[22]</sup>

However, when eye movement is tracked in young infants, infant girls even show a visual preference for a doll over a toy truck. Interestingly, the opposite is true for infant boys.<sup>[23]</sup> This shows that even before any self-awareness of gender identity has emerged, children already prefer sex-typical toys. These clear differences in toy choice are well established within the child by the age of three.<sup>[24]</sup>

Parents encourage their sons and daughters to participate in sex-typed activities, including doll playing and engaging in housekeeping activities for girls and playing with trucks and engaging in sports activities for boys.<sup>[25]</sup> Parents, siblings, peers, and even teachers have been shown to react more positively to children engaging in sex-typical behavior



Two children playing with paddle balls, a painting by the Chinese artist Su Hanchen (苏汉臣, active 1130s-1160s AD), Song Dynasty



A toy tank with a remote control. Such toys are generally thought of as boys' toys.

and playing with sex-typical toys.<sup>[26]</sup> Additionally, sons are more likely to be reinforced for sex-typical play and discouraged from atypical play.<sup>[26]</sup> However, it is generally not as looked down upon for females to play with toys designed "for boys", an activity which has also become more common in recent years.<sup>[27]</sup> Fathers are also more likely to reinforce typical play and discourage atypical play than mothers are.<sup>[28]</sup>

Traditions within various cultures promote the passing down of certain toys to their children based on the child's gender. In South American Indian communities, boys receive a toy bow and arrow from their father while young girls receive a toy basket from their mother.<sup>[17]</sup> In North African and Saharan cultural communities, gender plays a role in the creation of self-made dolls. While female dolls are used to represent brides, mothers, and wives, male dolls are used to represent horsemen and warriors. This contrast stems from the various roles of men and women within the Saharan and North African communities. There are differences in the toys that are intended for girls and boys within various cultures, which is reflective of the differing roles of men and women within a specific cultural community.<sup>[18]</sup>

## Economics



Toys "R" Us operates over 1,500 stores in 30 countries and has an annual revenue of US\$13.6 billion

With toys comprising such a large and important part of human existence, it makes sense that the toy industry would have a substantial economic impact. Sales of toys often increase around holidays where gift-giving is a tradition. Some of these holidays include Christmas, Easter, Saint Nicholas Day, and Three Kings Day.

In 2005, toy sales in the United States totaled about \$22.9 billion.<sup>[20]</sup> Money spent on children between the ages of 8 and twelve alone totals approximately \$221 million annually in the U.S.<sup>[29]</sup> It was estimated that in 2011, 88% of toy sales was in the age group 0–11 years.<sup>[30]</sup>

Toy companies change and adapt their toys to meet the changing demands of children thereby gaining a larger share of the substantial market. In recent years many toys have become more complicated with

flashing lights and sounds in an effort to appeal to children raised around television and the internet. According to Mattel's president, Neil Friedman, "Innovation is key in the toy industry and to succeed one must create a 'wow' moment for kids by designing toys that have fun, innovative features and include new technologies and engaging content."

In an effort to reduce costs, many mass-producers of toys locate their factories in areas where wages are lower. 75% of all toys sold in the U.S., for example, are manufactured in China.<sup>[20]</sup> Issues and events such as power outages, supply of raw materials, supply of labor, and raising wages that impact areas where factories are located often have an enormous impact on the toy industry in importing countries.

Many traditional toy makers have been losing sales to video game makers for years. Because of this, some traditional toy makers have entered the field of electronic games and are enhancing the brands that they have by introducing interactive extensions or internet connectivity to their current toys.<sup>[31]</sup>

## Types

### Construction sets

The Greek philosopher Plato wrote that the future architect should play at building houses as a child.<sup>[32]</sup> A construction set is a collection of separate pieces that can be joined together to create models. Popular models to make include cars, spaceships, and houses. The things that are built are sometimes used as toys once completed, but generally speaking, the object is to build things of one's own design, and old models often are broken up and the pieces reused in new models.

The oldest and, perhaps most common construction toy is a set of simple wooden blocks, which are often painted in bright colors and given to babies and toddlers. Construction sets such as Lego bricks and Lincoln Logs are designed for slightly older children and have been quite popular in the last century. Construction sets appeal to children (and adults) who like to work with their hands, puzzle solvers, and imaginative sorts.

Some other examples include Bayko, Konstruk-Tubes, K'Nex, Erector Sets, Tinkertoys, and Meccano, and generic construction toys such as Neodymium magnet toys.



Lincoln Logs have been a popular construction type toy in the U.S. since the 1920s.

## Dolls and miniatures



A girl and her doll in the 1900s.

A doll is a model of a human (often a baby), a humanoid (like Bert and Ernie), or an animal. Modern dolls are often made of cloth or plastic. Other materials that are, or have been, used in the manufacture of dolls include cornhusks, bone, stone, wood, porcelain (sometimes called china), bisque, celluloid, wax, and even apples. Often people will make dolls out of whatever materials are available to them.

Sometimes intended as decorations, keepsakes, or collectibles for older children and adults, most dolls are intended as toys for children, usually girls, to play with. Dolls have been found in Egyptian tombs which date to as early as 2000 BC.<sup>[4]</sup>

Dolls are usually miniatures, but baby dolls may be of true size and weight. A doll or stuffed animal of soft material is sometimes called a plush toy or plushie. A popular toy of this type is the Teddy Bear.

A distinction is often made between dolls and action figures, which are generally of plastic or semi-metallic construction and poseable to some extent, and often are merchandising from television shows or films which feature the characters. Modern action figures, such as Action Man, are often marketed towards boys, whereas dolls are often marketed towards girls.

Toy soldiers, perhaps a precursor to modern action figures, have been a popular toy for centuries. They allow children to act out battles, often with toy military equipment and a castle or fort. Miniature animal figures are also widespread, with children perhaps acting out farm activities with animals and equipment centered on a toy farm.

## Vehicles

Children have played with miniature versions of vehicles since ancient times, with toy two-wheeled carts being



A toy boat.

depicted on ancient Greek vases.<sup>[32]</sup> Wind-up toys have also played a part in the advancement of toy vehicles. Modern equivalents include toy cars such as those produced by Matchbox or Hot Wheels, miniature aircraft, toy boats, military vehicles, and trains. Examples of the latter range from wooden sets for younger children such as BRIO to more complicated realistic

train models like those produced by Lionel, Doepke and Hornby. Larger die-cast vehicles, 1:18 scale, have become popular toys; these vehicles are produced with a great attention to detail.

## Puzzles

A **puzzle** is a problem or enigma that challenges ingenuity. Solutions to puzzle may require recognizing patterns and creating a particular order. People with a high inductive reasoning aptitude may be better at solving these puzzles than others. Puzzles based on the process of inquiry and discovery to complete may be solved faster by those with good deduction skills. A popular puzzle toy is the Rubik's Cube, invented by Hungarian Ernő Rubik in 1974. Popularized in the 1980s, solving the cube requires planning and problem-solving skills and involves algorithms.

There are many different types of puzzles, for example a maze is a type of tour puzzle. Other categories include; construction puzzles, stick puzzles, tiling puzzles, transport puzzles, disentanglement puzzles, sliding puzzles, logic puzzles, picture puzzles, lock puzzles and mechanical puzzles.



Teddy Bear



A Rubik's Cube

## Collectibles



Beanie Baby; Sizzle the Bear

Some toys, such as Beanie Babies, attract large numbers of enthusiasts, eventually becoming collectibles. Other toys, such as Boyds Bears are marketed to adults as collectibles. Some people spend large sums of money in an effort to acquire larger and more complete collections. The record for a single Pez dispenser at auction, for example, is \$1,100 U.S.<sup>[33]</sup>

## Promotional merchandise

Many successful films, television programs, books and sport teams have official merchandise, which often includes related toys. Some notable examples are Star Wars (a science fiction film series) and Arsenal, an English football club.

Promotional toys can fall into any of the other toy categories; for example they can be dolls or action figures based on the characters of movies or professional athletes, or they can be balls, yo-yos, and lunch boxes with logos on them. Sometimes they are given away for free as a form of advertising. Model aircraft

are often toys that are used by airlines to promote their brand, just as toy cars and trucks and model trains are used by trucking, railroad and other companies as well. Many food manufacturers run promotions where a toy is included with the main product as a prize. Toys are also used as premiums, where consumers redeem proofs of purchase from a product and pay shipping and handling fees to get the toy. Some people go to great lengths to collect these sorts of promotional toys.

## Digital toys

Digital toys are toys that incorporate some form of interactive digital technology.<sup>[34]</sup> Examples of digital toys include virtual pets and handheld electronic games. Among the earliest digital toys are Mattel Auto Race and the Little Professor, both released in 1976. The concept of using technology in a way that bridges the digital with the physical world, providing unique interactive experiences for the user has also been referred to as "Phygital."<sup>[35]</sup>

## Physical activity

A great many toys are part of active play. These include traditional toys such as hoops, tops, jump ropes and balls, as well as more modern toys like Frisbees, foot bags, astrojax, and Myachi.

Playing with these sorts of toys allows children to exercise, building strong bones and muscles and aiding in physical fitness. Throwing and catching balls and frisbees can improve hand-eye coordination. Jumping rope, (also known as skipping) and playing with foot bags can improve balance.

## Safety regulations



An Aibo.



A boy from Jakarta with his ball. Ball games are good exercise, and are popular worldwide.



Toys with small parts, such as these Lego elements are required by law to have warnings about choking hazards in some countries.

Many countries have passed safety standards limiting the types of toys that can be sold. Most of these seek to limit potential hazards, such as choking or fire hazards that could cause injury. Children, especially very small ones, often put toys into their mouths, so the materials used to make a toy are regulated to prevent poisoning. Materials are also regulated to prevent fire hazards. Children have not yet learned to judge what is safe and what is dangerous, and parents do not always think of all possible situations, so such warnings and regulations are important on toys.

For toy safety, every country has its own regulations. But since the globalization and opening of markets, most of them try to harmonize their regulations. The most common action for younger children is to put toys in their mouths. This is why it is of utmost importance to regulate chemicals which are contained in the paintings and other materials children's products are made of. Countries or trade zones such as the European Union regularly publish lists to regulate the quantities or ban chemicals from toys and juvenile products.

There have also been issues of toy safety regarding lead paint. Some toy factories, when projects become too large for them to handle, outsource production to other less known factories, often in other countries. Recently, there were some in China that America had to send back. The subcontractors may not be watched as closely and sometimes use improper manufacturing methods. The U.S. government, along with mass market stores, is now moving towards requiring companies to submit their products to testing before they end up on shelves.<sup>[36]</sup>

## Disposal

When toys have been outgrown or are no longer wanted, reuse is sometimes considered. They can be donated via many charities such as Goodwill Industries and the Salvation Army, sold at garage sales, auctioned, sometimes even donated to museums. However, when toys are broken, worn out or otherwise unfit for use, care should be taken when disposing of them. Donated or resold toys should be gently used, clean and have all parts.<sup>[37]</sup> Before disposal of any battery-operated toy, batteries should be removed and recycled; some communities demand this be done. Some manufacturers, such as Little Tikes, will take back and recycle their products.

In 2007, massive recalls of toys produced in China<sup>[38]</sup> led many U.S. based charities to cut back on, or even discontinue, their acceptance of used toys. Goodwill stopped accepting donations of any toys except stuffed animals, and other charities checked all toys against government-issued checklists.<sup>[39]</sup>

The WEEE directive (Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment), which aims at increasing re-use and recycling and reducing electronic waste, applies to toys in the United Kingdom as of 2 January 2007.<sup>[40]</sup>

## Toy use in animals

It is not unusual for some animals to play with toys. An example of this is a dolphin being trained to nudge a ball through a hoop. Young chimpanzees use sticks as dolls - the social aspect is seen by the fact that young females more often use a stick this way than young male chimpanzees.<sup>[41][42]</sup> They carry their chosen stick and put it in their nest. Such behaviour is also seen in some adult female chimpanzees, but never after they have become mothers.

## See also

- Girls' games and toys
- Battery recycling
- Board Games
- Card games
- List of toys
- List of wooden toys
- National Toy Hall of Fame (United States)
- Toy museums
- Traditional Mexican handcrafted toys



Some communities require recycling of the batteries in toys such as qfix robot "crash-bobby".

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