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Toys Are Us

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by Benjamin A. Gorman

Almost everyone has had a special toy as a child, and tucked away in a corner of the memory is a special feeling for that toy. For a certain time in one's life, a toy was the key to a private world of innocent play, of mystery or adventure, and of pleasure. It was a time when the player controlled the world, making the rules, determining the results, playing at being grown up. As adults, we can step back into our childhood by once again holding, feeling, and seeing a favorite plaything. The mind can recall the moments of excitement and concentration, the power of control, and sometimes a disassociation with reality that the toys of childhood once provided for us at that young age, Sometimes broken or worn, boxed and tucked away, they still remain as tangible evidence of our own past.

As teachers, we sometimes forget that students are children, and that the main activity enjoyed by young children is play. Even within the structured environment of the classroom, we often see students at play with pencils, with bits of paper, with erasers—the very tools of a student's work—as well as assorted playthings brought from home. It is amazing how many ways a paper clip can be refashioned, or how much interest is created when a *Smurf* appears from a jacket pocket. Since our students are a few steps from early childhood, it should not surprise us that games, toys, and the urge to play are not left at home when the child enters his student role at school. School is work; nobody has ever said that learning was easy, but at the same time learning can be fun.

Play is an important ingredient in life, and toys are a part of our culture. In fact, toys might be considered the tools of play. This unit proposes to capitalize on our students' natural urge to play with things by having students look at and think about toys. Adopting the viewpoint that toys are cultural objects, the general purpose of this unit is to make students aware that toys reflect the interests and values of a society. Antique toys, as part of our human heritage, provide us with objects that allow us to reach across time and learn about our past. An examination of toys that are part of the students' life experience allows them to learn their society's values and perhaps to discover more about themselves. With students thinking about toys as products of a culture period, they may realize that "toys are us."

In this unit, students will:

1. Understand the function of toys in growth and development.
2. Learn that toys are universal and have served as tools of play for centuries.

3. Realize that toys are products of an historical period and reflect that time.
4. Examine toys to detect values of current society.

Toys Are Us can be used with middle school students in social studies classes. What has gone before, even in our recent past, often seems remote to our thirteen to fifteen year old students. Thus, part of this unit deals with the chronology of toys; it may establish toys' universality and allow students to connect with objects that they are familiar with or have had a common experience with in play. By raising a curiosity in students about toys, the importance of toys may be understood, and the cultural values of the society that produced them may be realized. Besides the history of toys, toys exist as cultural objects that are a part of our human past; they allow us to reach across time and to learn about our past, about people and their beliefs.

Through the story of toys, one can trace many scientific discoveries, historical events, and the whims of society; the toys of children can relate the story of people advancing and developing in mind and body. The focus of the unit will be on playthings of our American experience, and generally will exclude games, puzzles, and dolls which have a distinctive history. The unit should have a general appeal to all students and should be taught with fun in mind. Thus, I recommend using it for lessons on shorter school days, before vacations, or as a break between topics; we know that "all work and no play. . . ."

Toys Are Playthings

First students need to understand why toys are important as playthings. What can they teach us and what do we learn? It is necessary for students to be aware of the function that toys had in their childhood and how the toys helped them to grow and develop. As future parents and consumers purchasing toys for their young, the students need to develop insights into the importance of toys in the process of growing up.

Toys are not toys unless they are fun. At the same time, the basic function of playthings is the stimulation of a child's imagination and the engagement of his action skills. Children are naturally innovative and imaginative. They have their own habits and style in different roles in different situations.

Thus, toys and play are important in the growing process. The child learns to discover himself, and toys provide the occasion for these discoveries. Toys provide an opportunity to experiment which is valuable to growth, first time experiences, and self-satisfying activity.

The child in the crib who reaches out and sets a mobile in motion learns to connect action with himself, and the child will continue to learn largely from its environmental responses. The process will develop a realization of control and predictable patterns. A small child will learn to control the movements of a ball, use it to get others to react, and confirm his self. "Toys are important shapers of the self in childhood and often continue in later life as symbols of different 'leisure' pursuits," according to authors, Czikszentmihaly and RochbergHalton. (p. 92.) A professional basketball, soccer, or baseball player has simply developed his control to the highest level while the weekend golfer to a lesser degree.

"The importance of objects of action in the early years is a reminder of the powerful need children have to internalize actions and to define the limits of their selves through direct kinetic control." (*Ibid.* , p. 100.) By adolescence, a person knows that he can control his body and its environment in predictable ways. Now a new

challenge arises: the control of emotions and impulses. The “toys” of teenagers—stereos, TV, records, videogames—help them to interact and to define themselves through control of psychic processes. Thus, besides the pleasure and enjoyment that toys bring, they are concrete objects that aid in the development of a person’s control over his environment and encourage learning about himself and the world.

In many ways, toys help us as children to mimic adult roles, because they allow us an opportunity to experiment and discover in the safety of childhood. Dr. Benjamin Spock has written, “A child loves his play, not because it’s easy, but because it’s hard. He is striving every hour of every day to graduate to more difficult achievements and to do what grown ups do.” (p. 304) Remember when simple objects became important playthings, when ordinary things found new purposes in childhood hands? Jar tops, scraps of cloth, pots and pans, ale became building blocks with our imagination. We learned to mimic our mothers and fathers or older siblings. The objects were fitted into an unwritten script for our playing and becoming adults. Thus, toys combined pleasure, fantasy, and imitation of the world. They filled hours providing experiences in manipulation, sensory stimulation, mental exercise, and experiences in doing, often with sound effects added.

We may ask, “what is a toy”? The answer may be simply anything that a child is apt to play with. A teething ring, a blanket, sticks and stones, a chemistry set, wooden blocks all fit the description. The relationship one has with toys will reflect the cycle changes in life. The child learns that he can shoot people with a toy gun and must realize that it is only “pretend.” There are exercises in makebelieve that help children realize the limitations of the world and bridge the gap between fantasy and reality. As the child grows, the gun will gain meaning as sports equipment or as a weapon.

This issue raises the question of what may be the best kind of toy? The best toy is one that continually gives the child room to interact with it, to engage his imagination, to develop his skills, to enlarge his own mental and creative avenues, Children are not satisfied with only a few play ideas because their shorter attention span allows them to go on to new ideas. Toys should help play and not be its sum and substance; the plaything should not limit but extend the child’s creative involvement.

Store bought toys are often the parents’s choice. Who plays with them on Christmas Eve? On the next day, many small children will play with the wrappings and ribbon no matter how expensive the contents may have been. Often the commercial toy will have to wait until the child is ready. Commercials for toys persuade children what they should want to play with. In a study done in 1975, toy advertising on television made up 18 percent of the total. Doris Johnson states, “The toy category, was second only to the ‘cereals, candies, and other sweets’ category, which accounted for 25 percent of the total. During the holiday season, however, toys tended to dominate the commercials.” (pp. 167168.) The more TV that was watched by children, the more they asked for advertised toys. Often parents are forced to choose what is in vogue without consideration of the physical and psychological growth of the child. By recalling the toys that students themselves learned with, they might realize the important role that toys played as they played and had fun.

Toys Are History

Almost two centuries before Christ, a singing bird was invented by Hero of Alexandria; it became the model for a variety of whistles which have been popular ever since that time. From the ancient past, in Babylon, Persia, Egypt and elsewhere, animals made of clay, sleds, balls, and playthings on wheels survive as testimony that toys were part of human culture. The existence of toys reaches back to the dawn of civilization. For example,

in the Stone Age, musical instruments made of bone and rattles made from gourds have been found as evidence that from the earliest days of humankind, people were reaching toward the art of living. The toys produced in the preChristian era can be used to study in miniature the progress of humans.

A popular winter toy of today was man's earliest means of conveyance. The wooden sled used to drag food by early hunters has been dated as early as 6500 B.C. in Finland. Certainly children over the years discovered an exciting use riding downhill through snow. It would not be until 1889 however, that the first steering sled, the *American Flyer* , was produced. Another very old toy is the kite. The Chinese were flying kites a thousand years before Christ. They believed that the kite had the power to clear the skies of storms and chase evil away. Probably early Dutch traders brought the kite to Europe in the sixteenth century. A couple of centuries later, a kite was used by Benjamin Franklin in his experiments with electricity.

Toys have been found in Egyptian, Greek, and Roman burial sites, as well as among the remains of the Mayan and Aztec cultures in the new world. Maya children played with a wheeled toy shaped like a mountain wolf. The body was made of baked clay with four wooden wheels attached. It was made about 1100 A.D., and suggests that the Mayas knew about the wheel although they did not use it on carts or wagons for transportation. Toy horses made of clay existed in the days of the Egyptian Pharaohs, and the hobby horse may have been known to the Christ child. Egyptian children had tops, balls, toy boats, and pullalong animals; dolllike figures existed in the culture but were funeral figures and not playthings. Hoops were of particular interest to the Greeks because of their use in physical exercise. Tops originated in Japan, but all the early civilizations enjoyed spinning tops made in a variety of sizes. From the top, the gyroscope evolved as a later scientific development.

During the Middle Ages, fairs were annual events held on holidays; toy peddlers were in attendance selling figures of knights and soldiers, song birds, wooden dolls, animals, and more. For a penny or two, children could buy hobby horses which were very popular. They were simply constructed of a stick about two feet long with a carved horse's head attached. Children would mimic the soldiers and other galloping riders as they paraded and pranced through the streets. "Ride a cockhorse to Banbury cross. . ." as the rhyme instructs.

Toys that move have always fostered a feeling of wonder. The royal houses of Europe, from the Renaissance on, became fascinated with automatic toys which combined the skill of craftsmen and mechanical science. Rather simple by today's standards, the mechanical toys were made by skilled artisans who used air, water, mercury or clockworks to operate them. The concealed causes of movement were a mystery to many, and their making was sometimes thought to be the practice of sorcery. These lifelike mechanical toys became the delight of the royal and rich who demanded more novelties. As craftsmen created more realistic and complicated ones, art and science merged in the production of toys. Minute mechanisms performed natural movements in a mechanical duck made by the French toymaker, Jacques de Vaucanson, 170982. According to Dan Foley, the duck could paddle through water, preen its feathers, and move its neck. Moreover, the duck could swallow grain, digest the grain by means of a chemical solution inside and dispose of it "naturally." (p. 53.) The problem of mechanical toys was that they were expensive and were not produced in quantity until the 1800's. These complicated automatons that could lead orchestras or puff smoke were playthings for the rich.

Wooden toy carving is a traditional skill that has been practiced in many German villages since the Middle Ages. The skills were passed from one generation to the next, and every family member might develop 9 specialty. The town of Nuremburg became a distribution center for rural and village toymakers; later it became a production center for tin soldiers and other metal toys. It was in Germany that toymaking developed

into an industry. By the end of the eighteenth century, toy sellers began to reach a large market of customers through the use of catalogues with price lists and illustrations. Toymaking, which had been a traditional German folk art, was transformed into a large industry. With the increase of machinery, standardization began, but the toys' sturdy construction, bright colors, and design did not lessen their popularity.

The eighteenth century brought a spread of toys among children; paper and cardboard were used to make puppets. Paper dolls, ships, and soldiers began to appear. Doll clothing became more detailed with extensive wardrobes. Doll houses reflected current architecture and ranged from the elaborate to the simple lines of American colonial style. In the same period, models of soldiers were increasing as the martial spirit swept Europe.

The military exploits of Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, 174086, popularized a toy that has had continued appeal. The tin soldier, made in Nuremburg in 1760, is referred to by Dan Foley as the "doll of boyhood." (p. 62.) Small replicas of warriors and horses existed in ancient Greece, bronze soldiers were used in Roman days, and miniature clay knights were made during the Middle Ages. These ancestors of the tin soldier existed as individual pieces rather than parts of larger sets, and were expensive to produce. The tin soldier as an inexpensive toy was the work of a master craftsman, Andreas Hilpert of Nuremburg. By the 1860's, Great Britain began to produce hollow soldiers that were soon copied by the Germans and later by the Japanese. (*Ibid* ., pp. 6365.)

The standardization of size allowed children to maneuver soldiers on an equal basis in mock battles. Cannons, gear, horses, and soldiers provided excitement for children playing at war. At the same time, they were learning the militarism that was growing out of the rise of nationalism in Europe.

Music boxes, carousels, and musical instruments provided entertainment and also added music to the child's world. On a less sophisticated level, bells, rattles, whistles, and squeak toys continued to be found in the hands of the young. Playthings that make sounds allowed children greater expression, enabling them to exercise their diaphragms and to practice dexterity. Noise has been a part of many cultures' ceremonies in times of peace and war; with musical toys, children could perform and mimic the adult world's rituals and arts.

The nineteenth century marked the arrival of optical toys such as the *Zoetrope* . It consisted of a metal drum which could rotate on an axis. The drum was cut with a series of thin slots into which could be placed paper strips showing figures at different stages of movement. When turned, the figures appeared to move, creating the illusion of live action. The interest in movement and light at this time led to the development of the camera and the use of photographs. Continued experimentation in this area led to the Kaleidoscope which is still popular today. The Magic Lantern which used handpainted, colored slides was a short step from the development of moving slides that were projected on a large surface. By 1908, the Kittiscope was being advertised as a "moving picture machine," notes Antonia Fraser. (p. 124.) Mechanical toys, optics, and projected, moving images led inventors towards the age of cinematography. It should be noted that optical toys were results on the juvenile level of the scientific advances in photography. ". . .When stereoscopic vision has become a reality in the motionpicture field, do we find a return to the pocket viewer, and reflect on how scientific trends in the adult world are quickly translated into children's toys," writes Leslie Daiken. (p. 27.)

Toys Are U.S.

Turning from the general history of toys to the toys in the American past, it can be noted that the rigor of colonial life and Puritan strictness in New England did not halt children's play and their use of toys. The early English settlers brought dolls as gifts to the Indians. Of course, the American natives were familiar with dolls and introduced the corn husk doll to the newcomers. The Indians made toys and dolls from the things that nature provided. Both groups found that the cat's cradle was common to their societies. Some Indian toys have joined our culture, and they amuse and teach as they did long ago. For example, the Pawnee Indians used a wooden hoop from which bright colored items were hung. The hoop was attached to the cradle and attracted the baby's eyes and hands. Today we call it the cradle gym.

The struggle for survival in early America necessitated a childhood of short duration. Amusements in which the young could partake were usually connected with the work cycle, such as the gathering of all ages for some cooperative activitycorn husking bees or barn raisings. Just as children's clothing was not any different from the adults, nor were their amusements, which included cockfignting. Premature death in colonial times was very common, and there was a high rate of child mortality. "Toy coffins complete with removable carved wooden figures of the deceased, introduced a note of grim reality into the youngster's creative play," according to Brant and Cullman in *Small Folk* . (p. 45.) Despite the Puritan period's limitation on play, children did escape to their own world and played with kites, balls, and marbles in outdoor games, and fashioned toys with their jackknife, which is a term that means a boy's knife.

A group of toys that has been part of our heritage since the colonial period is the American folk toy. Built from wood, scraps of cloth, corncobs or whatever was at hand, these toys were handmade by people for their own use. Many of the designs for folk toys were passed down from one generation to the next. The puzzles, dolls, action toys, tops and other varieties were fun and sometimes promoted thoughtfulness in the children. Some folk toys, such as the skyhook and the flipperdinger, utilized principles of physics. The latter was a blow pipe with an air outlet on the top side; when the pipe was blown through, a little ball with a hook would rise towards a ring of wire that stood a few inches above it. The object was to hook the ball to the ring by raising it on an air stream. Simpler toys such as beanbags, whistles, bolos, wooden puzzles, and dolls were enjoyed by both maker and user. Made from native materials, folk toys reflect the simple ingenuity of our folk heritage, and often reflected the work of skilled hands and a keen imagination.

The American Revolution introduced a new attitude toward play due to economic prosperity and increasing leisure time. The earlier homemade toys were made more for entertainment, although they often permitted physical and intellectual development as well. Toys directed at teaching appeared during the Revolution years; for example, Locke's blocks related play to learning. Named after John Locke, they were the earliest alphabet blocks in history. Throughout the 1700's, Americans continued to make homemade toys, but in the 1800's, toys became more plentiful. While many were imported from Europe, soon an American industry would take root.

The 1830's and 1840's saw the birth of the American toy industry. A guild of toy makers was organized in Massachusetts by William S. Tower in the late 1830's. During the next few decades, wooden and metal toys were produced by craftsmen working in tool manufacturing or cabinetmaking as a sideline. Wealthy Americans continued to buy imported toys, but after the production of the tin soldier in Germany and England, fastgrowing America joined the competition. With the availability of raw materials and new manufacturing technologies, American manufacturers were able to produce toys in quantity and less expensively than in

Europe. In the 1840's, the Turners in Meriden, Connecticut, and tinners in adjacent towns began to use scrap pieces of tin to make tin toys. From this area, the industry spread to New York and Philadelphia. As American industry expended after the Civil War, metal toys became even more available to a wider domestic audience. By the 1870's, the George W. Brown Company produced 40 million items each year during that decade.

Trackless toy locomotives, made of tin and powered by a clockwork mechanism or simply pulled, became popular in America. Steamdriven models made of brass and copper with elaborate painted finishes became collectibles rather than toys, because they were considered too dangerous by some parents as toys. The train seemed to symbolize the progress and power of an emerging country during the second industrial revolution, which moved the machine to a prominent place in the society. By the late 1870's cast iron toys were being made, and between 1866 and 1932, the Ives Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut, made the finest iron toys, especially locomotives. The clockwork trains made by Ives included working air whistles and smoking devices that sent up puffs of smoke from the stack. At the end of the nineteenth century, with the development of the drycell battery, electrical trains were produced. As electricity reached into more and more homes, the transformer permitted the use of household current, and miniature railroads grew and entertained young and old.

American companies excelled in the manufacture of iron toys, which were produced from reusable molds. Many iron toys were vehicles that could be pulled. Tens of thousands of circus wagons, carriages, fire engines, and walking horses were made from the 1870's until World War II. During the last thirty years of the 1800's, mechanical banks of all varieties became very popular.

Since their introduction in 1903, Teddy bears have survived fads and have maintained the affection of many children. The Teddy bear appeared as the result of a cartoon in the *Washington Post* based on a photograph showing Teddy Roosevelt after a bear hunt with a little brown cub at his feet. Roosevelt had refused to shoot the cub and the cartoon used the analogy to illustrate a border dispute between the states of Mississippi and Louisiana. Leslie Daiken relates that Morris Michtom, who founded the Ideal Toy Corporation, wrote to President Roosevelt inquiring if he could use "Teddy" to refer to the toy bear that he wanted to produce. Roosevelt replied that Michtom was welcome to use the name, and production began. (pp. 118119.) In Germany, the Steiff Company had already been making bears with longer and thinner limbs, but the Teddy bear was strictly American in origin.

Before World War I, toy soldiers began to exceed trains in popularity, and their appearance in English nurseries might suggest the encouragement of the martial spirit. Toy airplanes did start to appear in great numbers and affected the market as space toys would do decades later. German exports to America ceased because of the war while the U.S. industry continued to expand. The 1920's saw a movement away from war toys at least until the following decade, but the greatest change came in the toy industry itself. With modern methods, the industry was able to produce toys cheaply and thus make commercial toys available to a mass market.

"Let's play cowboys and Indians" or "cops and robbers" were cries heard in the late 1930's and into the 1950's. These games may have been less disturbing to adults than the soldier imitation, but they served the same purpose: children were expressing natural aggressiveness through play. By this play, they could learn to control it. The continuous appeal of guns as toys in the hands of the young made the games more fun. "Bang, bang, you're dead!"

Attempts to market "peace toys" have met with failure. In Europe, one experiment which had children play with miniature figures of civilians and a model of a Y.W.C.A. resulted in the children using the figures as

soldiers and storming the model. Children will continue to build and build with blocks only to make their creation fall down and laugh with glee. The children are just learning to control their environment, exerting their power, and thereby learning about themselves.

Toys that promote constructive play do fill other needs. In 1901, a British inventor, Frank Hornby, patented a set of construction materials made of thin strips of metal with perforations for nuts and bolts. His invention called *Meccano* was copied in the U.S. and was renamed the *Erector Set* . In his article, Bernard Mergen relates that the sets allowed children to construct skyscrapers which architects were designing for urban America. *Tinkertoys* , invented in 1914, followed the same idea of building in outline form. (p. 165.) *Lego* , which comes from the Danish word “leg,” to play, was invented by Papa Christiansen, who had made wooden toys for his children during the 1930’s depression. His son, after the war, began to make the blocks out of plastic and then designed an interlocking system so that they wouldn’t fall down. *Lego* provides many possibilities for children to assemble and rearrange the small blocks according to their creative and constructive instincts.

For centuries children have learned, for example, to walk with push toys. And assuming that there is no fundamental difference between antique toys and those of today, children are still learning. The horsedrawn fire engine of the 1800’s has been replaced by the sleek, motorized ones of today. Even if toys have not changed, their availability to children has for mass production serves to supply a vast and youthful market. The industry uses plastic, steel, and paper which is molded by machines, punch presses, and printing devices. The mechanical hands of industry are directed by the demands for a particular toy that is often created by television and the print media. The beautifully crafted toys of the preplastic era in wood, tin, cast iron, and other materials are the relics of bygone days.

To the child of today, toys of the past may provide little interest; a miniature knight in armour would not excite and a hobby horse would no longer link the plaything to a 20th century occupation. But a survey account of toys in history does give us a picture of the development of human culture.

Toys Are Culture

For students to understand why toys are important as playthings and to realize that they are universal is only part of the story “toys are us.” Collectively, toys can be studied to complete a picture of the larger society that produced and uses them. Toys are cultural objects that express human beliefs, influences, technology—cultural values. As objects, toys provide us with material for understanding the development of the mind, of imagination, of ritual and innovation.

Period dolls can relate the history of clothes and hair styles; a doll’s house can be a scaleddown model of furnishings and lifestyles. Although teenage dolls first originated in France, it was the *Barbie* that set the trend and cultivated the teenage market. Unlike the earlier passive dolls, *Barbie* met the fantasy of young girls. With her extensive wardrobe and handsome boy friend, *Barbie* allowed girls to play at fashion and deal with the process of growing up. She did not create the sexual revolution, but her anatomically correct doll descendants reflected society’s increasing openness and concerns over sex education. Another example of a toy that mirrored our society’s attention was *G.I. Joe* . In the midsixties, the Action Man series, facial scar included, put dolls in the hands of boys as adult males who were going off to serve in Vietnam; once again, play imitated life.

Similarly, toy vehicles can illustrate the history of transport from sleds and wagons to trains and spacecraft. Lost, however, is the child's dominance and free use of the early trackless trains. Modern HO, N, and S gauge trains stay on the track and only their environment can be created with the purchase of trees, rocks, and buildings. Playing with toy trains has developed into an expensive adult hobby. From the age of the "ironhorse," toy trains were popular until the 1950's when they were replaced with the coming of the space age; today toy trains have become sought after only as collectors' items.

One symbol in 20th century American culture has become a major characteristic of this society—the automobile. It represents material success, prestige, and status as well as a person's independence. Cars reflect people on the move, competition, and their boundless energy They have become an extension of the individual and represent aggressiveness and the desire to control. For all ages, cars, trucks, vans, pick ups, two and three wheel varieties of vehicles hold a fascination for society. Among the young, *Tonka* cars, trucks, and the *Matchbox* series are popular. Motorized vehicles, speed, and the accompanying support equipment along with a new language, CB talk, allow children to enter the adults' romance with the automobile, From *Big Wheels* and tin cars imported from China, to slot cars, mini bikes and *BMX* , children are learning to be part of the car culture. Our modern rodeo now consists of tractors and trucks pulling weighted sleds through an arena of mud with funny cars and trikes filling the role of clowns.

Since toys reflect life in miniature and the scientific progress that moves us forward, it can be understood why space toys have been common in recent years. The toy world has kept up with the fact and fantasy generated by space exploration. So many spacerelated items are available in stores that adults may have trouble finding the playthings that they once enjoyed. Yet many common toys are sold because they still meet a steady demand. Construction kits, slinkies, and blocks can be found among rocket launchers, satellites and electronic toys. There seems to be room on the store's shelves, so why not in the child's room as well? The *Lincoln Logs* of yesterday have made room for computers which are a dominant part of our society. The information revolution has given us games where facts are worth being pursued. The games and toys still help children learn to grow and to cope with the adult world.

Rather than just a presentation of the history of toys, information about the culture can be gained through a careful study of individual toys. Students can observe a toy of their own time and begin to ask questions about its origin, its use, and about the people who produced it.

One approach to the study of material objects has been developed by Dr. Jules Prown. In the Institute seminar, "Time Machines: Artifacts and Culture," he explained a methodology by which we can analyze objects. It is a process which involves the sequential stages of close observation, deduction, and speculation. Objects can communicate, and if we apply the methodology to them, they can relate cultural values and human beliefs. For a complete description, read "Mind in Matter: An Introduction to Material Culture Theory and Method" by Jules D. Prown in *Winterthur Portfolio* , Vol. 17, No. 1, Spring 1982. For a classroom application, consult "VIEW: Visual Inquiry/ Experience in Writing" by Franco and Gorman in the Teachers Institute publication, *Art, Artifacts and Material Culture* , Vol. II, 1980.

Observe. Two circular wooden disks, measuring a little over two inches in diameter are connected by a 1/4 inch peg between the disks. Attached to the peg is a length of string about three feet long; the disks are separated just enough, so that the string could be wrapped around the peg. Being spool-like in shape, the disks can roll on their edges; lying on its side, it can be pushed or pulled by the extended string.

Deduce. With the string wrapped around the peg, between the disks, this object can be dropped, while holding the string's unattached end and will fall as gravity intended unraveling the string until it is fully extended. At

that point, the disks begin to rotate back up the string towards the hand. With practice, it will spin out and then back into the hand by manipulating the string.

By continued practice, hand and eye coordination is developed; with the imagination, this object can be used to complete a variety of tricks. Simple to construct, it can entertain child or adult, and provides for the satisfaction of accomplishment once mastered, a means of competition, or just plain fun. Thus, it is a toy!

Speculate. By raising a series of questions about this toy, the students might continue the experience of inquiry. Could they make one? What materials and tools might be needed? Could it have been made by a primitive society? Could it have other uses besides that of a toy? How and in what way? In what sort of environment could it be used effectively?

Research would reveal that the yoyo was known in the Far East in ancient times; in the Philippines, it was used as a weapon to strike at the heads of enemies. French missionaries brought the yoyo to Europe where it was criticized as dangerous. However, it was easy and inexpensive to produce, and as a toy, its popularity grew. Although simple in design, it could be used to do many tricks. For novice or expert, the yoyo's continued existence over the centuries testifies to the fact that toys are fun.

Choosing another item from today's play world, we could observe that it is small, about 3" x 14" x 1 1/2". It is lightweight and made of metal, plastic, paper, and rubber. The underside is attached to the top by a screw; the rubber wheels with plastic hubs are held on by metal pins. The decorative paper strips are attached by adhesive. "Made in Macua," "MC Toy," a logo, and registration numbers appear on the bottom. Mainly yellow, the object also has black, blue tinted plastic, and red and silver accents. Generally rectangular in shape, it rests horizontally to the ground. The surface is rough due to the indentations and raised elements, with greatest irregularity on the underside.

The bright colors entice the sense of touch and once held or pushed, it can move on its four wheels. Drawn backwards and released, it will move forward by itself propelled by a hidden mechanism. It certainly provides fun as a plaything. It could be one of many such motorized vehicles that might be used by children in creative play. The parts have been molded or casted to fit together precisely, indicating sophisticated manufacturing. Its realistic design makes it a model of a truck. Motorized vehicles are common in our society and while this truck is a miniature, a child could easily become acquainted with them close up, "drive it," control it, and use it in a variety of play situations. As a toy, the truck can be a good, safe tool for learning about occupational vehicles. In fact, this truck is a model of a dump truck.

However, it doesn't dump!

Time for a closer look. The dumping section does slide back and the front bumper can be pulled out. Both front wheels, fenders, and gas tanks lift upward and can pivot. The power source with attached rear wheels can slide off from the underside. Then, it can be reinserted under the rear of the dumpster's tailgate enabling the once truck to stand on end. A robot has been created! When pulled back on the wheels and released, the robot will move into action.

How easily our society is able to convert its television into a home movie theater, its cars into all terrain vehicles, and its toothpaste into stripes. Why shouldn't our toys reflect our technological abilities? Children, in their wonderful world of pretend, have converted sticks into swords, blocks into buildings, and lawnmowers into gocarts. Certainly toy manufactures shouldn't be far behind. This imported toy, *TruckRobot* , prepares children for today's society. Our society has already put robots into the workplace, they exist for the home,

and maybe someday, robots will become substitute playmates as well.

Toys Are Us

To the collector, toys as antiques possess value in their construction and uniqueness. To moralists, toys illustrate corruption in society. To the psychologists, toys and play are topics in the study of human development. As a part of social history, toys are included by the historian. For us, toys can serve as touchstones to our past when childhood was filled with imagination and fantasy. As cultural objects, toys reflect the values, occupations, interests, and technologies of the society from which they came. By approaching them as artifacts and with the proper questions, we can move back in time and experience that world. Besides old toys' serving as vehicles into the past, today's toys are a mirror of ourselves and they can also be a bridge to understanding ourselves.

As artifacts that exist today, toys can help to bridge our understanding of the past. An examination of these objects allows us to become closer to the people who possessed them. Even in our lifetime, the viewing of an old photo taken on a long forgotten occasion, or the touching of a childhood plaything makes a special moment. In that moment, our minds reflect on the memories stirred by the object and recalls a feeling, thought, or time period when it had a central role in our lives. As personal treasures, toys represent an innocent and simple yesterday and are a bridge from our not too long ago childhood to today. And "once you pass its borders, you ne'er return again . . ." except in that corner of your memory.

If toys reproduce in microcosm the adult contemporary world, toys are us.

Lessons for Toys Are Us

Remember the stuffed animal, the videogame, the die or toy novelties that have all materialized at one time or another in the classroom? Should it surprise us that students still want or need to play? Students, like all of us at different times, wait to escape age or job limitations and steal backwards into the self exercising our imagination. Toys are often the focus of this escape; remember that they are the tools of play.

The following classroom lessons are designed to have students think of and look at toys. The lessons will help develop the students' awareness that toys serve an important role not just as playthings by which we grow, but are objects that mirror our culture, past and present. These suggested lessons can be expanded and added to as the teacher desires. It is hoped that they can be taught in the spirit of fun, because toys are supposed to be fun and so can learning.

Lesson I *Let's talk toys.*

Objective Students will understand the function of toys in relation to growth development.

Activities

1. Define what a toy is. Ask the students to write their own definitions. Consult the dictionary and compare. Remember that anything that a child plays with can be a toy, but the main characteristic is that it must be fun.
2. On a sheet of paper, have the students name their favorite childhood toy, excluding games or puzzles. Then have them write a short description of the toy—its size, color, shape, the material it was made from, how it may move, etc. Have them answer the following two questions:
   a. How old were they when they played with it? and
   b. Was the toy used with other children?
3. Make a list on the chalkboard of their favorite toys and have the students copy the list. Across the top of the paper, have them place the following headings:

   Touch Sight Sound Imagination Knowledge

   The students should then put a check(s) under each heeding for every toy according to the things that the toy helped to develop in them.

   Discuss which toys provided the greatest opportunity to develop physical growth, mental growth or both. Why? Can the toys on the list be grouped as “realistic” and “educational” as opposed to “imaginative” and “enjoyable”?
4. Can the students name any “teenage” toys? How are they different from their earlier favorite toy? What do they learn from them?
5. As future parents, what toys would they buy for their children?
6. Can the students name any toys that are too complicated to enjoy playing with? Can they name any that do not provide a challenge? Can they name any toys that are not worth the money that they cost?

Lesson II *Toys in the attic* .

Objective This simple reading assignment will give the students some idea of the history of toys and that toys have been providing children fun for many years.

Activities

1. Duplicate and distribute to the class the story and questions that are on Handout 1. Let the students read and answer the questions; numbers seven and eight may be used for class discussion.
2. Depending upon the class and level of students, the sections in this unit, “Toys Are History” and “Toys Are U.S.” may be read or summarized for the class.

3. Have the students make a list of all the things which may be used as a means of transportation. Have them arrange them in chronological order and then have the students name a toy for each vehicle.

Lesson III *A toy inventory* .

Objective Students will realize that toys are products of a cultural period and reflect that time.

Activities

1. Have the students make a list of the toys in their homeold/new ones, younger brothers' or sisters', or even parent's old ones. Build a list of at least 10 toys.
2. From the list, make a chart putting the names of the toys under the kind of material that they are made from.

Wood Metal Plastic Cloth Paper Mixed

Once the chart has been completed, do the following:

a. Circle your favorite toy.
b. Underline your second favorite toy.
c. Put a box around the toy that you think is the oldest.
d. Put a star next to any toy that you learned from.
e. Put a dot in front of any toys that were handmade.

Follow Up: The objective is to have students understand that certain materials were not available and that technological advances can be noted by looking at a range of toys.
Using the student's chart of toys listed according to construction materials, compile a longer chart on the chalkboard. Then discuss: 1) What kind(s) could they make themselves? Why? and 2) which groupings would last the longest over many years? Why?
Using the expanded list of toys on the board, have the students go back in time to 50 years ago. What toys would not have existed? Cross them out. Why would they have not been available? Go back 100 years, then 200 years and eliminate the ones that could not have been made at that time.

3. Using the list made by the students, have them rechart them according to the following categories.

Building	Travel	Family	Communication
Work	Sports	War	Space

Once the chart has been completed, do the following:

a. Circle the toys that are related to the future.
b. Underline the toys that are related to the past.
c. Check each toy that males would play with.
d. Star each one that females would play with.

Follow Up: The objective is to have students recognize that some toys are timeless while others are more reflective of a certain period.
Discussion questions: 1) Which group is the largest? Why? Would there be a difference 50, 100, or 200 years ago? Why? 2) Why are toys in the play world related to the real world?

Compare the toys played with by boys and girls. Are girls favorite toys similar to those of boys? Is the opposite true?

Lesson IV *Toys Are Us.*

Objective Students will examine toys to detect values of current society.

Activities

1. Bring in a number of toys from home or let the students bring in current toys that will be used for close analysis. Divide the class into teams of three or four, each using a different toy.
2. Distribute Handout 2 and complete by observing carefully.
3. Concerning deduction, have the students answer the following questions on the back of Handout 2.

a. How does the toy affect their senses?

b. How is the toy used? How did they obtain it? Who would play with it, boy, girl or both? Is it simple or complex to play with? What can you learn from it?

c. How do you feel about the toy? What feelings might be associated with the toy?

Let the students share their responses.

4. Concerning speculation, ask the students to respond to: Why were the toys made? Would all children want to play with them? Why are they attractive as playthings? What values in our society do they express?

Follow Up:

1. Students might draw a toy that might exist 50 years from now. Let them figure how old they would be then.
2. Research toys in other cultures.
3. Discuss—Do toys express adult or childrens' values?
4. Discuss—What types of toys do adults play with?

Handout 1 for Lesson II, Activity 2.

Read the following story and then answer the questions below on a separate sheet of paper.

“Just put the penny into his hand,” said Grandpa.

As soon as I did, the figure of Uncle Sam moved his arm downward and slipped the coin into the carpetbag at his feet. Then to my surprise, he nodded his head and his goatee bobbed as to say “thank you.”

Grandpa remarked, “This old *Uncle Sam Bank* still works as well as when I gave it to your father when he was your age.”

The summer heat was making the attic air unbearable, so we carried dad’s old toy box downstairs. As we put the large box with its overflowing contents on the kitchen table, the bank slipped off hitting the table with a crash.

“No damage,” Grandpa said, “these old metal toys are pretty sturdy.”

Standing *Uncle Sam* upright, I asked if every kid had had one of them back then? Grandpa sat and started to examine the bank closely; “No, not everyone, not this type anyway.” Then he leaned back in the chair. I knew that he was going to begin one of his “when I was your age” stories, so I sat down and pretended to be interested.

“There were three types of banks,” he began, “the still banks which were often made in the form of a bank building or a safe, registering banks which worked like cash registers, and the mechanical ones, like *Uncle Sam* here, which were the most fun. A company in Connecticut, the J. and E. Stevens Company, made the first iron banks with movable parts that were operated by small mechanisms that caused your penny to be deposited in a slot. That one company made over two hundred different designs. There were animals, clowns, acrobats, famous people, all with a surprise automatic action when a coin was inserted. They were first made after the Civil War in 1868.”

“That’s old, no wonder that I never saw them in stores,” I said.

“Well times change,” Grandpa replied. “Let me tell you about my most favorite mechanical bank. It was called the *Eagle Bank* and was operated by a lever under the wing. When a coin was put in the eagle’s mouth, she leaned forward, flapped her wings, dropped the coin into a slot under her eaglets in a nest. Then they rose up and opened their beaks.”

“Neat! That sounds like fun; my old piggy bank just stands there.”

1. What would be a good title for the story?
2. How many types of banks were made?
3. How many years ago were mechanical banks first made?
4. What material was the Uncle Sam bank made from?
5. Name four different bank designs.
6. Why are mechanical banks considered as toys?
7. Why do you think that mechanical banks are not popular today?

8. What did children learn from the mechanical bank?

Handout 2 for Lesson IV, Activity

Description:

1. Physical qualities:

a. length _____; height _____; weight _____.
b. material(s) made of: _____
_____.
c. construction (how it is put together)_____
_____.

2. Content:

Copy any inscriptions, words, initials, numbers, etc,:
_____.

3. Formal analysis:

a. colors:
b. shapes:
c. lines:
d. textures:

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