



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
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Toys Are Us

Guide for Curriculum Unit 85.06.04
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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 directs students to look at and think about toys. It adopts the viewpoint 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 a 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 learn that toys are universal and have served as tools of play for centuries; students will understand that toys contribute to growth and development; students will realize that toys are products of an historical period and reflect that time; and they will examine toys to detect values of current society.

Through the story of toys, one can trace many scientific developments, 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 this unit is on the playthings of our American experience, and generally excludes games, puzzles, and dolls. The unit should have general appeal to all students and should be taught with fun in mind. It may be used on shorter school days, before vacations, or as a break between curriculum topics.

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. 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, a concentration, the power of control, and sometimes a disassociation with reality that the toys of childhood once provided for us at that young age. Besides old toys serving as vehicles into the past, they can be examined as cultural objects because they reflect the values of the society that produced and used them. Toys represent the adult contemporary world in microcosm—they are us.

(Recommended for Social Studies classes, grades 7-8 or higher)

Key Words

Children Plays Toys Children's Drama History American

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