

Exercising Spatial Intelligence



Coop's Corner



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Toys and the Future

Toys are more than a child's plaything. Toys provide a gateway to introduce new ideas and inventions. Examples are Tinkertoys and Lincoln Logs that encouraged a generation of future engineers.

In the 1970s, gaming arcades became popular in malls and on boardwalks. Both children and adults played Pong, Space Invaders and Pac-Man. Soon parents were complaining about the arcades.

During the 80s, video games were more available on home computers and parents could get the kids back to the house under their supervision and away from the gaming arcades. By the year 2000, computers were in 51% of American households with both adults and children playing video games.

The computer game industry has become a major sporting industry for all ages, abilities, and demographics. Professional players of all ages often make six figure incomes.

Toys are more than toys.

The Toy that Was Reinvented

The Sumerian inhabitants of Mesopotamia 5,000 years ago used hoops for decoration and symbolism. Egyptians wove hoops from reeds and rattan, and the Greeks used hoops made from grapevines for exercise. Native Americans danced with hoops to symbolize the four directions and for ceremonies. Every society has used the hoop for games, spiritual rituals, unity, or just for decoration. These hoops have been made of metal, bamboo, wood, grasses, and vines. Colonial American children used a stick to roll a metal hoop. The fact is, the hoop is an ancient invention.

During the 14th century, British children were making hoops and having fun hooping. The hooping craze was so widespread that British doctors were blaming hooping for back pain and heart attacks. When British sailors visited the Hawaiian Islands, they noticed that the hula dance had the same movement of the hooping movements back home, so the name Hula-Hoop was born.

In the 1950s, after noticing that children in Australia were exercising with hoops in a school gym class, Richard P. Knerr and Arthur "Spud" Melin had the idea to develop a new toy. The toy was a hoop made from a new plastic called Marlex, developed in 1958. Knerr and Melin trademarked the name Hula-Hoop.

The Hula-Hoop craze in the 1950s once again created concerns. The Japanese banned the toy from their market. They thought that the hip movement was inappropriate and too much for the sensitivity of their culture. The Soviet government said the toy represented "the emptiness of American culture."

The Hula-Hoop today is an international toy and exercise tool. The Hula-Hoop participants have entered the Guinness World Record book with the longest times, the number of hoops in motion at one time, and by age level. Jenny Doan went 100 hours twirling the Hula-Hoop, and Marawa Ibrahim twirled 200 hoops at one time! Getti Kehayova has the world record for the largest Hula-Hoop to be spun—it measured 17 1/4 feet—and Grace Good spun eight flaming hoops simultaneously! The list of world records for the Hula-Hoop continues with each new generation.



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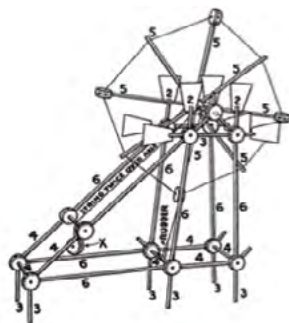
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Tinkertoys and Lincoln Logs

At the turn of the last century in 1913, a stonemason named Charles Pajeau watched children play with pencils, sticks, and empty spools of thread. This gave him an idea for a new toy. Later, on a commuter train ride, Pajeau met a Chicago trader named Robert Petit and told him about the idea for the toy product. The two men agreed to form a company and manufacture the toy. They introduced it at the American Toy Fair in New York City. At the fair, Pajeau convinced drug stores in Grand Central Station to sell the toys. You may have played with them! Remember Tinkertoys?

During the 1914 Christmas season, the two men convinced a Chicago department store to give them a display window. They dressed several small individuals in elf costumes to enter the display window and assemble the sticks and spools into different shapes, from airplanes to power machines. By 1915, Tinkertoys was selling a million sets. The toy allowed children to develop creativity, problem-solving skills, and spatial intelligence.



The company introduced an electric motor to the sets, which expanded the engineering capabilities of the toy. Colors were added in the 1950s, and plastic pieces were added in 1992. The marketing became more specialized, with each package a different design object.

In 1916 John Lloyd Wright, the son of the architect Frank Lloyd Wright, had an idea for a toy that would develop creativity through interlocking notched logs and accessories. He named the new toy Lincoln Logs, after President Abraham Lincoln, who had lived in a log cabin. John based the idea from an Imperial Hotel his father was designing in Tokyo, Japan, which had a foundation with interlocking beams for earthquake protection. The hotel was one of the few buildings to remain standing after the Great Kanto Earthquake in 1923.

Toys help children grow special connections and creativity. They also have the ability to introduce new ideas to adults. The development of the computer games at arcades helped in the transition of computer games outside the home to laptop computers today... that is a discussion for another day!

The YoYo

Some believe the yo-yo originated in China. However, the first mention of the yo-yo is in Greece around 500 B.C. It is also found in pictographs in Egyptian-temple wall art. Philippine hunters used a rock with a 20-foot string to hit their prey in trees in the 16th century. Wherever the yo-yo originated, it has become a global fascination.

The yo-yo is said to be the second-oldest toy in the world, next to the doll. It is a toy that has a calming effect on the user. The French court played with the yo-yo (*joujou de Normandie*). Marquis de Lafayette toyed with the yo-yo. Napoleon and his troops played with it before the battle of Waterloo as well, as it was a favorite of the Duke of Wellington. There is a National Yo-Yo Museum in Chico, and wooden parts can be found online.

This country saw its first patent in 1866 by an Ohio company, but the toy remained obscure until 1916 in an article in *Scientific American* titled "Filipino Toys." When Pedro Flores, an immigrant from the Philippines working at a hotel in Santa Monica as a bellhop, played with his yo-yo during his lunch break, a crowd would gather around and watch. He started making yo-yos and had two factories by 1929.



A businessman named Donald F. Duncan on a trip from Ohio to California saw the yo-yo and bought Pedro's company in 1929. Then in 1932, Duncan was given the trade name yo-yo, forcing competitors to use other names for the toy. It was Duncan who introduced the slip-string that allowed the yo-yo to "sleep." He set out on an advertising campaign with the Hearst newspaper company that increased paper circulation and sales of yo-yos.

Then in the 1960, with television and mass advertising, the yo-yo had a resurgence in sales and interest. However, the Duncan family lost a trademark case in 1965 and sold the company. Yet between 1960 and the 1990s, the yo-yo saw many innovations with the new technology that saw another resurgence in the 1990s. On April 12, 1985, the yo-yo went to space on the Discovery Shuttle. The toy needs gravity to work—you can guess the result!

Today, the yo-yo is providing more than entertainment for young enthusiasts. It is also a way for our troops to relax and take their mind off the stress of the job they have been sent to do. In 2008, Senator John McCain asked for people to send yo-yos and stress balls to the troops. There are several organizations that send yo-yos to the troops. As we get older and can no longer do what we used to do, there is still something that we can do that will make a difference.

The Toy Soldier

Toy soldiers have been around for centuries, for example, the game of chess. Model-toy military figures were found in the tombs of the pharaohs of Egypt. These toy soldiers were made of wood, reeds, clay, stone, and metals such as pewter and tin. However, not until the 1730s did the production of toy soldiers hit the marketplace in Germany as cast iron figures. By the 20th century, toy soldiers were being cast in lead for mass production. Children and collectors were building whole armies of toy soldiers in various specific battles.

In the years following World War II, companies began marketing complete box sets of soldiers with accessories of landforms, buildings, fences, trees, wagons, and other items that were found on battle fields. One could buy the complete Battle of the Alamo, Waterloo, D-Day, Romans, Spartans, or any historical battle.

In 1964, a new toy soldier emerged as a large action figure called G.I. Joe. Action figures became a rage by the '80s, from G.I. Joes to Star Wars figures. Two years later in 1966, lead was declared toxic and banned from the manufacture of lead toys like soldiers, paints, and other



items. The toy soldier market began to shift from plastic to high-quality toy soldiers made of pewter for adult collectors, with prices ranging from a few dollars to \$50 or more for a single figure or a small set of six pieces.

The toy soldier market also shifted with the new computer-age war game called Empire, in 1972. Computer war-gaming grew during the 1980s, and by 1996, one company released 23 different war games! Today, there are hundreds of computer war games on the market, such as Call of Duty and Battlefield, and others like Grand Theft Auto. Tournaments are played online by professional gamers. Some players have agents and make good money playing! The largest tournament in 2024 had almost 7 million viewers. The computer age has moved the toy soldier from the backyard, where only a few could play, to the world where anyone can play the game.

The toy soldier image has changed in its form and shape over time, and yet the main idea of strategies and tactics has remained constant. The Duke of Wellington said that Waterloo was won on a playing field—of games!

