

How to Evaluate a Toy

Three Questions to Ask:

1. Does it meet the criteria of a "GREAT TOY" by being...
 - **INTERACTIVE**
 - **OPEN-ENDED**
 - **CREATIVE**
2. Is the toy made with **QUALITY** parts and workmanship (will it stand up to rugged play?)
3. What is the toy's **TRUE COST**?

(TRUE COST is measured as "Cost per Hour of Play". For example, an expensive toy that a child plays with for hours will have a lower TRUE COST than a cheap toy that loses the child's interest or breaks after only minutes of play.)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Phil Wrzesinski is President of Toy House and Baby Too, one of the 25 Best Independent Stores in America*. Phil is an author and public speaker who teaches classes on toys, baby products, being a dad and being a retailer.

Besides being a self-proclaimed "Klutz Kid" and harmonica-playing fool, Phil is also the proud father of two boys. Phil first developed this list for publication in the December 2003 issue of *Kids in Common* and has updated and reprinted it here for your entertainment, education, and convenience.

**Retail Superstars* by George Whalin

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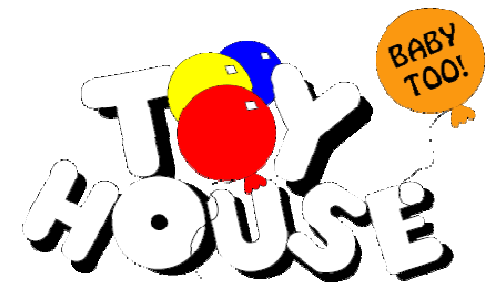
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WHY EVALUATE TOYS?

Play is an important part of growing up. It is where children begin to learn life skills like cooperation, communication, problem-solving, and negotiation.

Fred Rogers once said, "A child's job is to play." Toys are the "tools" children use to do their "job". The toys you choose for your child determine their ability to do their "job" and the type of learning they will get out of their play.

Your ability to properly evaluate toys will go a long way towards helping them develop as an adult.

This guide is designed to help you understand how to evaluate toys and show you what types of toys have proven time and again to be sure-fire winners with kids.



THE TERMS:

INTERACTIVE: A toy is "interactive" if it requires *active* participation by the person playing with it to make it work.

OPEN-ENDED: A toy is considered "open-ended" if there are many different ways to play with it, limited only by the imagination.

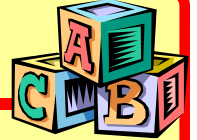


CREATIVE: A toy is considered "creative" if you must engage your imagination in some way to play with that toy.



WOODEN BLOCKS (AGES 2 AND UP)

INTERACTIVE – they are just expensive pieces of lumber until a child picks one up
OPEN-ENDED – from stacking to building, there's no wrong way to play
CREATIVE – with it's endless possibilities for play, the child's imagination creates the toy
BONUS – quality blocks last forever and will even be enjoyed by your grandchildren



PUPPETS (ALL AGES)

INTERACTIVE – the puppet doesn't work until you put your hand inside and move it
OPEN-ENDED – you give it the voice, the actions and the directions
CREATIVE – develops fantasy and role play skills
BONUS – puppets are great for families of multiple ages, one of the few toys your nine year old will play with your two year old



LEGO® (AGES 5 TO 12)

INTERACTIVE – teaches fine motor skills through building and following directions
OPEN-ENDED – you can build the model shown or make up your own creations
CREATIVE – combines both creative building and creative role playing in one toy
BONUS – every time you buy a new Lego® set you make the "old" Lego® new again

DRESS-UP CLOTHES (ALL AGES)

INTERACTIVE – without a child inside, dress-up clothes are just glorified rags
OPEN-ENDED – role-play has no structure other than what child develops on his/her own
CREATIVE – with each costume the child creates whole new worlds of make-believe
BONUS – probably one of the easiest toys to make or get (especially if you were smart enough to save your old clothes)



WOODEN RAILWAYS (AGES 3 TO 10)

INTERACTIVE – skip the battery-operated trains, the manual trains make this toy fun
OPEN-ENDED – you can be a track builder, engineer, or passenger on a ride
CREATIVE – different elements of creativity from layout design to role playing
BONUS – offers progressive skills as each age group "plays" differently, preschoolers who are into the trains become older children into the layout and design of the track

STORY BOOKS (ALL AGES)

INTERACTIVE – engages the mind and also offers parent/child interaction
OPEN-ENDED – you can read the book, or make up your own story from the pictures
CREATIVE – develops the imagination as images form in the mind of the reader
BONUS – reading takes us to places our pocketbooks can't, including places that do not even exist in our "real" world



PLAYMOBIL® (AGES 4 TO 10)

INTERACTIVE – many moveable parts and accessories that require *manual* operation
OPEN-ENDED – although limited in what you build, there is no limit to how you play
CREATIVE – develops imagination through role playing
BONUS – quality and attention to detail keep child's interest in the toy for long time

DOLLS (AGES 3 TO 10)

INTERACTIVE – rule of thumb: the less it does by itself, the more a doll is loved
OPEN-ENDED – some dolls are the child's baby, some her friend, and some her dream
CREATIVE – a doll's life is only limited by the mind of the child who plays with it
BONUS – watching your child's interaction with dolls helps you reinforce positive behavior patterns

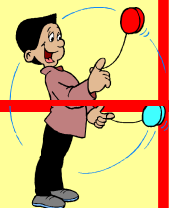


PLAY DOH® (AGES 2 TO 8)

INTERACTIVE – the ultimate build, destroy and rebuild toy
OPEN-ENDED – it's a sculpture, a piece of art, a finger therapy tool, a paper weight...
CREATIVE – oh, the endless possibilities of a lump of clay
BONUS – Play Doh® not only stimulates the creative mind, it also helps develop fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination

HOT WHEELS® (AGES 3 AND UP)

INTERACTIVE – no motors necessary, just an active child and lots of vroom, vroom
OPEN-ENDED – some cars drive, some talk, some line up by color, others by style
CREATIVE – no end to the designs, no end to the uses, no end to the creativity
BONUS – new cars are cheap enough that kids can buy with their own allowance which helps teach fiscal responsibility



KLUTZ PRESS® ACTIVITY BOOKS (AGES 7 AND UP)

INTERACTIVE – gives you both the means and motivation to *do* the activities described
OPEN-ENDED – the books teach the skills, how you use those skills is up to you
CREATIVE – many activities are arts & crafts skills where the design is of your own creation
BONUS – because of the types of activities and how easy the books read, they are great for older children and even adults, and the skills last a lifetime