

Playthings

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THE BUSINESS OF PLAY



Construction Toys & Projects

Mainstay category continues to build business



What's Selling?

YOUTH Electronics

Top 10 for June, 2010

Holiday Preview

WHILE IT MAY SEEM that the winter holidays are still months away, many consumers will soon be looking to get a head start on their shopping. PLAYTHINGS staff takes a sneak peek at some of the hot new toys available this fall.

Continued on page 10



The Beginning of a New Era

WHAT IS A TOY? What is a gift? In today's world, the lines are more and more blurred. A growing number of successful gift retailers are dedicating a portion of their floor space to a wide array of toys, puzzles, games and children's books. And conversely, smart independent toy retailers are adding giftables such as 'tween jewelry and accessories, baby clothes and juvenile room décor in an effort to encourage additional sales.

For more than 100 years PLAYTHINGS magazine has been the primary source for the news, trends and products of the toy industry. For 93 years, our sister publication, *Gifts & Decorative Accessories*, has done the same for the gift industry. Each has a loyal audience...

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Plus...

Global View

Why do we have to grow up?

Building Blocks to PLAY & LEARN

Let's build a better tomorrow one brick at a time today

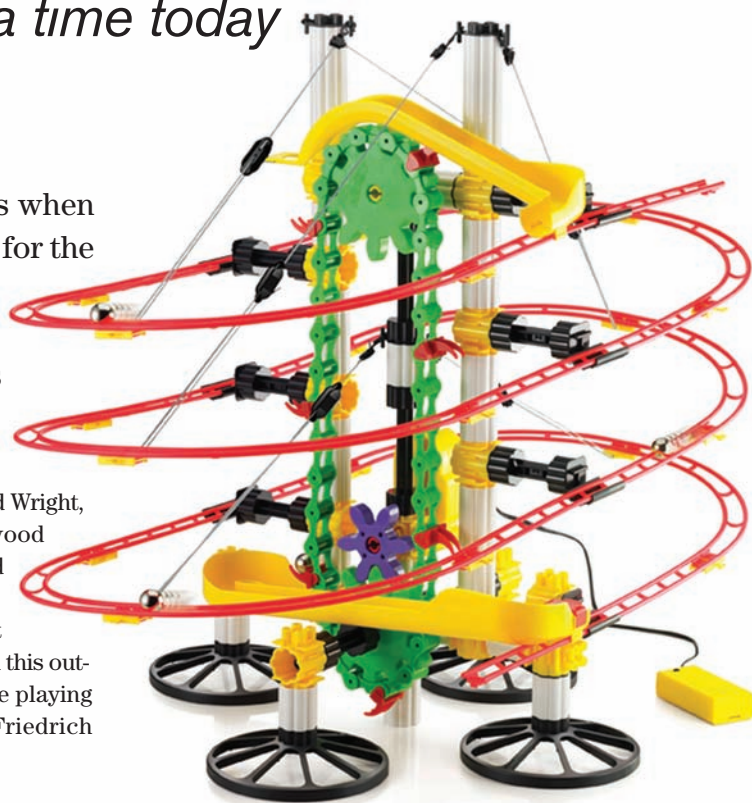
By Steve Auerbach, PhD/Dr. Toy

Building the future begins with a firm foundation. Children learn this when they create with construction toys. Construction play is, in fact, vital for the healthy development of children. They actively learn as they build plus they are integrating many valuable skills. Learning through the process of building is a serious tool to healthy growth, is a fun experience, and has enormous value for children of all ages, and adults, too.

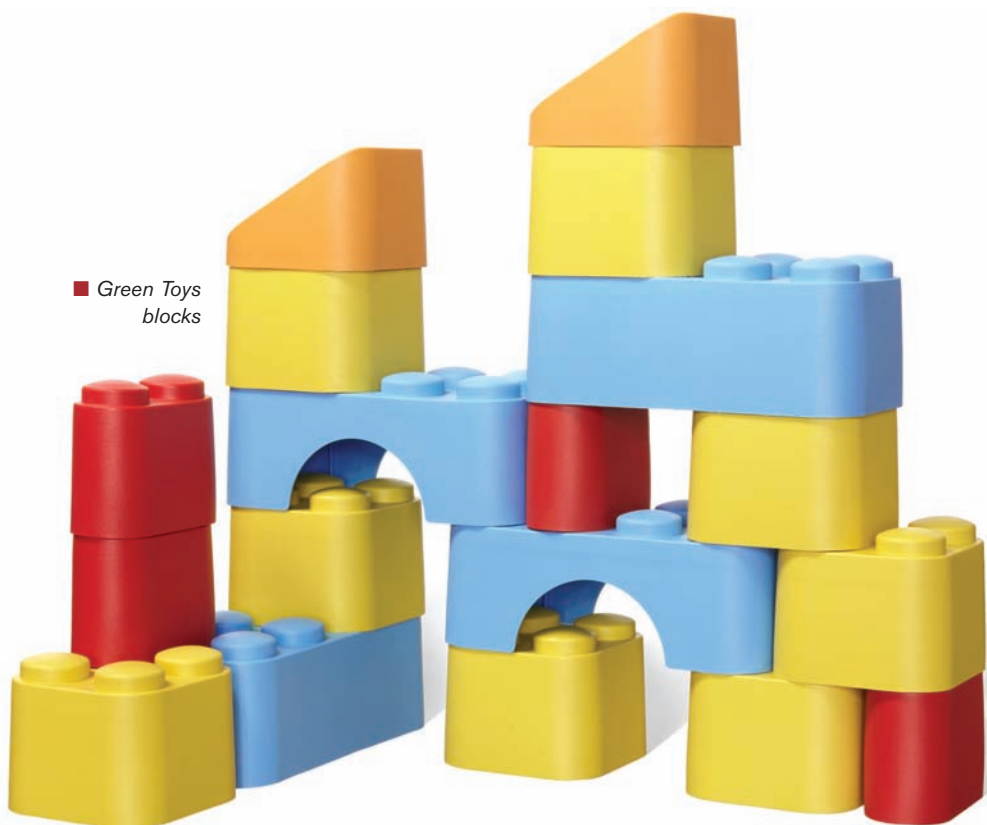
Teachers know the great benefits of using blocks and other preschool construction toys. They see children evolve as they learn building block by block. Construction play opens a new world of potential. Children gain when constructing and using their imagination. Building fosters physical coordination, mental development, and social and communication skills. Many educational and creative skills evolve from using a wide variety of building materials.

Building Blocks—The Past

The world-renowned architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, writes in his autobiography, “The maple-wood blocks...are in my fingers to this day,” and “these primary forms and figures were the secret of all effects...which were ever got into the architecture of the world.” As a child this outstanding architect spent a great deal of time playing with the educational blocks created by Friedrich



■ International Playthings Skyrail Rollercoaster Elevator by Quercetti



■ Green Toys blocks



■ Capriola Corporation Laser Pegs

construction toys



■ Lincoln Logs Shady Pine Homestead



■ Battat Inc/Adica Pongo Bristle Blocks Table with Blocks



■ Fat Brain Toys
Dado Cubes

“Construction toys, of all toy categories, offer the most open-end opportunities for children to design and create imaginative structure. Using abstract, modular forms, construction toys present a “what if” question and allow children to construct and continually modify their own representations.”

—Karen Hewitt Learning Materials Workshop

Froebel (known as “Froebel Gifts”) given to him by his mother. Froebel “Gifts” are small geometrically shaped blocks that can be assembled in various combinations to form three-dimensional compositions.

Frank Lloyd Wright’s son, John, many years later, created another popular construction product, Lincoln Logs. These wooden logs based on the traditional log cabin were played with by generations of young architects and builder. Other architects over the years have expressed the same early and strong influence of building blocks.

Confirmation of Construction

Research conducted in a variety of settings has shown successful results about the value of construction play and how this form of play relates to learning math, technology, and many other benefits. One study showed that playing with blocks improved children’s language development by 15% and reduced television watching.

Recent studies on brain development show most of a person’s neurons are formed between birth and six. If a child doesn’t receive sufficient nurturing, nutrition, parental/caregiver interaction, and stimulus during this crucial period, the child may be left with permanent developmental deficits that hamper success in school and in later life.

Construction products enhance educational programs at each level from preschool through col-

lege as the complexity of use grows with the age and ability of the student.

Construction materials are important to support children’s full creative, physical, and mental development. It’s important that parents and teachers give children ample time to explore and play together helps to make them more confident human beings.

Construction Choices

When building play started, it was as fundamental as placing two stones on top of each other, a fistful of sticks were used to create the first structure. It evolved into hand-made wooden blocks and other shapes that opened up the world of potential and stimulated children to create whatever they want their structure to be. Today, a wide array of materials and shapes with many levels of complexity, are available.

We are most fortunate to have many construction choices—from wood to colorful and sturdy plastic; from dowels that fit together to blocks of all sizes, shape, colors and forms; and from many different materials that reflect the real world—metal, soft and hard plastic, variations of wood and foam, air blown blocks, and sturdy cardboard encompass the vast world of construction play; and natural materials are also available. Construction products contribute to children’s evolution and benefits their overall growth and development.

Some Construction Products

Construction Benefits:

- Learn to create buildings and structures, and to design imaginary things based on one's own ideas.
- Build strength in fingers and hands (fine and gross motor skills), improve eye-hand coordination, gain visual discrimination, practice observation, and learn spatial relations.
- Develop social relationships while solving problems with other children, as they share, discuss, and build.
- Expand language and reading skills as they articulate about size, shape, colors, comparisons, themes, and other aspects of building.
- Learn and practice math skills by grouping, adding, subtracting, matching, and sequencing.
- Learn and practice computer-based technical skills such as modular reasoning, building, perspective, logarithms, algorithms, and creative reasoning.
- Experience science and physics experimenting



■ HABA USA Ball Track Construction Set

with gravity, weight, balance, and stability.

- Stimulate skills and imagination including cause and effect, problem solving, classification skills, and critical thinking.
- Gain a sense of personal achievement when constructing with blocks, building sets, construction toys, robots, and other objects.
- Make discoveries that are impossible to imagine, control, or manifest in any other way while using one's own hands to manipulate shapes and forms.

Benefits Happen Simultaneously:

- Take a block or construction piece and discover how to build placing each piece next to, on top of, or see how it connects to others.
- Discover by trial and error, by changing and exploring what works, by experimentation.
- Decide what you want to create and then work toward your goal, step-by-step.
- Work alone or with another and talk about what you are doing.
- Together they share and see how their structure may grow larger and more complicated.
- May add decorations to experiment and make choices.

1. Battat Inc/Adica Pongo Bristle Blocks™ Table with Blocks

www.battatco.com

Sturdy wooden table with 108 interlocking blocks in different shapes, colors and sizes. Handy storage bin/drawer for storage.

2. Blue Orange Games Zimbbos! Elephantastic Pyramids

www.blueorangegames.com

Fun building game for eye-hand coordination that inspires creativity. Build fantastic pyramid of elephants.

3. Cadaco EnviroBLOX™ Deluxe Set

www.cadaco.com

Set has 180 pieces 100% biodegradable building blocks and logs, variety of colors and sizes. Made in U.S. from cornstarch using patented manufacturing process – no plastic or oil-based materials. Adaptable; simply moisten EnviroBLOX with water for firm, instant hold; no tape or glue.

4. Capriola Corporation Laser Pegs™

www.laserpegs.com

First construction set where each piece feeds next piece with low voltage current. Used lit up or turned off. Once peg is connected its power source, it illuminates any peg connected with it. It is a 72-piece kit with three AAA batteries. LED lights have long life.

5. Citiblocs 100 Piece Wooden Building Set

www.citiblocs.com

Green, precision-cut blocks of wood crafted from New Zealand pine. Different building sets of 54, 100, to 200 pieces, with colorful building design guide.

6. Dr. Drew's Discovery Blocks

www.drdrewsblocks.com

Wooden blocks for creative play. Carefully crafted of kiln dried North American beech wood, 3" x 1/2" in a canvas bag. Introduced in 1975 as math manipulative.

7. Engino Construction System

www.engino.com/www.elenco.com

Design, build structures with ingenious engineering mechanisms. Parts snap-fit to stay together, system expandable in any direction and angle. Expandable rods are connectors, 3V motor included. 80 models, 12 in booklet plus download.

8. Fat Brain Toys Dado Cubes

www.FatBrainToys.com

Twist on classic building blocks, Dado engages imagination as slits on each cube interlock to create unlimited number of three-dimensional structures horizontally, vertically, or nested together. Ten cubes capable of structures over 32 inches high!

9. Green Toys Blocks

www.greentoys.com

Environmentally friendly basic building set of 18 boldly colored blocks, oversized, lightweight, easy for tiny hands to stack and unstack. Safe, no BPA, PVC, phthalates or external coatings; Made in USA from 100% recycled plastic milk containers save energy, reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Uses recycled and recyclable materials, soy inks for packaging.

10. HABA USA Ball Track Construction Set

www.habausa.com

Includes 42 beechwood pieces and 6 glass marbles. Combine blocks with other construction sets for endless arrangements. Safe, water based, non-toxic stains! No Lead Paint. Made in Germany.

11. ImagAbility WEDGiTS To Go Set

www.wedgits.com

This thirty-five piece nested Wedgits is a set of 33 blocks, 2 expansion parts, key chain, and sample deck of design cards in a handy carrying case to inspire artistic designs, architectural structures, open-ended design.

12. Infinity ZOOB Traveler 40

www.infinitytoy.com

Building pieces snap together 20 different ways and move. Set in handy, vinyl zipper bag, with 40 ZOOB pieces, foam play pad, instruction guide, and adjustable strap.

13. International Playthings Skyrail Rollercoaster Elevator by Quercetti

www.intplay.com

Build suspension system as marbles race around course return by elevator to the top. 15 feet of track, 4 marbles, detailed instructions.

14. K'NEX Brands 400 Piece Value Tub

www.knex.com

Includes bricks for open-ended fun, endless building play. Instructions 20 models and convenient storage tub.

15. Learning Materials Workshop Learning Materials Color and Form Blocks

www.learningmaterialswork.com

Building design toy for children and adults, inspired by ideas of Wassily Kandinsky, artist/ teacher at Bauhaus School in Germany; designed by Karen Hewitt for MOMA exhibition "Bauhaus 1919-1933."

16. Learning Resources Gears! Gears! Gears!® Illuma-Bot™

www.learningresources.com

Create robot with special features with 105-piece set includes chrome head, flashing lights, dome lights, detachable claws, large light gear, fiber optics, remote-controlled infrared motor with 25-foot range. Color-coded instructions four models.

17. LEGO Systems Atlantis Guardian of the Deep

www.lego.com

Deep sea diver searches for treasure key, encounters shark in 144 piece set. Minifigure has harpoon, shark guardian has biting jaws, moving tail, and poseable head.

18. LEGO Systems 5549 LEGO Building Fun

www.lego.com

LEGO bricks help imaginations go wild! Idea book for inspiration plus new storage container makes clean up easy.

19. Lincoln Logs Shady Pine Homestead

www.lincolnlogs.knex.com/index.php

Build frontier homestead, complete with horse-drawn wagon! Includes real wood logs plus colorful figures and step-by-step building instructions in a handy storage container.

20. Maple Landmark Montgomery Schoolhouse ABC Blocks

www.maplelandmark.com

A set of 28 blocks with letters and numbers for stacking, creating words, making arithmetic combinations. Each block printed letters, numbers, and simple pictures. 1-3/4" cubes cut from local rock maple and sanded smooth.

21. MEGA Brands Play N' Go Table

www.megabrands.com

Table plus 20 Maxi Mega Bloks pieces easy-to-fold legs allow for quick clean up, storage with integrated handle is perfect for travel. Promotes discovery and imagination with four fun scenes, stickers, figure, and vehicle.

22. Tree Blocks Tree House

www.treeblocks.com

36-piece set contains one of a kind freeform pieces in drawstring sack to put together tree house; additional accessories available.

23. Yoshiritsu Co LaQ Imaginal ZOO

www.roboporium.com

Colorful plastic container for easy storage, travel, 12 models from 1,320 colorful blocks, 7 types of blocks, 10 colors create flat, 2-3-dimensional, and spherical models. Safety standard testing. Instruction guidebooks use universal design. Made in Japan.

Construction is a Tool for Learning

The process of construction play encourages children to use many aspects of learning including — discovery, artistic expression, social interaction, balance, gravity, experience, language, humor, three-dimensionality, self-discovery, thinking, compromise, cooperation, negotiations, problem solving, the basics of math, science, physics, and much more.

Children explore mathematical thinking, patterns, geometric shapes, part-whole relationships, fractions, adding, dividing, subtracting; all experienced and practiced naturally in the process of building.

As they play, children translate their ideas, images, and feelings into tangible forms. They are using skills, actions, and abilities to transform objects into their own creations and using imagination and skill.

Evaluate Construction Products

- Is this the right construction set for child's age and ability and will it provide fun and self-expression?

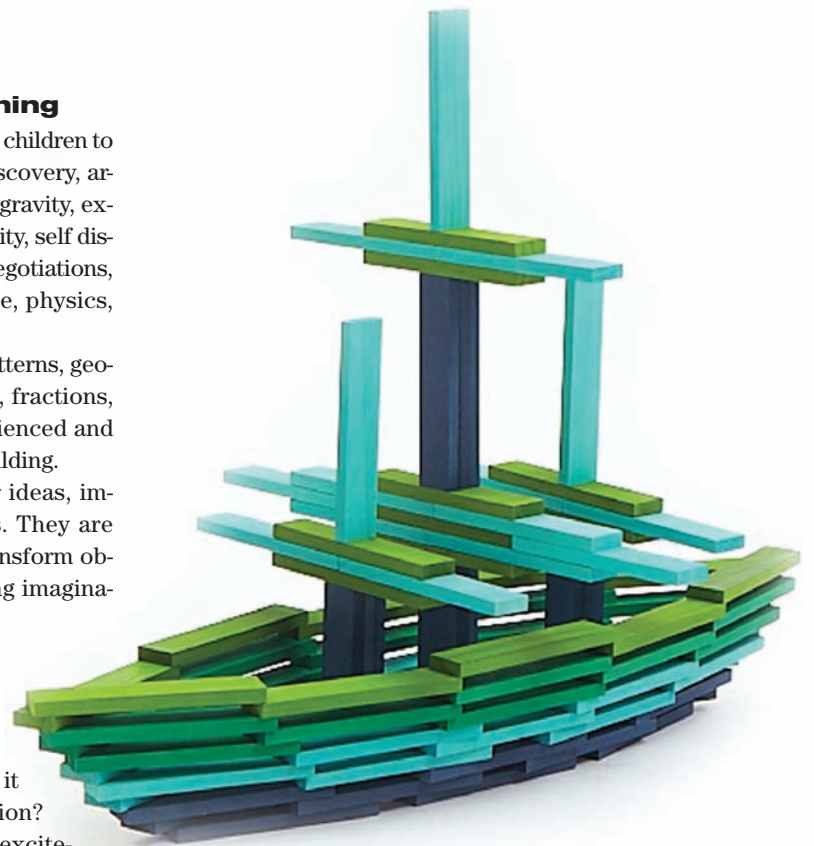
Is there sufficient fun and excitement for the child to enjoy using the product? If it is challenging, but not frustrating, it is the right product.

- Does the construction toy have aspects right for the child?

If the product allows “open-ended” play and supports a child's self-expression, the child can make a construction product turn out to match fantasy, and imagination.



■ Yoshiritsu Co LaQ Imaginal ZOO



■ Citiblocs 100 Piece Wooden Building Set

tion products is a natural process to reach out to explore the world.

- Continuing to engage in building play helps children gain many other important lifetime skills.

• The “young architect” or “construction foreman” gains small muscle dexterity, learns to place and balance objects, and practice eye-hand coordination.

- Construction play helps introduce art, design, archi-

“The wide variations of choices of available construction products offer more complicated and challenging building for all ages.”

• Does the product stimulate conversation and expression? Good construction toys offer fun, provide surprise and novelty each time a creation is made, and present ample chances for everyone to excel.

• Does the construction toy support skill building? Block and constructive play helps all ages keep mentally alert.

Construction Products Value

- Provides practice for children to develop many important skills, including math, science, physics, patterning, sequencing, visual discrimination, strategy, and eye-hand coordination.

• As children mature with more complicated products they learn about structures, levers, mechanisms, and pulleys.

- Playing with construc-

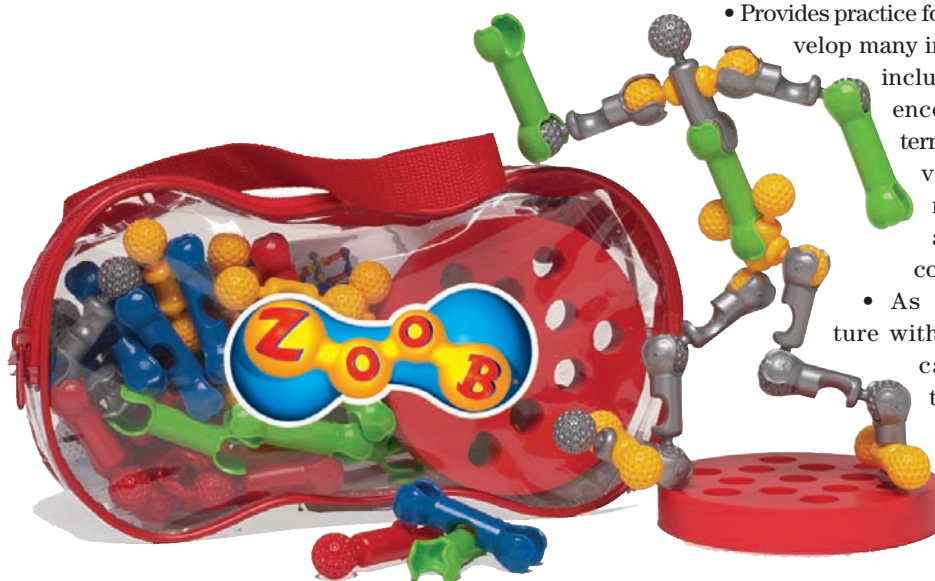
ture, history, mathematics, technology, science, logical reasoning, cause and effect, and engineering.

All of these benefits and many more are an integral part of the construction play experience. Assist teachers and parents to help spark children's creativity with block and construction play by doing promotions in retail locations, schools and other places.

The Last Block

The potential of scope and activity with construction play is vast and diversified. There are many opportunities, from simple to more sophisticated, for construction projects and play experiences. The wide variations of choices of available products offer more complicated and challenging building for all ages. The beneficial experiences of building continue well beyond childhood. ■

Stevanne Auerbach, PhD, aka Dr. Toy, a longtime play and toy specialist evaluates products on www.drtoy.com, author of Smart Play Smart Toys coordinated the World's First International Construction Toy Exhibition at The University of Cyprus (2008) and is working on coordinating The 2nd Exhibition for ITRA (International Toy Research Association) Conference in Bursa, Turkey (2011) and the 3rd Exhibition in Tokyo, Japan. Looking for right location for 4th Exhibition in the USA; Contact drtoy@drtoy.com.



■ Infinity ZOOB Traveler 40