

~~~~~  
**Phil's Forum 6-17-05 – Toy House Top Ten Road Show**  
~~~~~

We're hitting the road!

That's right, the Toy House is going mobile this summer and coming to a family-friendly event near you.

I know, you're probably asking yourself, "So what's new?" You've seen my staff and me at the Spring Arbor Learning Fair, the Jackson County Health Fair, and other events around town. What makes this summer's plans so newsworthy?

Unlike in the past where we had a display with a bunch of flyers and a few "not for sale" demos, this time we're rolling out a complete ten-by-ten foot booth filled with the best toys ever!

And I mean it when I say best toys ever. It's the Toy House Top Ten Toys Traveling Toy Tent!

Our booth will be filled with all of my Top Ten Toys. Plus, we'll have a few goodies to match the theme of the event where we'll be.

Hold on. It just dawned on me. Some of you might not know what I mean by our Top Ten Toys. Some of you might not have seen our in-store flyers and displays highlighting what I believe to be the Top Ten Toys of all times.

Let me explain.

I developed the list of Top Ten Toys for Kids in Common, Jackson's Family Magazine for the December 2003 issue. My wife thought it would be a good idea to help people understand toys a little better and have some sure-fire winning suggestions for the last-minute shoppers of some of the Great Toys at Toy House.

Unlike some other stores, we have three criteria for determining what makes a Great Toy.

- 1) The toy must be INTERACTIVE. The child must be an active participant in the toy. If the child does nothing more than start it and watch it go, then he or she becomes disinterested quickly. All great toys engage the child immediately and make them active participants in the play.
- 2) The toy must be OPEN-ENDED. Great toys have many different ways with which to play. They are not limited in how or what you can do. Great toys allow kids to choose how they play, not force them into one singular play mode.

- 3) The toy must be CREATIVE. Any toy that does not also engage a child's imagination quickly becomes a forgotten toy. Great toys bring out creativity in children and encourage them to think.

It's a simple criterion, but one that is proven time and again to be the difference in what becomes an all-time classic toy and what fades quickly as a short-term novelty.

Here is a good example of a "hot" toy from years past and how it stacked up.

Do you all remember Tickle Me Elmo? In December 1996 he was the hottest toy in America. Because of a short supply, people were paying up to \$7000 in auctions to get one because it was the "must-have" toy of the season. But come January, you couldn't give a Tickle Me Elmo away. Why?

It's all because of how the toy worked. First, it was designed for the toddler/preschool set. Second, the big draw was that you squeezed his belly and then he began to laugh and vibrate while you watched, and maybe giggled yourself, until he was done. I don't know how many of you have toddlers and preschoolers at home, but they just weren't impressed. Tickle Me Elmo missed on the very first criterion of being a great toy – it wasn't interactive. Oh, yes you did have to squeeze his belly to turn him on, but that was it and that's about as interactive as a light switch (and most kids have more fun playing with a light switch). Tickle Me Elmo also missed out on criterion number two. There was one and only one way to "play". Squeeze his belly and watch. And, of course, there was absolutely no creativity or imagination involved.

For most kids, after the second or third squeezing, they were quickly bored and moved on. In fact, some local preschools reported that once they took the batteries out of Elmo he became much more popular. Then the kids had to use their imaginations and be involved in making him come to life. They got to figure out how to involve him in their play and what to do with him. Tickle Me Elmo was a complete flop as a toy, yet Elmo (without the Tickle Me) met all the criteria of a Great Toy.

So, with that understanding, I set out to create the ultimate toy list – my Top Ten Toys of all time. Along with the three criteria listed above, I had some other criteria to help me make my list.

One of my other criteria for being a Top Ten Toy was that the toy must be currently available today. But that only makes sense. If the toy is truly that great, it will still be a great seller and still be on the shelves. Another thing I looked for was long-term value. And when I mean long-term, I mean really long-term. With only one exception, all of my Top Ten Toys are toys that you will consider holding onto for your eventual grandchildren.

As with all Top Ten lists, some really great products did not make the list and I struggled over what to include and what not to include. I probably could have made a Top Twenty list. In fact, here are some toys that did not make the list:

Board Games – Fantastic toys that have stood the test of time (did you know that backgammon is over 2000 years old?) but don't always stir on creativity and imagination.

Hot Wheels/Matchbox Cars – This was a hard toy to leave off the list. For many boys, their Hot Wheels collection is one of their most favorite toys. Unfortunately for today's kids, they don't get the open-ended play that came with my generation's version of Hot Wheels with the orange track and purple connectors that allowed us to run our Hot Wheels throughout the entire house.

Tonka Trucks – Another great toy that really should be on the list. In fact, I'm not quite sure why it didn't make it, other than the fact that Tonka is getting out of the classic, metal, lifetime-guaranteed trucks that put the Tonka name on the map in the first place.

Construction Sets – Lincoln Logs, Tinker Toys, K'Nex, Erector Sets and all of the new building toys certainly meet the three criteria for a Great Toy. If the list were longer any one of these toys would have a shot at being on it. Instead, only one building toy made the list, the toy that totally redefined the construction toy category. (Can you guess which one?)

Even some of the Toy Hall of Fame toys did not make the list including yoyos, slinkies, and hula-hoops.

So what's on the list? What are my all time Top Ten Toys?

I'll give you some time to guess...

Did you figure it out? You can check your answers the next time you stop in the Toy House.

Or better yet, stop by and see us in our Toy House Top Ten Toys Traveling Toy Tent during these following events.

(Sorry, no freebies today, you'll have to come see us to get the list;-)

Juneteenth – Saturday, June 18 from 12 to 6pm at the Downtown Riverwalk Amphitheater next to Consumer's Energy.

The Learning Fair at Spring Arbor University – Friday & Saturday, July 8-9 from 10am to 4pm.

The Hot Air Jubilee – Friday to Sunday, July 15-17 all day at the Jackson County Airport

One final thought. My list is my opinion. I want to know what you think. In fact, if anyone can successfully convince me why a different toy belongs on the Top Ten Toy List than any of the ten I have chosen, I will gladly give that person a \$50 gift certificate. (If more than one person chooses the same toy, there will be a drawing.)

Check out my list. If you think something else belongs on the list, send me your convincing reasons why.

And stop by and see us on the road this summer. It'll be Toy House fun in a ten-by-ten booth!

Happy Shopping!

-Phil Wrzesinski