

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 teaches the highly-acclaimed "SHOPPING FOR BABY 101" classes at the Toy House, "BABIES 101: THE BASICS FOR NEW DADS" at Allegiance Health, and "SHOPPING FOR TOYS 101" to groups and organizations of all types. 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.

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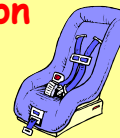


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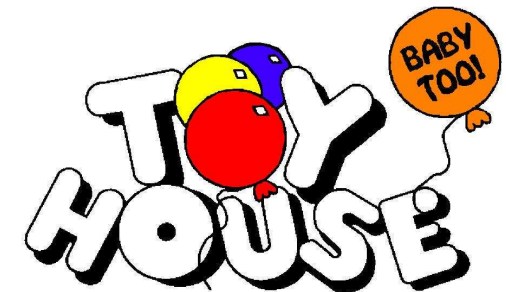
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WHY EVALUATE TOYS?

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	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 <i>manual</i> 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 <i>do</i> 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	