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**CHILD'S PLAY**

**By Arleen M. Kaptur**

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When you are around young children, listen very carefully. When they believe no one is concerned with what they are doing, they let themselves go. They make up stories, give dialogue to their playthings, and give the best descriptions to animate or inanimate objects that you can ever imagine.

As writers, we sometimes lose that child-like quality of spontaneous insight. into the stories we are trying to write. We work at writing, instead of letting writing work in us. Some stories I have read give mundane, dull, and very uninteresting descriptions of scenes that could be brought alive and made vibrant with the right words. When you are trying to describe something to your reader, close your eyes and in your mind see whatever it is "for the first time". You never saw it before and you are trying to take in all the details. All your senses are aware of this scene or object and they all want to participate. Let go and let them. Don't let them hold back. They are the artists of your creativity so taking away their paints and brushes will only harm your work.

Your characters and their personalities and antics can be treated in the same way. Meet them as total strangers with no pre-conceived notions. Let them be themselves and take it from there. Some writers believe that their characters must always be the super heroes in every scene. Sometimes the quiet, unassuming person in the room that is deep in thought or totally absorbed in whatever they are doing speaks louder than the character that is explaining and touting their own horn.

Children are smarter than we give them credit for. They pretend and they give life to whatever they are doing at that particular moment. One sad fact is that many of today's toys rob these little ones from their creative playing by giving an adult's version of actions, words, and story plots. Notice how quickly a child tires of pre-programmed playthings and would sometimes prefer the box they came in.

As writers we don't want to be childish, only child-like. There is a world of difference in these words. Seeing things for the first time in a different light and noticing all the fine points is being child-like. A small one can study a rock or a blade of grass for hours if left to their own devices. Along comes an

adult and we give them a toy that is meant to entertain but stops the imagination process. A simple toy soldier can be placed in so many different story plots and doesn't always win. Either their sand castle collapses or the day comes to an end. However, tomorrow brings new adventures and opportunities.

Writers are professional people, this is true. As professionals we know the value of finding ways to increase our creativity and our imagination. Pick up your toy soldier and see what today's adventures will bring. You may be very surprised at what your own child-like images can do. Give it a try.

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### **Ten Things You Should Know Before Buying**

**By Michelle Andrews**

Your young child's playtime is his first real learning experience, and toys can act as catalysts in your child's growth. The benefits of educational toys are many and varied, and by choosing the right toys, you create an environment that is fun and conducive to learning vital skills.

But currently it is hard to find what you need if you do not know what you are looking for. With a million toys on the market today, it is tough to pick out the best combinations of fun and learning. However, every beneficial toy should be fun, safe, and help the child develop and exercise some skill. When faced with so many choices, asking yourself some simple questions about your child's development can help you make the best selection.

The following is a list of characteristics you should look for in a good, educational toy:

- 1.Sensory attraction: How many senses will the toy occupy? Does it respond to and with lights, sounds, or movement? Is it colorful? Does it have a smell or a texture?
- 2.Activation method: Will the toy provide a challenge without frustrating your child? Will it be a fun and rewarding experience?
- 3.Self-expression: Will the toy allow your child to express himself, be creative, and make choices?
- 4.Success potential: How many "correct" ways are there to play with the toy? Can play be open-ended with no right or wrong responses? Will the toy adapt to your child's ability and style?
- 5.Ways of use: Can the toy be used in many different positions? Can it be used in different kinds of play?

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6.Popularity: Is it a popular toy? Can it be tied–in with other media such as storybooks, television or movies?

7.Flexibility: Does it have adjustable volume, speed, and level of difficulty?

8.Opportunities for interaction: Does the toy provide a chance for you or other children to be involved? Will it build social skills?

9.Individuality and growth: Will the toy engage your child in activities that indicate the child's developmental age and growth? Does it reflect the child's interests?

10.Safety and durability: Is the toy durable, considering your child's age and strength? Is it safe?

So, giving your child the right toys will be benefit for all. Your child's play time is not only a time of fun and development for them, but can also be a great way for you to relax and enjoy your child's company. With educational toys, you can follow, supervise and direct your child's development, and find great thrill and amusement in their playtime activities.

Michelle Andrews, a former middle school teacher who now stays home with his three children. He wrote "Parent's Guide on How to Raise a Smart Child by Choosing the Right Educational Toys." Visit his Website [EducationaltoysGuide.com](http://EducationaltoysGuide.com) at



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