
Polio Comes Home

Pleasure and Paralysis in Candy Land

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The Candy Land board game has been in production since 1949 and remains one of the best-known and biggest-selling children's board games of all time. Beginning with the fiftieth-anniversary edition in 1998, Hasbro Inc. has promoted the story of how a retired schoolteacher named Eleanor Abbott came to invent Candy Land while recuperating in a polio ward in San Diego. Although Candy Land appears all sweet pleasure and harmless fun, the coincidence of the invention and manufacture of Candy Land with the polio scares of the midtwentieth century suggests an important connection between the discourse of the "endangered child" and the image and ideal of childhood and play given material form in the Candy Land game. This article considers the form of game play and the imagery of Candy Land to show how the fears, images, and experiences surrounding the midcentury polio outbreaks came to shape a new idea of children's play. Play in Candy Land is a therapeutic intervention that separates children from their bodies both to protect them from their bodies' vulnerabilities and to form their bodies and desires into the proper paths.

Candy Land has enjoyed popularity as a children's board game since 1949 when it was first manufactured by Milton Bradley. With the fiftieth-anniversary edition in 1998, Hasbro Inc. began exploiting the historical significance of Candy Land in its marketing materials. Inserts Hasbro included with special fiftieth- and sixtieth-anniversary editions drew attention to the story of how Eleanor Abbott, a retired schoolteacher, invented Candy Land.¹ The story lends a certain poignancy to the game: Abbott had contracted paralytic poliomyelitis (polio) and developed the game in 1948 while recuperating in a San Diego polio ward. The game was such a success with the children in the ward that Abbott submitted her idea to the Milton Bradley company, where it slowly grew to become one of the company's most successful products.

For the first thirty years of the game, the Candy Land package included the slogan, "A sweet little game for sweet little folks." The candy is sweet and

the children are sweet, but they are both also insubstantial and insignificant, as suggested by including “little.” Yet Candy Land itself, as a brand and a cultural reference, is anything but little. In the years since its release, the board game has sold more than forty million copies.² Through six decades, it has remained in production, first by Milton Bradley, and then as a unit of Hasbro Inc. Current surveys reveal that 94 percent of mothers are aware of Candy Land, and over 60 percent of households with a five-year-old own a copy of the game.³ In 2005 Candy Land was inducted into the National Toy Hall of Fame at the Strong in recognition of its continuing importance as an American icon.⁴ As the phenomenal success of the game indicates, it looms large among the experiences of children and families in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century American culture.

Board games of all kinds flourished in midcentury America. Family time and family entertainment marked the postwar baby boom and its attendant emphasis on suburban domesticity. Television had not eclipsed other more active forms of home entertainment, and many beloved and still-popular board games were introduced around the time of Candy Land, including such classic games as Scrabble (1948) and Clue (1949). Many earlier popular board games were also in wide circulation, including many titles familiar today such as Sorry!



First marketed as “A sweet little game for sweet little folks,” Candy Land has remained popular since its introduction in 1949. The little game became big business for Milton Bradley and Hasbro Inc., its current manufacturer. This image depicts the box lid of the game dating from the 1960s. From the collections of the National Museum of Play at the Strong, Rochester, New York.

(1934), Monopoly (1935), and Go to the Head of the Class (1940). But unlike these contemporary, sophisticated games of skill and strategy, Candy Land asked little of its players.

Although preschool games abound in number and variety today, when Candy Land first appeared, it was unique in its explicit appeal to kids between three and five years old. Other games promoted for children in the 1940s and 1950s like Chutes and Ladders (1943) and Uncle Wiggley (1916) demanded at a minimum counting and some reading as well. Candy Land brought the activity of board game play down to the level of the smallest child. A child who could recognize colors could play Candy Land.

In its overt orientation toward the youngest child, Candy Land was part of a larger phenomenon: the postwar baby boom and the attendant flourishing of toys, games, and entertainment fueled by the indulgent spending of parents and grandparents. Superficially, Candy Land, with its bright colors and sweet scenes, seems to reflect the giddy optimism and goofy innocence typically associated with the 1950s. Gary Cross has suggested that the explosion of toys and games for children in the baby-boom years reflected a cultural orientation toward “wondrous childhood”—an image of childhood as a time of innocence and wonder cultivated by and mediated through the continuous stream of novelties and delights provided by consumer culture.⁵ In Cross’s analysis of early twentieth-century advertising, he shows how the use of images of childhood to sell products emphasized over and over the “seemingly natural desires and delights of children.” The nurturing and celebration of children’s wonder became, in turn, a justification and a demand for parents to indulge their children’s desires, as each fulfilled desire promised to become yet another occasion for delight and wonder. Candy Land, with its theme of candy indulgence that panders to the supposed desire of kids for unlimited sweets, fits neatly into this logic of wondrous childhood.

The trivializing slogan “a sweet little game for sweet little folks” simultaneously makes both game and child seem simpleminded.⁶ Yet, the connection between candy and polio suggests that the ideas and images of children and childhood embodied in Candy Land might be more complex.⁷ In Candy Land, sweet candy and innocent fun emerge out of and in response to the broader context of a polio menace. Polio became in the 1950s a potent signifier of something dangerous looming on the edges of the idealized American family experience. Candy Land’s therapeutic origin in the polio ward illuminates the extent to which a culture that viewed children through the lens of “wondrous

childhood” was deeply preoccupied with managing and containing risk, danger, and debility.

The threat of polio catalyzed an anxious undercurrent in ideas about children and children’s play at midcentury. The notion that children were innocent and wondrous, that they were fundamentally distinct from adults in their capacities and qualities, and that they should be protected from the cares and responsibilities of the adult world for as long as possible implied an enormous inherent danger. If children were unique, they were also uniquely vulnerable. Parents, and especially mothers, were charged with keeping their children safe from an unseen menace that could strike any child anytime, anywhere. Although the idyllic images of childhood seem quite distant from today’s overscheduled, overpadded child, the perception of vague danger surrounding childhood like an infectious miasma set in motion the increasing confinement and control of children’s play that characterizes childhood in the second half of the twentieth century.⁸

Today, the putative dangers menacing children have metastasized: strangers, satanists, pornographers, drug pushers, environmental toxins, and high fructose corn syrup. And the dangers have become increasingly difficult to exclude: disordered metabolisms, chemical imbalances, and errant genes. The compulsory practice of “child proofing” posits children as essentially incompetent to navigate or master their environment. In the name of safety, freedom is circumscribed and controlled while pleasure is channeled and managed. In *Candy Land*, this dynamic appears particularly in relation to the central motif of the game—candy.

The freedom of *Candy Land*, such as it is, suggests the freedom to consume limitless candy. Today, the dangers of intemperate candy eating are linked to the medical dangers of diabetes and obesity. The associations of children with candy eating at midcentury were generally more benign. Yet, when we examine the original packaging of the game, the picture that emerges of the relation of children to this *Candy Land* is more ambivalent than we might imagine. It cannot be entirely accidental, as I will discuss in detail, that the original *Candy Land* box top illustration depicts children alone in a forest contemplating a house made of sweets—a powerful echo of the Grimm Brothers’ fairy tale “Hansel and Gretel.”⁹ Reproduced in multiple editions and retellings of the classic Grimm version, including countless picture books and adaptations in diverse high- and low-cultural media from opera to television shows and cartoons, the story of Hansel and Gretel has been throughout the twentieth century a ubiquitous reminder of the dangers of nibbling on gingerbread and candy houses found in the forest.

Candy Land as inflected by the more sinister and dangerous adventures of Hansel and Gretel suggests a deep ambivalence about what happens when children are separated from their parents. Candy Land is envisioned as a special place for children only, a metaphor for the new emphases on child-centered, age-appropriate forms of education, occupation, and leisure, which—despite the superficial orientation toward family—increasingly separated the world of adults from the world of children.¹⁰ Children's polio wards likewise appear as a medicalized version of the numerous children-only entities and experiences that proliferated in the postwar years: summer camps, scouting groups, Sunday schools, television programs, and popular songs. The superimposition of Candy Land and "Hansel and Gretel" suggested by the game's visual vocabulary raises a disturbing question. Is the child-centered landscape a safe place of play and pleasure, as in Candy Land? Or is it a sinister scene of abandonment and fear, as in "Hansel and Gretel?" Reading polio back into Candy Land reveals a profound vacillation between these two ways of valuing and interpreting the idea of child-centered (and adult-controlled) forms of play.

As I elaborate, candy lands for children were a popular theme in didactic children's literature dating from about 1880 to 1920. These literary candy lands, which served primarily to warn children of the dangers of their candy cravings, also provide an illuminating antecedent to the Candy Land game. The contrast is striking. Turn-of-the-century candy lands aim to exhort or frighten children into a discipline of self-control. Midcentury Candy Land has abandoned the idea that children can exercise any self-control at all in the matter of their appetite for pleasure. Instead, the game simultaneously provokes and denies children's desire for candy in its proffering of an imaginary land of candy abundance. Candy Land's approach to candy is analogous to padded, low-lying playground equipment: both assume children cannot be expected to learn to control themselves or keep themselves safe. Candy Land's children are sweet, but they are also fragile, vulnerable, and incompetent. The best that can be done for them, it seems, is to modify and control the environment to exclude anything that might lead to harm.

Candy aside, the distinguishing characteristic of Candy Land as a board game is its association with preschool skills—color recognition and matching. Later in this article, I consider the marketing of the game with particular attention to depictions of the relation between pedagogy and play. In the 1950s and 1960s, the preschool skills incorporated into the game were emphasized as part of a campaign of age appropriateness. Candy Land could be played by very

young children without adult help. While this tendency toward age segregation mirrored a wider social trend, it also reflected Candy Land's origins in the children's polio ward, where adults might not be present or available to facilitate play. For children recovering from polio, we can imagine that a candy-filled board game might have had a certain therapeutic value as a way to endure the tedium of waiting to get better. But when Candy Land was marketed to parents over the decades, the emphasis on skills and what children learn in the game increasingly made Candy Land's therapeutic intervention in childhood much more explicit.

In his pictorial history of timeless toys, Tim Walsh draws our attention to a detail in an early printing of the game board that hints that the game's designers quite self-consciously transformed polio victims' struggles into the



An image in Tim Walsh's *Timeless Toys: Classic Toys and the Playmakers Who Created Them* (2005) shows what may have been an early reference to Candy Land's origins in a San Diego polio ward. The earliest game board includes an illustration of a boy with lines on his legs that suggest the leg braces common to victims of the disease; a later version of the same illustration shows the boy without the brace.

fantasy of Candy Land.¹¹ In the earliest versions of the game, the little boy on the board appears to have a leg brace, a detail that disappeared in subsequent printings. The phantom leg brace recalls the painful truth of polio's crippling effects. The paralysis and physical debility of polio form an implicit contrast to the happy and carefree cavorting of the two children on the board, skipping their way through candy land. The representation of candy is a sweet if imaginary recompense for physical suffering. The depiction of play in the land of candy promises the fantasy of escape from the pain, tedium, boredom, and loneliness of rehabilitation in a special medical setting.

But when Candy Land left the polio ward to become one of the most successful children's games in history, it took with it the legacy of the disease. Milton Bradley did not anticipate the incredible success that would come to Candy Land. There was no hint in the early marketing of the game of its origins. Yet, despite the absence of an explicit connection between polio and Candy Land, the game incorporates and builds on ideas of childhood and children that correspond to the actual experience of and the vague fears surrounding polio at midcentury. The commercial success of Candy Land suggests that there was a close fit between a game that tacitly assumes illness, paralysis, and rehabilitation and more broadly based ideas about childhood and children that emerged in postwar American culture. Children were increasingly seen as endangered, vulnerable, fragile, and incompetent. Children needed to be kept safe and made well; children needed shelter and therapy. And the candy? Children could have as much candy as they wanted—in their imaginations, where it could do no harm.

Polio Panic and Candy Land Origins

In the late 1940s, polio was recognized as the fastest growing infectious disease of children and adolescents. After holding steady at about twenty thousand cases per year in the early 1940s, the number of new cases each year began growing rapidly around 1946 and peaked at fifty-eight thousand in 1952. Until the steep declines in 1956 and 1957 in the wake of the successful implementation of the Salk vaccine, polio emerged each summer as a dreaded threat. As documented by David Oshinsky in *Polio: An American Story*, polio garnered unprecedented attention in the media and through the philanthropic activities of the organization that would become the March of Dimes. Polio created a climate of hysteria;

newspapers and magazines published alarming accounts of the “raging epidemic,” and headlines screamed warnings of the “Polio Scourge,” “Polio Panic,” and “Polio’s Deadly Path.”¹² It is difficult to imagine that any American family could have remained unaware of the dangers of polio in the postwar years.

Yet, in relation to the population as a whole, the risk of contracting a serious case of polio that would lead to paralysis or death remained quite low. Oshinsky points out, “Statistically, the chances of getting a serious case were small, the chances of being permanently disabled by it were very small, and the chances of dying from it were miniscule. Psychologically, however, the impact of polio was profound.”¹³ To some extent, the wide disparity between the real dangers of polio and the near-hysterical public response was due to the uncertainty and confusion surrounding the causes of polio infection. Unlike such infectious diseases as cholera or typhoid, the paths of polio transmission and infection were still poorly understood in the 1940s. No one knew exactly how polio spread or why some people got infected and others did not.¹⁴ Where infectious diseases like tuberculosis evoked images of poverty and squalor, polio struck without regard to race or class. Indeed, persistent rumors of African-American immunity, coupled with poster-child images of attractive, fair-skinned youth, suggested that the white middle class was uniquely vulnerable.¹⁵ Neither a good job, a beautiful home, nor clean living seemed to protect families from the risk of polio.

This sense of vulnerability, and particularly the vulnerability of the very young, was amplified by the incredibly effective publicity campaigns mounted by the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis (NFIP). The NFIP ingeniously exploited (and, in turn, intensified) the association of childhood and polio in its publicity and fund-raising campaigns, most famously the March of Dimes Poster Child campaign that began in 1946 and brought a new child to the public’s attention each year as the face of polio. The poster children, and children depicted in other NFIP materials, were invariably young, typically between about four and eight years of age. Americans of any age could contract polio. Nevertheless, children were the most visible victims, and the heartbreaking images of children in wheel chairs and braces moved the nation to pour money into polio research. Although both NFIP and the news media worked for the good of the cause, both in fact benefited from the stories of polio epidemic and its brave child survivors. Towns devastated by polio made sensational headlines and opened the nation’s wallets to fund medical research. In this climate, it is little wonder some parents developed an exaggerated sense of the dangers of polio.

The excessive anxiety provoked by the relatively small real danger also seemed to reflect a broader underlying current of fear in the 1950s evoked by the uncertain and precarious conditions of the Cold War.¹⁶ The Red Menace threatened from abroad, and the specter of cataclysmic atomic warfare loomed large. The polio panic cannot be reduced to a metaphor for the “red scare” of course, although some have noted a metaphorical similarity in the idea of infection by the germ of disease or communism.¹⁷ However, the sense of vulnerability and of danger from unseen and alien forces resonated strongly between Cold-War anxiety and fears of polio. And perhaps polio seemed a somewhat less daunting challenge than communism; the NFIP’s fund-raising programs were invariably optimistic in their implied message that the only obstacle to medical progress and eventual triumph over polio was money. While the Cold War may have provoked widespread anxiety, polio offered something concrete to focus on—both as a source of danger and as a target for specific actions. Fears associated with polio in particular also provided a powerful rallying point for the child-centered mood of the 1950s.¹⁸ Sheltering children was an increasingly important aspect of parents’ role. There were things parents could and should do to protect their children. One thing they could do was to buy games and toys to keep their children occupied at home, where they would be safe from contagion.

There is no explicit reference to polio in Milton Bradley’s early marketing of Candy Land. True, board game advertising in the 1950s and 1960s emphasized little more than images of the game and brief descriptions; inventors and stories of invention were not usually part of game marketing plans.¹⁹ And it is not surprising that the manufacturers of a children’s game in the time of polio’s epidemic would not wish to connect the game with the disease. Polio was not, of course, the only concern of parents interested in spending money on children’s goods.

Candy Land appealed to parents for many reasons that had nothing to do with fears of epidemic contagion. There were not very many comparable games available, so Candy Land became a prime choice for a parent seeking a game for a very young child. The idea of age-appropriate children’s games was a product of the new emphasis on children and child-centered leisure. Parents perhaps liked the idea of a pastime that engaged more than one child directly, a game “for the children” rather than a toy for one child. Compared to more elaborate and expensive dolls, playhouses, and craft and science kits, the price of board games like Candy Land was within reach of even modest families, provid-

ing an economical way to participate in the broader culture of child-centered consumption.²⁰ The imagery of the game corresponds to popular notions of children as innocent and sweet, images that parents might have been eager to associate with their own children. It is impossible to say which of these several factors were significant. In the absence of any surveys or studies of consumer choices, we can only speculate about the reasons Candy Land continued as such a retail success.

But among all the possible reasons parents purchased Candy Land, one particular appeal was directly related to the historical context of anxieties and fears surrounding polio: Candy Land offered parents a reassuring alternative to the dangers lurking outside the house. As historians have observed, the fear of polio in the late 1940s and early 1950s curtailed children's free play.²¹ A combination of popular superstitions and a lack of medical knowledge about the means of transmission led to the suspicion that polio might lurk anywhere, from the water in public swimming pools to the sweet creaminess of ice cream cones bought at the corner shop.²² The fear, however unfounded, was that polio germs contaminated the traditional outdoor and public play spaces of childhood. But there was a safe alternative. Children could stay home and play inside. Candy Land was, in this context, something to do in the house. Advertisements for the game like one published by Rogers Toy Store in Washington, D.C., promised parents that "this indoor game . . . will keep your youngsters happy for hours."²³

Occupying time is a central feature of Candy Land. This race game requires you to draw a game card and to move your game piece to the next color spot on the game track corresponding to the color on the drawn card. The first player to complete the route wins. The track is punctuated by marked spots that correspond to illustrations on candy cards, like a candy cane or lollipop; if you draw one of the candy cards, you go directly to the corresponding spot on the board. This might mean you jump forward, but as the game progresses, it increasingly means you jump back. As Scott Eberle has suggested, the Candy Land track is more a loop than a line.²⁴ The possibility of circling back around stretches the game, making it longer and longer. Even the obstacles on the track, the Cherry Pits and the Molasses Swamp, function not as real dangers, but merely as gentle delays that extend the game. If you land on one of these spots, you cannot move again until you draw a card of a particular color. This may take quite a while. As these dilatory and circular features of the game suggest, the point is not to win or lose, or even to finish. The point of the game is to pass the time, certainly a virtue when one's days are spent in the boring confines of the hospital and an

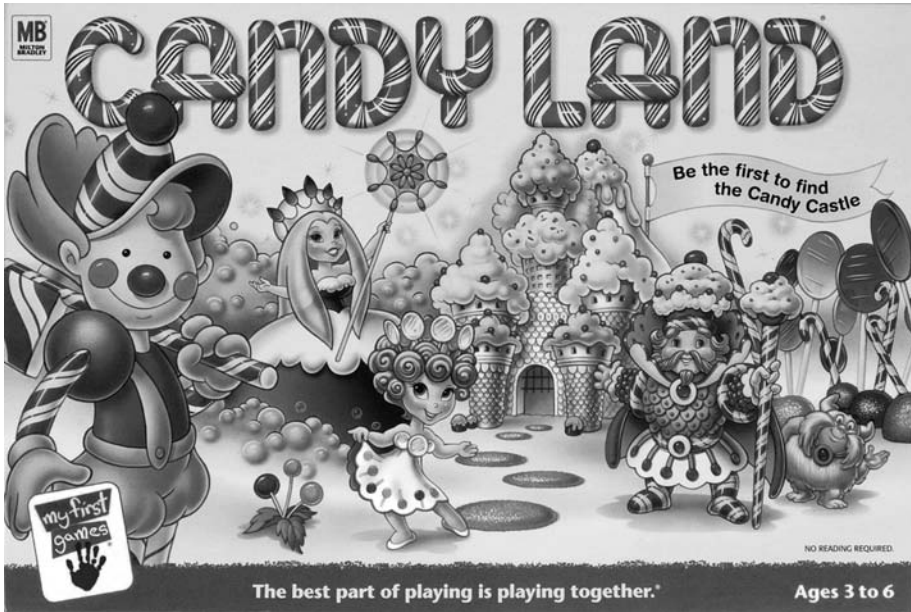
appealing feature as well of a game used to pass the time indoors for children confined to the home.

Children without Parents: Polio Wards, Candy Land, and “Hansel and Gretel”

The first edition of Candy Land bears little resemblance to the current packaging of the game.²⁵ The most recent edition, in production since 1999, is slathered in lollipops and candy canes. Every figure on the cover is carrying—and sometimes even wearing—candy, and candy shapes dominate the landscape. Candy Land today boasts its own mythos called The Legend of the Lost Candy Castle, a pseudo fairy tale that lends itself to character tie-ins and movie-length narratives. But the figures contemporary children associate with the game, such as King Kandy, Queen Frostine, Lord Licorice, and Princess Lolly, are newcomers to Candy Land, part of a major overhaul revealed in 1985. For nearly forty years prior, the game’s periodic updates merely introduced stylistic variations on the original 1949 box and game board featuring a simple candy landscape with no characters other than the players themselves.

Looking back at the first version of the game, one might be surprised to discover that the original cover of Candy Land does not actually depict a candy land. The image illustrating the cover of the 1949 box shows three children, a little girl to the left and a slightly bigger girl and boy to the right, with their backs to the viewer, peering through a forest to discover, as we do, a hidden gingerbread house with a gingerbread man out front. There seems no direct representation of candy in the scene (although candy does appear in abundance on the game board itself). The box top may not directly evoke a candy land, but there is another story that this image seems to reference: the iconic scene of the children approaching the witch’s house made of sugar and cake, from the classic Grimm Brothers’ fairy tale “Hansel and Gretel.”

Rachel Freudenburg has made an exhaustive study of illustrations in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century editions of “Hansel and Gretel.”²⁶ Viewing her assembled archives, one is struck by two points. First, when a fairy tale is illustrated, there is one scene in particular that is always included: the confrontation between the witch and the children in front of the cake house. Freudenburg concludes that illustrations of this particular scene “are so numerous that the image has gained iconic stature.”²⁷ Freudenburg focuses primarily on classic editions, but even today, a casual search will reveal that the vast majority of



In 1985 the modern edition of Candy Land introduced the game's own fairy tale called *The Legend of the Lost Candy Castle*, which included King Kandy, Queen Frostline, and Princess Lolly. The Candy Land remake positioned the game to market character tie-ins and movie-length narratives more befitting a modern brand. From the collections of the National Museum of Play at the Strong, Rochester, New York.

illustrated children's editions of the story feature some version of this scene on the cover.²⁸ Second, this scene from "Hansel and Gretel" has been depicted by different artists with many variations of detail and tone, but it is nevertheless governed by very strong formal conventions. The illustration always portrays an isolated forest setting, and it always includes the children, the house, and the witch. These elements correspond for the most part with the scene depicted on the 1949 Candy Land box, though there are three children rather than two, and the witch has become a gingerbread man.

Perhaps the allusion to "Hansel and Gretel" is deliberate, or perhaps it is unconscious—we cannot know for sure. But the visual resemblance suggests that we might look more closely at the relationship between the story of "Hansel and Gretel" and the game of Candy Land. In the classic Grimm Brothers' version, Hansel and Gretel's mother is unable to feed her children, so she persuades the father to lead them into the forest and abandon them. Afraid and hungry, the children at last stumble on a house made of sugar and cake. When they



The image from the earliest Candy Land box lid depicts not the lollipops and candy canes of the game board but a forest scene with three children approaching a gingerbread house and gingerbread man. The illustration may remind some readers of the classic fairy tale “Hansel and Gretel” and the part of the story in which the abandoned children first find the cake house and the wicked witch who owns it. From the collections of the National Museum of Play at the Strong, Rochester, New York.

begin to eat the house, the witch who lives in it captures them. She puts Gretel to work in the kitchen and Hansel in a cage, where she fattens him up so she can eat him. The children trick the witch, trap her in her own oven, and run home where they are reunited with their father (the mother having mysteriously and conveniently died).

Candy Land revises each element of this story and, at least superficially, transforms the sinister narrative of abandonment and struggle into a frivolous and fun adventure. Instead of a dark and scary forest, Candy Land is a happy land of sweets. The candy in Candy Land is everywhere and abundant. In “Hansel and Gretel,” the children’s hunger and appetite cause their trials, first when the mother insists on getting rid of them, and again when they succumb to the temptation of the sweet house. But there are neither parents nor witches in Candy Land, no one to tell the children not to eat the candy and no one to punish them if they do. Hansel and Gretel face the dark forest filled with fear and uncertainty. In contrast, in Candy Land every player knows in advance that the path always leads back to “home.”

In this reassuring and anodyne narrative, we might view Candy Land as “Hansel and Gretel” in a post-World War II key. The moralizing and terrifying

stories of previous generations, meant to scare children into good behavior, no longer seemed appropriate in an era dominated by the gentle admonitions of Dr. Benjamin Spock to treat children with love and kindness and to be attentive to their emotional needs for security and happiness. The runaway success of Dr. Seuss in the 1950s suggested that the parents who read aloud to their children, and the children who asked to hear the stories again and again, were gravitating toward “lighthearted, toddler-oriented writings” that emphasized “fantasy, nonsense and mischief.”²⁹ Robert McCloskey’s beloved and award-winning picture books from this period depict the most gentle of perils in which the reassuring presence of mother and father provides a constant backdrop for the ordinary adventures of childhood. As these examples suggest, stories for children in the 1950s might have many purposes, but inducing fear, particularly fear of parents, was not among them. Candy Land is the apotheosis of the kind of sweet landscape of childhood imagined in this literature of reassurance: in Candy Land there is nothing to fear. Even the Molasses Swamp, where you might lose a turn or two, is a place where sweetness prevails.

There remains, however, the question of how the children have arrived without their parents. Hansel and Gretel were deliberately lured to the forest and abandoned. In Candy Land, it is not so clear from the game itself why children are alone in the forest of sweets. If we follow the logic of viewing Candy Land as a softened retelling of Hansel and Gretel, we might suppose that the Candy Land children have come to the forest by their own choice or as a sort of fun holiday. But within the larger context of the polio panic, the separation of the children from their parents points to a more complex emotional and familial drama.

There was not then (nor is there now) any cure for the paralysis of severe polio. The only treatment was a long course of physical therapy and rehabilitation. By the late 1940s, the increasing number of paralytic patients combined with the expense of sophisticated equipment and trained nurses and the financial support (which flowed primarily through the NFIP) meant that dedicated polio wards and rehabilitation centers were common across the country. For the parents of young children, a diagnosis of polio forced on them a wrenching decision. The best chance to save their child was to lose their child, to hand her or him over to the nurses, therapists, and doctors who could provide full-time care and rehabilitation in a specialized residential setting. For most families, these polio wards were distant from the family home, which meant that once a child was placed in the ward, family would be far away and visits infrequent.

“Hansel and Gretel” makes us ask why parents would abandon their own children. We wonder especially about the mother who insists that she must get rid of her son and daughter. Why would parents deliberately desert their children in a dangerous forest, leaving them to what they must imagine is a certain death? Is it simply selfish wickedness?

Bruno Bettelheim, the most famous interpreter of the Grimm Brothers’ tales, insists that “Hansel and Gretel” is not about parents malevolently abandoning their children but actually about children needing and desiring to grow up and leave their parents. In this reading, Hansel and Gretel’s ordeal is for their own good, a necessary passage in developing maturity.³⁰ But this reading seems wishful, perhaps willful, in its refusal to recognize any ill-will or responsibility on the parent’s part. More recent readers insist that adult evil toward children—as exemplified by the scenes of abuse and abandonment that pervade “Hansel and Gretel”—is real and persistent.³¹ If we follow the lead of historicizing readers, we might interpret “Hansel and Gretel” as a tale emerging in a context of famine and understand, if not excuse, the mother’s act as a calculation for survival as she weighs the lives of her husband and herself against those of her children.³² Perhaps the depiction of parents abandoning their children is really a representation of what psychoanalytic critic James Hoyme has called the “abandoning impulse,” a normal and universal psychological tendency for “all parents [to] sometimes experience the wish to be free from the burdens and constraints of childcare. “They are,” says Hoyme, “therefore (naturally) inclined to resent the child whose living presence frustrates that wish.”³³ We need not resolve these competing readings here. What matters for our purposes is that whether viewed historically or psychologically, the act of abandonment is clearly a result of conflict. What the mother wants (and the father) and what the children want are fundamentally opposed. Abandonment thus appears as a choice: the mother chooses herself and her own needs over those of her children.

In contrast, parents who took their children to polio wards were trying to provide their children the best medical care. Certainly they were not parents who wanted or who intended to abandon their children; the hospitalization was for the children’s own good. In light of the availability and cost of specialized care, the hospital promised the best chance for the children to regain mobility and independence. But the medical justification for leaving one’s child in a distant institution does not change the emotional cost of such a separation. The parents, and particularly the mothers of children diagnosed with acute forms

of polio, were thus placed in an impossible bind. They had failed to protect their child from the disease, and because of their failure, they were forced to abandon their child to far off hospitals and doctors.

In *Living with Polio*, Daniel J. Wilson recounts the experience of rehabilitation in polio wards based on the testimonials of over one hundred survivors.³⁴ For many of Wilson's informants, particularly those who had contracted the disease as older children or adults, the communal wards fostered a warm and nurturing community of friendship and experience that provided support for enduring sometimes uncomfortable therapies and the tedium of institutionalization.

But the youngest patients recalled an experience much more traumatic. Don Kirkendall woke up on the Small Boys Ward of the Minnesota state hospital "overcome with homesickness and fright" (104). John Swett spent seven months at a facility in Warm Springs, Georgia, when he was five years old: "He felt abandoned when his family returned to their Florida home, and he 'cried for about a week not knowing when I would see them again'" (105). Gail Bias, admitted at age six, "cried before, during, and after her parents' visits and when they had gone she was left with 'such an empty, empty feeling being there all alone'" (105-6). Not surprisingly, Wilson concludes, "Many youngsters felt the terror of being abandoned by their parents" (105).

No matter how loving and how supportive a family might be, a child left alone in a hospital would be filled with doubt and fear. While Candy Land layers a sugarcoating over this danger, the implication of the game remains: as a revision of the "Hansel and Gretel" tale, Candy Land, too, is a scene of abandonment. At the heart of Candy Land is the fundamental ambivalence of children alone: Are the children free from their parents and therefore able to enjoy all the forbidden sweets? Or are they abandoned by their parents, left to navigate the journey through Candy Land on their own? In the abundance of sweet candy and the image of playful children unencumbered by debility or pain, the game seems to lean heavily toward one side of this ambivalence. The adventure of Candy Land and the pleasures of its endless sweets are promised as rewards when adults are absent. Candy Land smothers the emotional anguish of abandonment by coating it with a thick layer of frosting. In Candy Land, there are no parents or their nagging worries about too much candy or too much fun. Candy Land transforms the perilous and threatening experience of abandonment, an experience that is explicitly narrated in "Hansel and Gretel," one that gives the tale its terrifying power, into a sugar-laced holiday from parental rules and adult supervision.

No parents in Candy Land, then. And equally significant, no witch. The biggest departure from the “Hansel and Gretel” narrative is the absence of any sort of antagonist in Candy Land. Difficulty and danger are central to the dramatic tension of “Hansel and Gretel.” In the face of life-threatening obstacles, the children emerge as the heroes of their tale. In contrast, Candy Land reassures its players that there is no danger, only pleasure.

But this reassurance comes at a cost. The game play of Candy Land eliminates the agency and power suggested in “Hansel and Gretel,” the possibility that the children themselves might have the wits to figure a way out of their ordeal and the strength to prevail against formidable obstacles and survive. In Candy Land, there is no need to decide, or to act, or even to think. Every player has an equal chance of drawing the cards that will advance her most rapidly toward home; every player will, if she continues to draw the cards, eventually get there. In the place of a struggle against adversity and the moral reward of victory, the children of Candy Land idle away their time until the game ends or their parents come to take them home.

Candy Appetite

Although Candy Land is the best-known and longest-lasting board game for preschoolers, it is not the earliest example. Milton Bradley first offered the children’s Uncle Wiggily game in 1916. After Candy Land joined the Milton Bradley line up, the company grouped Uncle Wiggily with Candy Land as appropriate for the youngest players. The character of Uncle Wiggily, and the imaginary landscape of the game with its country shacks and alligator swamps, was based on a series of illustrated children’s books by American writer Howard Roger Garis. It seems likely that the Uncle Wiggily game supplied the basic inspiration for Candy Land. Both games are simple race games, and both games require drawing cards to dictate the progress along the course. The layout of the path and the use of various themed locations to mark progress along the path are strikingly similar. There are also important differences. Play in Uncle Wiggily advances with fairly sophisticated written instructions in verse and counting moves up to fifteen squares. In contrast, Candy Land play relies only on simple color and picture cues. But the more dramatic difference between Uncle Wiggily and Candy Land is the introduction of a land of candy as the theme of the game.

Although a candy land was an original conception for a board game, the idea of a candy land for children was not. The first representations of candy lands appear in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century didactic children's literature. Poems and stories like "How Felicia Liked Candy Land" and Louisa May Alcott's "The Candy Country" follow a generic formula which depicts the joys of a land of candy, only to turn from the joys to the pains and aches that would result from overindulgence.³⁵ Alcott's "The Candy Country" offers a mild version of this literature that attempts simultaneously to entertain and to educate. Over the course of Alcott's novella, Lily grows from candy indulgence and indolence to an appreciation of brown bread and hard work. The story was reprinted several times in school readers published by Little, Brown of Boston in the early 1900s, suggesting that educators found the story's message of virtue in hearty nutrition and honest labor appropriate for the edification of their young charges.³⁶

"How Felicia Liked Candy Land" (1901) by Jane Ellis Joy is a short story originally published in the *Sunday School Times* and reprinted in other periodicals. Felicia, having polished off an entire a box of candies while reading her school books, is invited to visit Candy Land by the king and queen themselves. Since they are all made of candy, Felicia is at first delighted. But by the second day, Felicia longs for buckwheat cakes and porridge instead of her breakfast of more candy: "The sight of candy, and nothing else, almost made Felicia ill." By the end of the tale, she wants a simple potato and cries out in a sick delirium, "This Fairyland candy is killing me!" Suddenly back home in her own bed, she hears the doctor at her side: "She's out of danger now, but don't let her eat so much candy again!"

The problem for Felicia in Candy Land is not so much candy itself but candy in excess. A more extreme condemnation of candy's sinister effects appears in "The King of Candy Land," a short poem by Ella Wheeler Wilcox published and reproduced through the 1890s in the *Christian Advocate* and elsewhere.³⁷ Wilcox was best known for her inspirational and sentimental popular poetry. But when children's teeth and stomachs seemed in danger, she did not hesitate to deploy a much darker imagery. Two stanzas of praise for the King of Candy Land describe his smile "like the sun" and "bright eyes [that] twinkle and glow with fun." Three stanzas follow this enticement depicting the horrors that will consume the children who fall under his spell. In this poem, candy itself is a monstrous lure. The King offers children "every thing toothsome, melting sweet" but "when he lifts his mask and shows his face," the truth is revealed:

“he is a monster, ugly and grim, that they go running after.” The children’s delight turns into a scene of suffering and decay: “The cheeks grow pale that once were bright, and they sob instead of sing. And their teeth drop out, and their eyes grow red . . . and they have aches in every place. . . .”

The image of children eating themselves sick on candy, repeated over and over in the didactic candy lands, hints at the particular relation between children and candy at the turn of the century. With new sources and lower prices of sugar in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and with the introduction of new machine production techniques and new packaging, storage, and transportation technologies, candy was transformed from a local and handmade product to a regional, mass-produced commodity. As a result, more candy and more kinds of candy at lower prices became more widely available. Penny candy was cheap, plentiful, and made to appeal to a child’s eye. Licorice, marshmallows, suckers, kisses, caramels, jellies, and more could be had at the candy shops found around every corner, several pieces to the penny. In the golden age of penny candy, from about 1880 to the early 1930s, children were significant buyers of candy for their own immediate consumption, and penny candies made for and sold directly to children were a significant portion of the candy market. Wendy Woloson, in her study of the confection market in the nineteenth century, concludes that in this period the eating of candy by children was “universal.”³⁸

Alongside the cultural spectacle of children enjoying candy came an attendant anxiety that children’s ability to pursue their own pleasures and satisfy their own desires must somehow be a dangerous thing. As “The King of Candy Land” suggests, the literary candy lands of the turn of the century were meant both to attract and to terrify. Children would be seduced by the visions of candy, only to be turned back to eating right when the true nature of candy and the vile consequences of its consumption were revealed. Candy in excess was both disease and cure: the candy land stories repeat over and over the lesson that eating too much candy will make you sick, that the experience of candy sickness will cure you of the desire to eat candy. In an admittedly extreme form, the gruesome King of Candy Land personifies children’s own dangerous appetites. In this view, the menace to children’s health and safety comes from their very nature, and the work of disciplining children aims to civilize and govern these internal forces to protect children from their own dangerous impulses.

Unlike its literary predecessors, the Candy Land game does not punish children for their indulgence. Candy Land appears to have no moral or didactic purpose. Adults, and adult ideas, are markedly absent from the board.

Candy is unrestricted, and there is no cost or penalty for desiring the candy, or at least the board's images of candy. In part, this lax stance reflects a general tendency in the transformation of children's games in the twentieth century. While board games of the nineteenth century sought to instruct and uplift their young charges, by the midtwentieth century, board games aimed at children offered fantasy, escape, and adventure.³⁹ It is just this escape that Candy Land offers, both in its representation of a fantasy destination and as an escape from the disease and danger of polio. But the apparent lack of didacticism in the game also relates to changing ideas about children's appetites and children's candy.

By the late 1940s, the children's penny-candy scene had changed dramatically. In 1932 to 1933, it was estimated that nearly 18 percent of total candy production went to the juvenile penny-sweets market. Over the next fifteen years, the portion of the total candy output produced for the penny market fell to less than 4 percent.⁴⁰ Both long-term and short-term forces conspired to make penny candy a nostalgic memory by midcentury. Penny candy had always represented the bottom end of the candy trade. "Better" candy stores avoided penny-candy sales, viewing the children's trade as an inconvenience and a distraction. Profit margins on penny goods were razor thin, and the penny-candy merchant had to spend more on labor to serve the demanding small customers making numerous small purchases. The United States' entry into World War II in 1941 brought the rationing of sugar and other candy ingredients. The candy industry succeeded in promoting candy as an essential food, thereby assuring their continued access to sugar and other necessary commodities, but prices rose significantly. During the war years, about half the nation's candy production went to provisioning the military, therefore reducing the amount of candy sold domestically. These forces drove out the penny-candy trade. Bulk and box candies made far more profit, and manufacturers, even those with nostalgic ties to the candy past, could no longer make economic sense of the penny lines.⁴¹

The game of Candy Land thus evokes the dystopian candy lands of didactic children's literature, but in a context in which children's access to candy has changed dramatically. In the late 1940s, candy bars or sacks retailing at five or ten cents were within a child's means. But observers remarked sadly the demise of the children's candy counter with its countless variety of goods to be chosen: "[Today] they don't have the fun of peeping and peering and puzzling and selecting such as one had when faced with a wonderful array of unwrapped penny candies in the old days."⁴² Candy for children's consumption was increasingly purchased at large self-service grocery stores, where it was packaged

in cellophane bags or other family-size packs rather than offered as individual pieces. This candy would be bought by mother, perhaps at the request of Junior, but no longer as an autonomous and independent child's purchase.⁴³ Candy continued as a source of pleasure and delight to children, but only as provided or approved by their parents.

The marketing slogan for the game says it all: Candy Land fulfills "the sweet tooth yearning of the younger set without the tummy ache aftereffects."⁴⁴ In contrast to the didactic training of the 1900s that frightened children into self-control, by midcentury most adults shared the assumption that children could not control their own sweet-tooth yearnings. It is parents who control children's access to candy and who seek to protect their children from the consequences of unsupervised candy eating. Candy Land is the permissive solution to the dilemma of children's dangerous desires, one example of what Gary Cross identifies as the "new consumer products that would ease strained relations by reconciling the inevitable conflicts between the child's desires and the parent's convenience and duty without either having to give in."⁴⁵ Rather than attempt to squelch the child's yearnings for sweets, Candy Land gives them free play, but only in their imaginations. In the game of Candy Land, appetite for candy becomes harmless because no actual candy is consumed. Indeed, far from being harmful, it seems that the appetite for candy is actually the implicit condition for fun: the more you like candy, the more you will like to play Candy Land. Unlike the didactic candy lands of the turn of the century, the game of Candy Land does not attempt to intervene in children's appetites, to mold or control them. Rather, the game of Candy Land stimulates the appetite for candy while at the same time separating appetite from the physical world of edible candy.

This is not to say that the compensations of imaginary candy were not significant and valuable to the children who enjoyed Candy Land. Cindy Dell Clark's recent study of the role of play in children's ability to cope with chronic disease discovered a similar compensatory logic in the particular fascination that the game holds for diabetic children. She recounts the popularity of the game among diabetic children and concludes: "Through fantasy play about candy, diabetic children reverse (and reveal) their starvation for indulgence. . . . They play at or imagine the indulgent eating they miss."⁴⁶ For diabetic children, Candy Land takes the place of the real candy they cannot eat. It is not so different from the role of Candy Land in the polio ward where a trip through the imaginary candy forest took the place of physical play and activity that was beyond the capacity of paralyzed and convalescent children. For diabetic children, for paralyzed and

hospitalized children, Candy Land offers an escape from the limited, impaired, or imperiled body.

Diabetic children represent a discrete population with a particular medical limitation that makes real candy dangerous in a particular way. But today, when childhood obesity ranks as the single most significant threat to children's health, every child is potentially at risk from the dangers of unlimited sweets. As a recent *New York Times* headline opined, "Baby Fat May Not Be So Cute After All."⁴⁷ Public policies to remove candy and soda from children's reach and to substitute safe alternatives enact the compensatory logic of Candy Land on a national scale. Children are depicted as passive dupes of an advertising and marketing machine that reinforces their innate desires for sugar. The gentle tolerance for children's sugar excesses that made Frosted Flakes the best-selling cereal in postwar America now appears to verge on child abuse. And the notion that children might, as a century ago, be capable of self-regulation and self-control is notably absent from the passionate debates about how to keep children safe from food. It is telling that in this climate of acute awareness of the purported dangers of children's candy, Candy Land is bigger than ever. The virtual compensations of Candy Land extend ever outward to encompass every child who is at risk, that is to say, every child.

Child's Play and Family Fun

Promotions for board games around the time of Candy Land's introduction concentrated on the idea of family fun. Board games were not differentiated by difficulty or suitability for different ages. A 1950 ad in *Life Magazine* featured Uncle Wiggley alongside Go to the Head of the Class and Game of the States as games that "make FUN a family affair."⁴⁸ The Milton Bradley games were "designed to provide lively 'fun at home' while stimulating mental development and competitive spirit for the whole family," as one 1950 toy store catalog pointed out.⁴⁹ Board games brought parents and children together for laughter and friendly competition between the generations: "It's easy to have your whole family looking forward eagerly to evenings at home together."⁵⁰

Candy Land was different. Its difference reflected a new form of social organization in the postwar years, when toy makers proffered "child-centered" entertainments to a booming population of young families. But Candy Land's difference also reflected its origin in the polio wards, where children were left

to entertain themselves, with only intermittent attention from nurses and other adults. It was therefore important that a game designed for those children could be played by the youngest without need of adults. Hasbro remarks on the significance of Candy Land's innovative design: "Up until this time, most board games were designed for all-family play. Finally, here was a game young children could play alone!"⁵¹ The idea of separating different ages and providing appropriately graded activities appeared in Milton Bradley's advertising at the same time the company began including Candy Land in its promotions. The earliest print ad mentioning Candy Land that I have located is a Christmas 1953 Milton Bradley promotion in *Life* magazine. In this ad, all-family play has been replaced by "the right game for the right age."⁵² The ad depicts various games in columns under the headings "Age 3 to 9," (including Uncle Wiggily and Candy Land), "Age 6 to 12," and "Family Games." Age appropriateness was also age segregation; while the age ranges in this ad do overlap, we see clearly that children have been divided and separated by age and ability.

By the 1960s, a game like Candy Land could be advertised without reference to any adult context. For example, in a 1962 print ad, two young children about four years old are depicted playing Candy Land, which is described as a game that "even pre-schoolers who can't read can play and enjoy." The little boy and girl pictured are clean and tidy with neat clothing and smooth hair. They sit calmly at a table with the game in front of them. There is no family in this ad, nor much fun. The ad emphasizes instead an image of children alone, occupying themselves quietly indoors without noise or fuss.⁵³

Candy Land may or may not be the sort of game children would choose for themselves. I suspect many kids in the 1960s were, like me, more entranced by the images of candy than they were committed to following the rules and finishing the game. In any case, it was parents, not children, who were the true consumers of Candy Land. After all, the three- to five-year-olds could not read the magazine ads and did not have money. What the advertising through the 1950s and 1960s suggests over and over, is that because of its age-graded simplicity, Candy Land did not require any adult participation or supervision. If Candy Land promised children visions of unlimited sweets, what Candy Land offered parents was the image of children who were quite happy to play alone. The conditions of the polio ward, once determined by the necessity of disease and rehabilitation, reemerged as an idealized framework for children's play.

To what extent was Candy Land ever played by children independently? We do not know. But the changing emphasis in marketing from 1970s until today

suggests that the idea of the lessons of Candy Land, and the role of adults in imparting those lessons, has become increasingly important. The 1962 print ad discussed previously describes the game play as “matching colors and objects,” which suggests the game is educational because it reinforces age-appropriate skills. Therefore, no adult need intervene in order to ensure the game’s educational value. But by 1970, adults were publicly debating to what extent they should involve themselves in children’s play. One mother, Mrs. A. H., wrote to a newspaper advice column to settle a long-simmering dispute with her husband, who joins their six-year-old daughter in “imaginary games such as she plays with the other children.” Mrs. A. H. disapproved, insisting that parents should not be playmates to their children: “I feel parents should read to their children, play organized games such as ‘Candyland’ and ‘Scrabble Jr.’, and generally converse about the events of the day.”⁵⁴ This mother found active and imaginative child’s play inappropriate for an adult. Yet at the same time, she sought some common ground with her children. For her, Candy Land mediated between the imaginative, childlike play of her daughter and friends, and the more formal and rule-bound activities that Mrs. A. H. suggests were properly favored by adults.

The advertising images of Candy Land in the 1980s, 1990s, and the last ten years envisage play as occurring less and less frequently between children and more and more often between a child and an adult. Moreover, the adult is not just any adult, but a mother in particular. In ads depicting mothers playing Candy Land with their preschool-age children, Hasbro evokes an idealized vision of motherhood to suggest that Candy Land is part of good mothering.

But even as the image of mothers and children remains central, the evolution in depictions of mother-child interactions reflect a changing understanding of the way play happens between adults and preschoolers. A television advertisement from the early 1980s shows a mother playing Candy Land with two children. The mother appears to instruct the children in play and to participate in the game. But the focus of the ad is on the two children’s activity.⁵⁵ The scene is formal and fixed: mother sits with the children at a kitchen table in a U shape, each on a different side of the board. The location in the kitchen and the focus on the kitchen table suggest that Candy Land belongs in mother’s domain. This scene reflects closely the view expressed by Mrs. A. H. in 1970: Candy Land is a good choice for bridging the gap between adult activities and children’s play. In an ad from 1988, the mother again plays with two children, but here they cluster around her and the smaller one sits on her lap. Physical

contact and emotional connection seem as important as game play.⁵⁶ A more recent advertisement from 2007 depicts a more direct interaction between a mother and a single child.⁵⁷ In this ad, a child chooses Candy Land from a stack of Milton Bradley products and brings it to the mother. They play the game together on a low child's table. The presence of the low table, in contrast to the kitchen table of the early 1980s ad, places Candy Land firmly in the world of the child. Mother plays with child by going down to the child's level.

Even as mother has entered the child's world in the 2007 depiction of Candy Land play, we notice that it is a child's world with only one child. In 2007, as promoted in Hasbro advertising, the appropriate companion for a child and the appropriate playmate in a game of Candy Land is not another preschooler but an adult. This revision of the play reflects in part the new demographic reality in the United States of smaller families and increasing numbers of children without siblings. For very young children at home, a parent or an adult care giver may be the child's primary playmate. But the evolution in advertising images of Candy Land, from children playing the game alone, to children playing the game under adult supervision, to a single child playing the game with an adult, also provides a vivid reflection of the well-documented transformation in parenting styles and expectations in the latter years of the twentieth century.⁵⁸ In a society that is increasingly perceived as dangerous and threatening, parenting has become in large measure shaped by the imperatives of safety. And in a climate of increased competitiveness and economic uncertainty, many parents believe their children's happiness and success depends on parents' constant guidance, supervision, training, and support. The "permissive" parenting styles of the 1950s and 1960s have been increasingly displaced by protective, controlling, and often overbearing styles of parenting intended to shape every aspect of a child's education and character. Children can no longer simply be left alone to play. Most important, as the emphasis on the "educational" benefits of every toy on the shelf reminds us, they must be taught.

And what is it that Candy Land teaches? A 1996 article on toys and the "work" of play in *The Exceptional Parent* magazine describes it this way: "When children play . . . Candy Land, they have to wait their turn, follow the rules, negotiate when to end a game and learn to deal with losing and winning."⁵⁹ As the article points out, these skills are all important for being able to play with friends, for developing social relationships with peers, and for getting along with others. But playing with friends and getting along with others are

not the only problems for contemporary children. The lack of such skills is increasingly a problem in school settings that emphasize order, conformity, and academic achievement. As one kindergarten teacher insists, “Many children that I work with have difficulty with the concept of taking turns, following a set of pre-determined instructions (i.e., not just getting to make all the decisions however they want), and focusing on something that is not flashing colors and lights. . . . [Candy Land] helps improve school-readiness skills.”⁶⁰ A cynic might suggest that the tedium and passivity of Candy Land, the demand that one follow instructions without any opportunity for decision or choice, also teach a form of school readiness. In any event, in the subsuming of play to a therapeutic purpose, we have not traveled so far from Candy Land in the polio ward. In the framework offered by educators, Candy Land is a kind of therapy for childhood, a training ground for developing the practical and necessary skills and behaviors that children are presumed to be unable to acquire through their own unstructured play.

If Candy Land was originally invented as an imaginary escape from the polio ward, it is ironic that in its contemporary commercial success, Candy Land brings the experience of the polio ward into the home and school. In effect, the child playing Candy Land resembles a convalescent child. The fantasy of candy, the age-graded simplicity of the game, and the style of sedentary indoor play introduced in Candy Land tax neither the mind nor the body. Candy Land suggests a particular project for childhood that strongly echoes the project of the polio wards: to be protected from harm and to receive therapeutic training in proper behaviors and skills. The rehabilitation of the body in the polio ward has become the rehabilitation of the child herself.

Conclusion

In many ways, Candy Land today as a game and a brand has broken from its midcentury origins. The radical 1985 makeover of Candy Land to include characters and a narrative theme seemed calculated in part to expand the marketing possibilities of the game and the brand more directly to address children as consumers. The board game is still popular, but it is only one element in a multiplying array of toys, games, and entertainment sold as part of the Candy Land brand. Themed editions of the game featuring such popular children’s characters as Dora the Explorer or Winnie the Pooh provide cross-branding

synergies. Innovations like Sweet Celebrations Game, which allows players to construct different paths out of puzzle-like pieces, and Castle Game, which involves sorting and matching tokens, repurpose the Candy Land theme in new gaming formats while still emphasizing the matching skills central to the original game. One feature DVD is currently available, promising a “magical, musical animated adventure,” and there are perennial rumors of a Candy Land theatrical feature film in the works. The educational aspect of the board game and its progeny may still appeal to parents, but the Candy Land movie and Candy Land merchandise and related brand spin-offs have abandoned education in favor of pure entertainment aimed solely at children.

More ambitiously, as a lure for consumer pleasures Candy Land has extended far beyond the toy shelf. The Toys R Us flagship store, which opened in New York City’s Times Square in 2001, features a fully realized Candy Land, a sixteen-hundred-square-foot candy section that incorporates life-size elements from the game to display and sell real candy. A Candy Land where you can buy and eat candy would seem a complete reversal of what I have called the compensatory logic of the original game, whereby the surrogate movement of pieces on a game board and the imaginary consumption of a visual candy feast stand in for physical play and embodied pleasure. But no children will get anywhere near the Toys R Us in Times Square on their own; the Toys R Us version of Candy Land is fully supervised by responsible adults who may allow for some candy indulgence, but only as an extraordinary event (Times Square is primarily a tourist destination) and only under watchful and vigilant eyes of the parents.

Life-size Candy Lands have become popular attractions at schools, community centers, and churches in recent years. For example, an elaborate, technologically sophisticated Candy Land was staged by students in the Gates Building at Brown University in 2004,⁶¹ while students at Hastings College in Nebraska followed in 2005 with an outdoor version.⁶² Cornerstone Church of Cranberry, Pennsylvania, sponsored a life-size game for their community in 2008,⁶³ and the city of Poway, California, planned a life-size Candy Land game for their winter holiday festivities in 2009. For the most part, Hasbro has not been directly involved in these Candy Land events. At the same time, Hasbro has also refrained from asserting its exclusive legal right to the trademarked game characters, theme, and images. As a Web search for “life size Candy Land game” shows, the idea of the Candy Land theme for birthdays, camps, and carnivals is not considered proprietary by the parents

and teachers who create their own Candy Land props and reproduce their own versions of Candy Land game. The ubiquity of Candy Land as a theme and a phenomenon, and its breaking away from the game proper, reflect the way in which Candy Land has become a common cultural reference for baby boomers and subsequent generations.

The biggest live staging to date was an enactment of Candy Land in San Francisco to celebrate the game's sixtieth anniversary on August 19, 2009. Winding Lombard Street was covered with colored mats to reproduce the game's squares, and actors portraying the game's characters populated the path. Spectators lined the edges of the street to watch as teams of select children drew six-foot cards, moved to the next colored square, and eventually arrived at the finish, a giant cake in the shape of King Kandy's castle.

Candy Land's origins in the children's hospital came full circle in this event as children from the University of California, San Francisco Benioff Children's Hospital were invited to play the game. The first Candy Land had been played by children confined to a hospital; the life-size Candy Land suggests not that the children have escaped the confines of the hospital, but that the therapeutic and sheltered conditions of the hospital have expanded to become the entire world.⁶⁴ The ground has been padded, the path has been laid out. There is no challenge or obstacle, no winner or loser. In Candy Land and its vision of childhood, all the rewards come to the child who stays on track, the child who draws the cards and makes the proper moves. There is nothing to fear and nothing really to do but to keep going. Everyone in Candy Land ends up at exactly the same place, sooner or later. The superficial pleasure of candy makes up for the boredom of safety and conformity. It isn't just a game. It's life.

What is striking in all the accounts of life-size Candy Lands is the extent to which children seem almost marginal. Adults plan, create, and run the games, and children are supposed to just show up and enjoy the fun so carefully laid out for them. We know little of children's own wants, or needs, or experiences in relation to the history of Candy Land. Three- and-four-year-olds do not leave much of a first-person documentary record, and to date, no one has organized a thorough investigation of their thoughts or feelings about Candy Land. Who plays Candy Land, and when, and why, is primarily a subject of speculation and anecdote. The vast, messy archives of everyday life recorded in Internet blogs and photo-sharing sites suggest that there is no definitive trend in Candy Land use. One finds humorous accounts of parents playing the game with children, YouTube videos of children playing alone as well as with another child, and

family snapshots depicting children playing the game as well as occasionally adults alone (one supposes as a gag).

Not surprisingly, given the age of Candy Land's target market, accounts of children's engagement with Candy Land tend to be written by their parents. Paul Weingarten describes his daughter's passion for the game in "Lessons of Candyland," in *Parenting* magazine in 2001. He tries to teach her the rules. She expresses no interest. She likes the red squares, the blue game pieces, and Princess Lolly, and she cheats, which is to say, she picks the cards she wants and moves her piece at whim. Finally he gives up worrying about what he should be teaching her and just plays: "So on that morning with Elizabeth, and many others that followed, I took a few moments, sat on the bedroom floor in my suit, and played Candyland. And I came to understand what was most important: This game was about being together."⁶⁴

The struggle between Elizabeth and her father over the correct way to play provokes Paul's own ambivalence about his proper role as a father. Is it to teach and discipline or is it to love and nurture? Candy Land, in its rules and structure and emphasis on skills like color matching and shape recognition seems to embody the former ideal of parenting as pedagogy, especially as this quality has been emphasized in the game's marketing and in its therapeutic uses in recent years. But as Elizabeth demonstrates, children are not simply passive vessels for the lessons of the game.

Elizabeth makes her own kind of fun out of the game's pieces and images. Her refusal to play by the rules is also a refusal to submit to the discipline of the game. She brings her father down to the floor, her space, to play the game her way, without regard for the appropriate educational lessons Paul originally values. Paul first saw Candy Land as a means of teaching Elizabeth rules and orderly play, but Elizabeth turns the table, and uses the game as a tool to teach Paul her own kind of lesson. The board game of Candy Land, in its form and its rules, encodes and encourages passivity and paralysis. And yet Elizabeth is able to intervene actively in the game, to redirect its ends, and to command her father's attention on her own terms.

We must suppose that Elizabeth is not alone in her creative and playful appropriation of Candy Land. The history of the game, its origins, its packaging, and its marketing, as well as the broader cultural and literary influences that shape the idea of children and candy expressed in the game, all of these tell us quite a lot about how adults envisioned the children they hoped to teach, protect, heal, or entertain. But as Elizabeth reminds us, the children who actu-

ally sat down with the Candy Land board, with other children or with their parents, found many ways of play around or alongside or in spite of the aims and intentions of adults. And perhaps that is what is really fun about playing Candy Land.

NOTES

1. Hasbro Inc., “The History of Candy Land,” http://www.hasbro.com/candyland/en_US/discover/history.cfm; Hasbro Inc., “Candy Land Game Celebrates 60 Years of Delicious Adventures,” Press Release, February 13, 2009; Hasbro Inc., Candy Land Limited Edition 50th Anniversary Package Insert, 1998.

2. Hasbro Inc., “The History of Candy Land” (website in note 1).

3. Tim Walsh, *Timeless Toys: Classic Toys and the Playmakers Who Created Them* (2005), 83.

4. Scott G. Eberle, “Candy Land: The Sweetest Game,” *Classic Toys from the National Toy Hall of Fame: Celebrating the Greatest Toys of All Time!* (2009), 196–201. See also Walsh, *Timeless Toys*, 80–83.

5. Gary Cross, *The Cute and the Cool: Wondrous Innocence and Modern American Children’s Culture* (2004); see especially pages 69–81, “Children and Permission to Consume.”

6. The cultural significance of candy has merited very little scholarly attention to date. Children’s relation to candy, at the margins of the margins, has been even more neglected. To cite but one example, otherwise excellent and exhaustive works in the history of childhood routinely omit any discussion of the role of candy in childhood. See, among others: Steven Mintz, *Huck’s Raft: A History of American Childhood* (2004); Howard P. Chudacoff, *Children at Play: An American History* (2007); David I. Macleod, *The Age of the Child: Children in America 1890–1920* (1998); and Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*.

7. While I am exclusively concerned with the postwar period in this essay, I argue elsewhere that there is strong historical precedent for popular associations linking candy and polio. My essay, “The Candy Prophylactic: Danger, Disease, and Children’s Candy around 1916” (*Journal of American Culture*, 33.3 [September 2010]: 167–82) examines the ways in which candy was the point of convergence of a broad array of fears provoked by the 1916 polio epidemic. Candy came to signify fears regarding the vulnerability of children; worries about the dangers of filth, flies, and germs; anxiety about children’s autonomy and pleasure, particularly in relation to their mouths and what they put in them; and parents’ doubts about their ability to protect their children. The appearance of candy in relation to the postwar polio experience is rather more compensatory than pathogenic. But the continuity is striking: the danger of polio mirrors the pleasure of candy. Put another way, children’s pleasures are dangerous.

8. Chudacoff, *Children at Play*, 163–64.
9. Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, “Hänsel und Gretel,” *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, 7th ed. (1857). The essential English language version is Andrew Lang, ed., “Hansel and Gretel,” *The Blue Fairy Book* (1965, first published 1889), 251–58.
10. Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*, 282.
11. Walsh, *Timeless Toys*, 80–83.
12. David M. Oshinsky, *Polio: An American Story* (2005), 5, 85.
13. *Ibid.*, 81.
14. Today, we understand poliomyelitis to be an intestinal infection spread by virus via the fecal-oral route: from infected fecal matter into the mouth. Prior to the twentieth century, polio virus was endemic, and most people were exposed early and developed immunities. Ironically, improved sanitation in the United States, Europe, and Canada in the twentieth century led to increased vulnerability to serious polio infection. Most polio infections do not produce any symptoms at all. In the case of illness, usually the disease produces mild, flu-like symptoms. Only a very small number of those who contract polio develop serious complications.
15. Tony Gould, *A Summer Plague: Polio and Its Survivors* (1995), 79–80; Oshinsky, *Polio*, 72.
16. For a useful overview of sources and expressions of anxiety in the postwar period, see Douglas Field, “Introduction,” in *American Cold War Culture* (2005), 1–16.
17. Jacqueline Foertsch, *Enemies Within: The Cold War and the AIDS Crisis in Literature, Film, and Culture* (2001); Emily Martin, *Flexible Bodies: Tracking Immunity in American Culture—From the Days of Polio to the Age of AIDS* (1994).
18. Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*, 278.
19. Little is known about Eleanor Abbott beyond the assertion in Candy Land history of her role as inventor. Even basic biographical details remain elusive. Despite exhaustive searching, I have been unable to confirm such basic details as her year of birth, place of hospitalization, or year of death. The earliest reference to her relation to Milton Bradley that I have been able to locate is a 1964 article describing Milton Bradley’s royalty payments: “For example, ‘Candyland’ was developed by Eleanor Abbott, a polio victim, while amusing youngsters in the hospital 20 years ago. She has received bountiful royalties ever since, and has devoted much of this income to helping crippled children.” Richard Frey, “The Hunt for Big Games,” *Spokesman-Review* (Spokane, WA), October 18, 1964. In addition to these minimal facts about Abbott, Mel Taft, a Milton Bradley executive, offers what is perhaps the only other published insight into the Eleanor Abbott enigma. He recalls meeting her and visiting her “very modest home in San Diego” while developing the game. He describes her as “just as sweet as could be,” Walsh, *Timeless Toys*, 81.
20. The original 1949 game retailed for one dollar, about the price of a pound of good steak. A deluxe edition was released in 1954 with a bigger box and molded plastic pawns which sold for two dollars. However, the original version continued to be available through the 1950s, and might be sold for less, as, for example, an eighty-eight-cent promotion in a Washington, D.C., toy store in 1957. Rogers Toys advertisement,

Washington Post, March 7, 1957. In this period, games for older children or adults like Clue or Go to the Head of the Class would sell for two or three dollars. More elaborate indoor toys such as art sets or science kits might sell for three to seven dollars.

21. Oshinsky, *Polio*, 84. See Chudacoff, *Children at Play*, 154–81, for a discussion of the broader impact of the midcentury polio scares in transforming children's opportunities and liberties to play, particularly in relation to the emergence of the idea of "endangered childhood" in the second half of the century.

22. See, for example, "Polio: Hazards to Avoid," *Life Magazine*, August 15, 1949, 48.

23. Rogers Toys advertisement, *Washington Post*.

24. Eberle, "Candy Land," n.d.

25. Hasbro Inc. displays the evolution of the Candy Land board, including the variations discussed in this article, on its website at http://www.hasbro.com/candyland/en_US/discover/history.cfm.

26. Rachel Freudenburg, "Illustrating Childhood: 'Hansel and Gretel,'" *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies* 12 (1998): 263–318.

27. *Ibid.*, 297. Freudenburg also makes the interesting observation that although the story of Hansel and Gretel might be read as one of strong children triumphing over adversity, the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century illustrations she examined focused on the scene in front of the house and on images of the children alone in the forest, moments in the story when the children are at their weakest and most vulnerable (269).

28. Interested readers might consult various available editions at <http://amazon.com> to see examples of contemporary cover illustrations. An excellent gallery of historical and contemporary Hansel and Gretel images may be accessed at SurLaLune Fairytales, <http://www.surlalunefairytales.com/illustrations/hanselgretel/index.html>.

29. Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 296.

30. Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (1976).

31. Maria Tatar, *Off With Their Heads! Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood* (1992), xvii, xxiv.

32. Jack Zipes, *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children, and the Culture Industry* (1997), 48–49.

33. James B. Hoyme, "The 'Abandoning Impulse' in Human Parents," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 12 (1988): 33.

34. Daniel J. Wilson, *Living With Polio: The Epidemic and Its Survivors* (2005).

35. Jane Ellis Joy, "Boys and Girls: How Felicia Liked Candyland," *Zion's Herald*, June 12, 1901, reprinted from the *Sunday School Times*; Louisa May Alcott, *The Candy Country and How They Ran Away* (1900, first published 1885).

36. Louisa May Alcott, *The Louisa Alcott Reader: A Supplementary Reader for the Fourth Year of School* (1908, 1918).

37. Ella Wheeler Wilcox, "The King of Candyland," *Christian Advocate*, September 26, 1889, October 18, 1891; *Massachusetts Ploughman and New England Journal of Agriculture*, October 9, 1897.

38. Wendy Woloson, *Refined Tastes: Sugar, Confectionery, and Consumers in Nineteenth-Century America* (2002), 54.

39. Sally Sugarman, "Children on Board: Images from Candy Lands," in *Images of the Child*, ed. Harry Eiss (1994): 323–34.

40. Judith Klein, "A Fond Farewell to Penny Candy," *Washington Post*, October 27, 1946.

41. For contemporary commentaries on the changing penny-candy market as described in this paragraph, see: B. G. Collins, "Let's Sell Candy to the Children," *Confectioners Journal*, June 1947, 35–36; Langston Hughes, "Childhood Memories of Good Old Home," *Chicago Defender*, December 18, 1948; "Penny Candy," Editorial Column, *New York Times*, August 30, 1949; and Klein, "A Fond Farewell to Penny Candy."

42. Hughes, "Childhood Memories of Good Old Home."

43. Candy was, of course, not the only treat satisfying the sweet tooth of postwar children. Frosted Flakes, Sugar Pops, and Trix appeared in the 1950s. Sweet snack cakes, already popular, became sweeter: Hostess added the creme filling to its popular cupcakes after World War II, while the coconut- and marshmallow-covered Sno-Balls debuted in 1947 and by 1950 had been amped up with a creme filling as well. The new medium of television provided an increasingly direct line from children's eyeballs to their stomachs: candy and cereal manufacturers were major sponsors of programs aimed at a young audience. But for all these sugar treats, the path to Junior's mouth ran directly through mother's purse or father's wallet.

44. Hasbro Inc., "The History of Candy Land."

45. Cross, *The Cute and the Cool*, 79.

46. Cindy Dell Clark, *In Sickness and in Play: Children Coping with Chronic Illness* (2003), 26.

47. Roni Caryn Rabin, "Baby Fat May Not Be So Cute After All," *New York Times*, March 22, 2010.

48. "Milton Bradley Games Make FUN A Family Affair," Advertisement, *Life Magazine*, December 4, 1950, 179.

49. Schoonmaker's Store (Newburgh and Beacon, NY), *The Toy Yearbook, 1950–1951*, 54, available at the Antique Toy Archive, "Toy Catalogs," <http://www.antiquetoyarchive.com/pages/catalogs.asp>.

50. "Milton Bradley Games Make FUN A Family Affair," Advertisement.

51. Candy Land 50th Anniversary Edition Package Insert.

52. "Fun for Every Age," Milton Bradley Advertisement, *Life Magazine*, November 30, 1953, 123. The incorporation of age-related guidance into Milton Bradley's game marketing happened very quickly between 1950 and 1953, the year Milton Bradley first included Candy Land, and the first year that the ads made reference to games being scientifically designed for each particular age. The 1950 *Life Magazine* Christmas ad includes some age guidance, but depending on the game it varies from none at all, to general references to skill ("everyone who can read a newspaper"), to specific ("8 to 15 year olds"). The descriptions of Milton Bradley games in Schoonmaker's 1950–1951 *Toy Yearbook*, including Uncle Wiggily and Go To the Head of the Class, do not make

any reference to ages at all. In the 1951 *Life Magazine* Christmas ad (December 3, 1951, 6), age ranges for games vary from “the younger set” (Chutes and Ladders) to “ages 5 to 50” (Uncle Wiggily), an interesting hybrid of specific age recommendations and the idea of family fun. By the time of the 1952 Christmas ad in *Life Magazine* (December 1, 1952, 149), the main part of the ad still describes the variety of games without any explicit reference to age: “There’s a choice you can count on/to please every one,” but individual games have more regularized age ranges included in the descriptions.

53. “Toys, Toys, Toys!” Advertising Feature, *Today’s Woman Christmas Ideas* #9 (1962), <http://www.collectorsquest.com/blog/2007/12/10/ghosts-of-christmas-past-toys/>.

54. “Joan Beck’s Mail: What Should You Be, A Parent or a Playmate?” *Chicago Tribune*, May 30, 1970.

55. Candy Land commercial, circa 1980, accessed at YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHdqLCuM_ZM.

56. Candy Land commercial, 1988, accessed at YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WAhGGKJZl4Y>.

57. “Candy Land: Time for Us” Commercial, 2007, accessed at YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWjbf_ZehXg.

58. See, for example, Judith Warner, *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety* (2006, first published 2005).

59. Kathleen H. Murphey, “Toys: The Tools of Play,” *Exceptional Parent*, October 1996, 32.

60. “The Case Against Candy Land,” anonymous comment #5, Boing Boing, <http://www.boingboing.net/2009/01/26/the-case-against-can.html>. Parents and educators have strong feelings about the relative merits of Candy Land as a game experience. See, for example, the reviews and commentary at “The Case Against Candy Land,” and “Candy Land: Tabletop Tuesdays: Perhaps Not As Stupid As You Might Think,” *Play This Thing*, <http://playthisthing.com/candy-land>.

61. “Christmas in Candyland: Another Third Floor Holiday Extravaganza,” <http://techhouse.brown.edu/~dmorris/projects/candyland/index.html>.

62. “Life-Size Candyland Game Staged by Nebraska College Students,” Boing Boing, <http://www.boingboing.net/2005/02/04/lifesize-candyland-g.html>.

63. “Life-Size Candy Land - A FREE Fun Family Event,” Your Cranberry, <http://www.yourcranberry.com/event/life-size-candy-land-free-family-fun-event>.

64. Recent Hasbro corporate philanthropy projects have emphasized even more the connection between Candy Land and childhood illness. The Candy Land game has been a particular focus of Hasbro’s partnership with Give Kids the World Village (GKTW), a nonprofit Florida resort that provides accommodations and attraction tickets to children with life-threatening illnesses. In 2007 the company created a special edition of the game to give to GKTW kids. In 2008 Hasbro extended the connection between GKTW and Candy Land by donating and constructing Matthew’s Boundless Playground on the village grounds, an “accessible” playground in the form of Candy Land. In recent years, Hasbro has actively publicized the historical connection between

the first Candy Land game and polio. It is difficult to speculate about a corporation's intentions and motives, but the emphasis on Candy Land as a gift to children recuperating from polio fits with Hasbro's current community-relations program. See: Hasbro Inc., "Hasbro Inc. Announces Special Partnership with Give Kids The World Including a One-of-a-Kind Version of CANDY LAND (R) Game Based on Give Kids The World Village," Press Release, March 7, 2007, <http://www.hasbro.com/corporate/community-relations/upload/has-cand-2007.pdf>; Hasbro Inc., "Life-Sized Candy Land Playground Opens at Florida's Give Kids The World Village," Press Release, July 14, 2008, <http://www.hasbro.com/corporate/community-relations/upload/has-gktw-2008.pdf>; and Hasbro Inc., *2009 Corporate Philanthropy Report*, <http://www.hasbro.com/corporate/community-relations/upload/2009-Corporate-Philanthropy-Report-WEB.pdf>.

64. Paul Weingarten, "Lessons of Candyland (A Father's Days)," *Parenting*, August 2001, 167.