

knows anything about the science of child development will not be taken in.

—David Elkind, *Tufts University, Emeritus, Melford, MA*

Toys and American Culture: An Encyclopedia

Sharon M. Scott

Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood, 2009.

References, illustrations, index. xxix, 418 pp. \$85.00 cloth ISBN: 9780313347986

Toys and American Culture is an ambitious reference book that breaks new ground in taking the entire field of American toys as its purview. Previous guides to American toys have focused on classic toys, old and new favorites with particular cultural significance or staying power. The best of these are Tim Walsh's *Timeless Toys: Classic Toys and The Playmakers Who Created Them* (2005) and Scott Eberle's *Classic Toys of the National Toy Hall of Fame: Celebrating the Greatest Toys of All Time!* (2009), books which not only document toy history but also provide extensive context and discussion. As an encyclopedia, *Toys and American Culture* aims to be far more comprehensive. Although the book does not quite live up to its promise to "provide the cultural and historical framework for understanding American toys," it does bring together in one convenient volume essential information about a diverse range of toys and toy-related subjects.

Toys and American Culture features over two hundred entries illustrated with sixty black-and-white photographs. The entries fall primarily in the categories of toys, toy designers, and toy companies,

with smaller numbers of entries on organizations, publications, collections, and special topics. Eighty-five toys are included, some as broad categories (Dolls, Trains), others are more narrow brand names (My Little Pony, Cabbage Patch Kids, Aqua Dots). The encyclopedia defines toys as playthings that encourage imaginative play, therefore games are categorically excluded (although the cultural relevance of games like Monopoly or Chutes and Ladders is surely worthy of consideration).

The entries on traditional toys such as dolls and trains make good use of the substantial research on these artifacts. For post 1950s brand-name toys, this volume relies more heavily on corporate and production histories. In many cases, this provides illuminating and surprising contexts for familiar toys. In other cases, the omissions of relevant cultural connections are worrisome. For example, the entry on Lincoln Logs discusses the connection to Frank Lloyd Wright, whose son invented the building pieces, but does not place the log cabin theme into a broader context of America's fascination with the frontier or children's related play motifs such as cowboys and Indians.

Entries on toy designers bring attention to many hitherto obscure characters in the history of American toys. As most of the designers also were involved with toy companies as well as specific toys, there is frequently substantial overlap between corresponding entries. The stories of designers are especially engaging: the reader comes to appreciate the range of life experience and creative expression that have been brought to bear on the creation of American toys. Women found particular success in the toy industry in an era when

invention and entrepreneurship were associated more with men. Unfortunately, the brief entry called “Women in Toys” focuses on a trade group by that name, rather than a more illuminating consideration of women’s role in American toy culture.

The special-topic essays focus most directly on making connections between toys and broader cultural issues. The entry entitled “Racist Toys” is unflinching in its acknowledgment of the dubious aspects of the toy past. The lengthy entry “Advertising and Toys” provides a useful introduction to the topic. An essay titled “Gender Stereotyping in Toys” draws attention to the ways toys reflect and amplify traditional gender ideals. A few of the other special-topic essays seem partial or perfunctory, but the range of topics indicates the wide sweep of toys in America.

Readers interested in education and child development may be disappointed with related entries. The entry named “Science and Toys” is too short. There are no entries on educational toys, children and toys, or childhood and toys. It should be noted that this volume does not assume toys and childhood to be synonymous; some of the toys are either not primarily aimed at children (Pet Rock) or are presented as significant in relation to their status as adult collectibles (Beanie Babies, PEZ, and Star Wars action figures.)

For generalists seeking an overview of toys in America, or for high school students or college undergraduates seeking basic information for beginning research, this volume might be a good starting place. Older students also might be engaged by the biographical and company entries that go behind the scenes of familiar toys, although the lack of color illustrations ham-

pers the appeal of this volume for casual browsing. *Toys and American Culture* is a limited but useful addition to the expanding toy reference bookshelf, reflecting the growing significance of toys, play, and children as topics worthy of attention within a broader historical and cultural context.

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Connecting Kids to History with Museum Exhibitions

D. Lynn McRainey and John Russick, eds.
Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press,
2010. Bibliography, index. 334 pp.
\$34.95 paper. ISBN: 9781598743838

Despite its focused title, this book tries to accomplish a great deal. The pages cover everything from developmental learning theories to the ways people understand history to techniques for museum exhibit design. It seems to have been assembled as a single go-to volume for curators and designers who are new to working with children in history-museum settings. Unfortunately, this overambition leads to a diffuse, often redundant, and highly varied volume. There are other books to support and supplement this one, particularly pertaining to learning theories, child development, and the fundamentals of exhibition design. The authors’ desire to cover everything for everyone makes for a less powerful and useful text.

This book tackles the basic question: How can museum exhibitions help children learn and experience history? The answer requires understanding children’s