

concerned with children's lives dedicate a sustained effort to understanding and recognizing play and its central place in children's holistic development and well-being. Waters-Davies provides a guidebook for those who are interested in accomplishing this ambitious goal, not only for students of play and their professors, but for everybody who intends to advocate for play.

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The Handbook of Developmentally Appropriate Toys

Doris Bergen, ed.

New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021.
Foreword, preface, introduction, about the authors. 302 pp. \$75.00 paper.
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This book is the result of a well-coordinated encyclopedic effort to overview and engage with the many forms and shapes that toys take (today and in the past) and with their possible effects on child development. The work of its numerous authors is well coordinated, applying similar structures and looking through similar lenses at a vast array of playful objects that sometimes exceed what we would traditionally call “toys.” The product of this effort is a sort of “Doomsday book” of toys that with very few exceptions lists the many different objects that children can engage playfully. From this perspective, Doris Bergen's book is a true handbook, both in style and content. The writing is simple and linear,

generally devoid of obscure academic jargon and oriented toward a wide audience of teachers and educators who might want to consult the book for practical matters, rather than for scientific inquiry. The authors skillfully combine both scientific research (especially in pedagogy and developmental psychology) and their extensive lived experience as educators.

The book is structured in chapters, each focusing (with the exception of the introductory and concluding ones) on a different kind of toy, about which the authors list possible types, recall its history, discuss its appropriateness for different ages and genders, note its adaptability for children with special needs, summarize the main research trends about it, and finally provide recommendations. For this reason, more than a book to be read from the first page to the last, the *Handbook of Developmentally Appropriate Toys* is a book to keep in one's library and to consult when designing a new educational activity or when information on a particular toy is needed.

The structure of the book itself offers an interesting contribution, as the very construction of its chapters presents a sort of typology of toys. There are chapters that define sets of toys based on what they represent (replicas of kitchen objects, of workshop and crafting tools, of vehicles, of people—that is, dolls and puppets), based on the actions they allow children to do (construction blocks, riding toys, climbing toys, throwing toys, musical toys, wearable toys—i.e., dress-up clothes), or based on the actions they do themselves (flying toys, such as airplanes, kites, and drones). Other sets are defined around cultural production types (Indigenous toys), or the types

of technologies involved (technologically augmented). Finally, there are sets of objects that would not be traditionally defined as toys but that have an important role in child activities and development, such as objects used for science (microscopes, chemistry kits, and the like), books (especially, but not only, pop-up books), crayons (and art in general), and board games.

The list of toys discussed is quite comprehensive—only two major categories seem to be missing. The first is role-playing games. While they are not properly toys (but certainly they are board games, a category present in the book), the current popularity in education of games such as *Dungeons & Dragons* would have made them an interesting addition.

The other missing category is war toys. Although some toy soldiers are mentioned in other categories, the absence of weapons replicas next to vehicles, household items, and tools is noteworthy. Their absence might be due to a question about their developmental appropriateness, a question raised in the first chapter of the book.

This choice to exclude war toys, however, is unfortunate, because a more extensive engagement of how and when such toys might actually foster development is key to a more critical approach to the whole concept of developmental appropriateness. For example, in a rather clever piece titled “Letter to My Son” Umberto Eco (1993) argues for the importance of (well-directed) war play to developing an historical and political conscience. Toys, he argues, are not play, but an invitation to play. Children, then, will add meaning to it, create situations, initiate dialectics. Toy play, he argues, does not entail necessarily

a passive reception of the values contained in the toy. Children are able to negotiate them and to reach their own conclusions.

Children’s agency, however, seems to be partially absent from this book. Children and their development are the focus of the attention of adults, of course, and often the subjects of their studies, all aiming at helping and nurturing youngsters. But the way children reappropriate their toys and negotiate their meanings is often overlooked. There are, indeed, some acknowledgments that the way children play is often much less sanitized than adults might hope. Even, for example, the most innocent doll can face torture and hanging at the hands of her young owner. That is why, in the end, the appropriateness of toys also depends on the appropriateness of their use and why play is also known sometimes to be mischievous, liberating, subversive, and even cruel.

Additionally, as the handbook correctly points out, the very concept of appropriateness is a complex one. What is appropriate for a young child? Different cultures and times will produce very different answers to this question based on all sorts of considerations, including gender. Cultural and religious taboos are often reflected in the way toys are designed and marketed, and sometimes banned or destroyed, as in the case of Barbie dolls in Iranian bonfires. The current protests in Iran, however, show vividly how positions about modesty and the freedom of Iranian women to choose their attire are polarized. Not only the body of women then, but also the body of dolls becomes a cultural “battlefield” on which we can witness a clash of values and ideologies, as well as of different conceptions of child-

hood and education. The appropriateness of toys, far from being a technical feature, emerges as profoundly political, something fundamentally socially constructed.

The Handbook of Developmentally Appropriate Toys, then, should not be read by educators as a recipe book, with simple instructions for one-size-fits-all educational solutions. We should read it, instead, as an atlas, which offers us detailed maps and relevant data of the vast territory that is the world of toys. It is a tool that contains suggestions, recommendations, and examples. But, ultimately, it delegates to our own contextual judgment and expertise the difficult task of deciding what criteria define appropriateness and what approaches are able to encourage forms of developmentally appropriate play.

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Two Wheels Good: The History and Mystery of the Bicycle

Jody Rosen

New York: Crown, 2022. Prologue, introduction, acknowledgments, notes, photo credits, and index. 338 pp. \$28.99, hardcover. ISBN: 9780804141499

As much as we include the bicycle in our nostalgic recollections of fun and youth, for the past two centuries this contraption has played—and still plays—a major role in the practical activities of people of all ages and all places. As Jody Rosen, a pop culture and music critic whose works have appeared in the *New York Times Magazine*, *New Yorker*, *Slate*, and other

publications, informs us in this idiosyncratic but charming book, there may be a billion automobiles worldwide, but there are two billion bikes, and they have mostly serious functions. Though car culture dominates most nations, Rosen reminds us that, “Around the world, more people travel by bicycle than by any other form of transportation” (p. 5).

Two Wheels Good consists of a useful history of the bicycle from its invention in Germany in 1817 to the present, plus an unconnected series of chapters and essays that focus on uses of the bike in various international contexts to highlight what Rosen says are “some different stories” (p. 14). Though he does not overlook ways bikes have evoked controversy and unfriendly reactions, especially from automobile drivers, Rosen is a true enthusiast able to wax poetic at the mention of a two-wheeled, human-powered vehicle. To him, a “bike ride is better than yoga, or wine, or weed” (p. 17). Beyond this euphoria, Rosen identifies uses of the bicycle that are rarely considered. For example, in one chapter he relates that prospectors during the Klondike gold rush of the 1890s freed themselves from depending on costly draft animals by riding bikes in their search for a strike. In another chapter, he notes that in Bhutan, one of the world’s more mountainous countries and one where paved roads are scarce, there nevertheless has been an official effort to make the country a “bicycling culture.” Rosen also introduces readers to the joys and challenges of bike races and expeditions, such as the Bikecentennial, in which more than four thousand riders pedaled from Astoria, Oregon, to Yorktown, Virginia, in 1976 to celebrate the two hundredth anni-