

Christmas toys can be fun and educational

As Santa's helpers search for those perfect gifts to give to little ones this Christmas or look for activities children can do over the holidays, they may want to keep education in mind and look around the house for what might already be under their noses.

"Children learn through playing," said Jasook Gilbert, a UF early childhood education professor and director of UK's Early Childhood Laboratory. "As they play, they are experimenting. Children are fascinated by what they see around them. That's why they play outside and collect rocks and bugs and put worms in their pockets to take home. They are exploring and learning."

Careful selection of toys given this Christmas can enhance children's play and learning, Gilbert said. Toys should encourage the development of mental, physical, social, and emotional abilities by involving sound, touch and sight.

Several traditional favorites are not just fun for children, but aid in several areas of development. Legos help build creativity and problem-solving

abilities in preschoolers while enhancing motor skills. The larger Duplo do the same for toddlers.

"They're not expensive or fancy, but what children can do with them are endless," said Gilbert, who recommended avoiding the collector's type packages that build specific things. "They can make one thing today, tear it apart and make another tomorrow. It's up to them and encourages creativity."

Other "oldies but goodies" include balls, Lincoln Logs, tea ball sets, paper dolls and matching card games like Old Maid and Go Fish. These toys are fun while helping develop eye coordination, memory and creativity, as well as improving abilities to grip and hold.

Because they often require more than one person to play, these games encourage social skills such as cooperation, sharing and getting along with others.

Games such as "Marble Works" can be great for youngsters, helping build coordination and reasoning skills. For instance, "Marble Works" requires a child to build a slide that allows a marble to roll

successful from top to bottom, inspiring logic and reason. When a child has built the lower correctly and the marble makes it from top to bottom, the game inspires many cheers and a good sense of self-esteem in the child.

"They have to figure out how to build it, balance it, make sure the marble will fit through the holes," Gilbert said. "They are learning the laws of physics, and the toy is educating them by itself."

Books are hands down best for development. They can help children learn to read and build creativity as children imagine the words they are hearing. Holding books also aids in motor control development, but parents of infants and young toddlers need to be mindful of size and materials because children may chew on books. Special plastic and cloth books help guard against any troubles. If parent and child read together, books can nurture loving and learning relationships. Videotapes of favorite books can play the role of books to some extent, exposing children to sights, sound and vocabulary. They also have the advantage of

ease and repetition. However, with the images of the story dictated by the video, a lot of creativity is not stirred.

Another option for children is computer software. Gilbert said children as young as age 2 can work with computers and learn a vital skill for the future. Computer software can help build everything from vocabulary to recognition of animals and can be purchased at many children's and department stores. Some special computers for young children are on the market.

But purchasing toys is not the only way to come up with some great gifts or party play ideas. Many can be put together or with things found around the house and are just as developmental as store bought educational toys. For instance, two paper plates can be filled with beans or rice, then taped together in a disk shape to form a cymbal. Plastic eggs can be filled to make noisemakers, and rubber bands can be strung around boxes to make musical instruments. All these things can be decorated and colored by the children. If you want to get a little messy, a combination of cornstarch

and water can yield a clay-like substance, while Elmer's Glue and liquid starch form a putty-like substance. Parents and children can explore shapes, colors and consistency with these gooey combinations.

Stored in plastic bags, the mixtures can last up to a week.

"If children help make something with you, they have a sense of ownership and pride when you're finished," said Gilbert. "Plus you are spending time with them, and you can check out their development by watching how they hold and grip and reason. It lets you know what they may need."

Involving them in the creation process encourages children's curiosity and experimentation. Even if mixture does not form due to imbalance in the amounts of the ingredients, children can see the process and different consistencies, she said.

"Making toys at home is cheap. You can throw them out and start again and talk about what went wrong," she said. "It also makes them think. They want to know how that happened and why. This kind

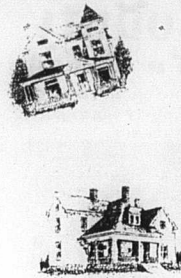
of inquiry may not occur any other way.

While parents may have to give in to a Pokémon toy here or there, a host of fun and developmental toys can be waiting under the tree, satisfying everybody's needs.

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200 years, has it been that long. The Nicholas County Bicentennial Celebration will be kicked off on Saturday, December 18, at the Nicholas County Courthouse with a Mini-Mall starting at 9:00 a.m.

The Nicholas County Historical Society, The Bicentennial Committee, and other citizens of Nicholas County have been working very hard to make the event spec.

The days activities will begin with the Nicholas County Homemakers presenting a Historic Bicentennial Display.

Carlisle Postmaster Charles Watkins, will set up a Bicentennial Post Office where you may bring in those special Christmas Cards, or any piece of paper to receive a cancellation stamp with Nicholas County's Logo and the December 18th date.

A Bicentennial Store will be set up where you can find that perfect Christmas Gift. Afghan's, Historic Sketch Calendar, Historic

Tea Towels, T-Shirts, Hugies and Christmas Ornaments will be available.

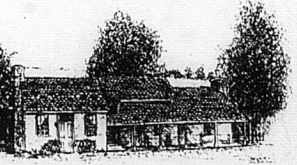
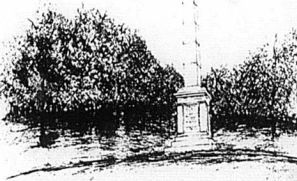
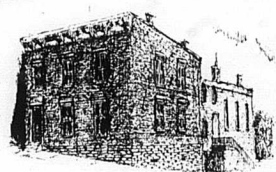
The Bicentennial Program will begin at 10:00 a.m. when all the bells in the county will ring two minutes prior.

Nicholas County Judge Executive Larry Tinker will be the Master of Ceremonies. Rev. Howard Livingston, of the Nicholas County Ministerial Association will lead the Invocation.

Special singing will be provided by Michelle Knappke singing the Star Spangled Banner. The Carlisle Community Cantata Choir, under the direction of Tom Metcalfe will perform America the Beautiful and many Christmas songs.

Joan Conley will be giving a brief history of Nicholas County and Ruth Hollar will pay special tribute to Dr. Charles Mathers.

The ceremony will end with a benediction by Rev. Kevin Thomsen of the Nicholas County Ministerial Association.



December 18, 1999

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