

Tools of the Trade: 2008 Holiday Toy List
By Maureen Reed

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

2008 Toy List

Maureen Reed

Nearly 10 years ago when my son was just starting school, his kindergarten teacher gave me a list describing the characteristics of the gifted child. What resonated with me from this list was my child's capacity for curiosity, creativity, and abstract constructions.

I think this is why so many gifted children (and adults!) enjoy games so much. Games can encourage creative problem solving and abstract construction within a given rules set. The universal desire to

rise to the level of a challenge and solve the puzzle or create new answers is abundantly present in gifted children.

Play is essential to the development of any child, but the quality of play is even more essential to the gifted child. Games allow gifted children to play to the fullest extent of their ability and are one of the few toys that allow them to play on equal footing with their mental peers—no matter their age.

The benefits of games are not limited

to just intellectual pursuits. Games also provide a fabulous vehicle for the social and emotional support children need. Games bring families and communities together to support and encourage the gifted child in a relaxed, fun environment.

But which games are best? Games are as varied and unique as the gifted children that love them. Which one will your child like? 2008's Toy List suggests games that best match the needs and interests of your gifted child.

Word Games

The complexities and intricacies inherent in language have been a source of entertainment probably since cavemen started using consistent sounds to name objects. We do know that written word games have been around since ancient Rome as crossword-type puzzles were found in the ruins of Pompeii. Word games were revived in the 20th century with the regular publication of crossword puzzles in newspapers and the arrival of the classic board game Scrabble. These games have sparked and fed a fascination with words for many young gifted kids. High in both educational value and fun, gifted kids who enjoy cracking codes or delight in a rich vocabulary will love word games.

AmuzeAmaze is an exciting new word game combining spelling and—a maze. Players are stuck in a maze and the ability to spell is the only way out. With a board game that changes with each new game and letter tiles that help just when they are needed most, this clever game will delight all word game fans. Long words are not required to win, making it appropriate for younger spellers as well. Bonus moves are awarded if longer words are spelled or uncommon letters such as X or Q are used. As players make their way through the maze, the first one to collect four colored cards and minding the hedges wins!

Manufacturer: HL Games
Web Site: <http://www.hlgames.com>
Ages: 8 and up; 2–6 players
MSRP: \$24.99



Abstract Strategy Games

Abstract strategy games, such as Chess, Backgammon, Senet, Mancala, and Go, are the venerable elders of the game world. Abstract strategy games are usually two-player games with very little luck involved. They are the classic head-to-head “battle of the wits” using logic, planning, and spatial visualization.

Abstract strategy games hold a special lure to gifted children, due to their reliance on higher order thinking skills and spatial awareness. The gifted child who thinks logically and abstractly will eagerly approach the new and innovative challenges these games present.

Ducks in a Row is a great introductory strategy game for younger kids. Move up and down, side to side, or diagonally to get four ducks in a row. Our kid testers loved the ducks and colorful board and didn't realize they were learning to think logically and strategically.



Manufacturer: ThinkFun
 Web Site: <http://www.thinkfun.com>
 Ages: 4 and up; 2 players
 MSRP: \$11.99

Chaos is a fast-paced strategy game that bills itself as being virtually unpredictable. With a solid wood board containing a 3 x 3 grid (similar to tic-tac-toe) and large wooden discs to stack, the game is visually and tactilely appealing. Although Chaos looks like a simple tic-tac-toe game, it is much more than that. The goal is to get rid of all the pieces by strategically stacking and “toppling” pieces—sometimes right off the board! Our kid testers got a big kick out of this “chaos.” The rules are easy enough for younger children to learn while providing an appropriate level of challenge. Kids who like abstract strategy games will instantly be attracted to the geometry of this game. Our kid testers said it was “very addicting” and they played it all afternoon.

Manufacturer: Mindware
 Web Site: <http://www.mindwareonline.com>
 Ages: 8 and up; 2 players
 MSRP: \$24.95

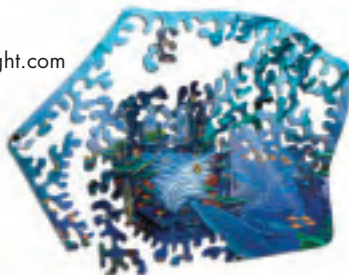


Puzzles

Puzzles take many forms and are expressed in many genres. Riddles, logic and jigsaw puzzles, three-dimensional building forms, and even word scrambles could fit the definition of a puzzle. Today, logic puzzles dominate the educational puzzle world and creative puzzle makers abound. NAGC has found the most innovative puzzles that gifted kids will love.

The **Pieceless Puzzle** is an imaginative new twist in jigsaw puzzles. It is called pieceless, because it literally has no pieces. It is one long continuous strip of foam material cut to resemble puzzle pieces. Our kid testers were fascinated with this puzzle and loved that both sides have a picture. Parents reported that for the first time ever, puzzles are now a car toy!

Manufacturer: Gamewright
 Web Site: <http://www.gamewright.com>
 Ages: 8 and up; 1 player
 MSRP: \$14.99



Royal Rescue is a beautiful new logic puzzle from Educational Insights. The knight and the princess are locked in separate towers. A rescue route must be built for them to reunite. The solid wood blocks and brightly colored guide book make this a durable and high-quality game. With simple puzzles for inexperienced builders to complex puzzles that challenge skills and develop spatial reasoning abilities, our younger testers enjoyed the theme of this logic puzzle and the challenge of moving to the next level.

Manufacturer: Educational Insights
 Web Site: <http://www.educationalinsights.com>
 Ages: 5 and up; 1 player
 MSRP: \$24.99



Family Games

Games have been used to match wits, pass time, educate, and entertain. Family games combine these purposes along with those of social togetherness, so crucial for the emotional well-being of every child. Not many play activities are inter-generational—but games are! Plato famously said that he could learn more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation. Playing games together as a family will foster a deeper relationship between parents and children, siblings, and with older generations.

10 Days in Asia lets you tour Asia by train, plane, ship, or on foot. Plot a course from start to finish using the destination and transportation tiles to complete a 10 day journey before fellow travelers can.

The latest in a series of games (10 Days in the USA, 10 Days in Europe, 10 Days in Africa), this game brings together the best qualities of educational and family games. No prior knowledge is needed before playing this game—the map is on the board—but while playing, it is easy to be captured by the imaginary journey through exotic locations across the continent of Asia. From Turkey to Japan, from Russia to Papua New Guinea, Asian geography will be your family's playground as you plan, organize, and sequence your 10 Days in Asia.

Manufacturer: Out of the Box Publishing
 Web Site: <http://www.otb-games.com>
 Ages: 10 to adult; 2–4 players
 MSRP: \$24.99



Ideally, a family game will allow 4–6 players. Generally, a family game is not overly concerned with educational value. Its first priority is fun! This does not mean that educational value is absent. Many fun games have some hidden educational value. Even Monopoly—the penultimate family board game—teaches basic economics. NAGC has picked two excellent family games. We loved them both and present them both for your consideration.

Pixel is the perfect abstract strategy game for the whole family. With colorful pieces and easy-to-learn rules, this game is a creative new entry in the abstract strategy game world. The game has two sliders that can be moved reminiscent of an X and Y graph. Where the sliders intersect is where you place your piece. The catch? Only one slider can be moved at a time. The winner is the first person to get three pieces in a row. Our kid testers like the many possibilities presented for every move. Our chess players were especially intrigued by this game and thought it was “cool.” This is one of the few abstract strategy games that the whole family can play together.

Manufacturer: Educational Insights
 Web Site: <http://www.educationalinsights.com>
 Ages: 6 to adult; 2–4 players
 MSRP: \$21.99



Building Toys

It is human nature to create and build. Children often express this through their love of building toys. Ever since the introduction in the early 1900s of Erector Sets, Tinker Toys, and Lincoln Logs, children have let their imagination run wild building, creating, and constructing real and imaginary structures. From toddlers tactilely exploring the world around them to teenagers creating functioning robots, building toys educate and inspire children to explore and create.

The Lego Group has done it again with the introduction of the **Pink Brick Box**. This year, rather than go for the complex robots or intricate playsets, the brilliant idea is the oh-so-simple concept of supplementing the traditional primary colored bricks with pastel pink and purple blocks. All of our female testers were cheering this development because finally they felt like the Legos belonged to them, not their brothers. Despite any desires to the contrary, little girls do seem to be drawn to all things pink. If pink Legos make the difference between a gifted girl's feeling comfortable exploring her spatial and engineering abilities or discarding it out of hand as too “boyish,” then more power to her!

Manufacturer: The Lego Group
 Web Site: <http://www.lego.com>
 Ages: 4 and up; 1+ players
 MSRP: \$14.99



Card Games

Cards have been a favorite game type since the invention of paper. Kids naturally love the feel of cards in their hands. Learning to hold the cards in little hands is a developmental exercise in fine motor skills that brings a great sense of satisfaction when accomplished. From thick cardboard cards for the littlest hands to a completely customized deck, cards hold a wealth of possibilities and interest.

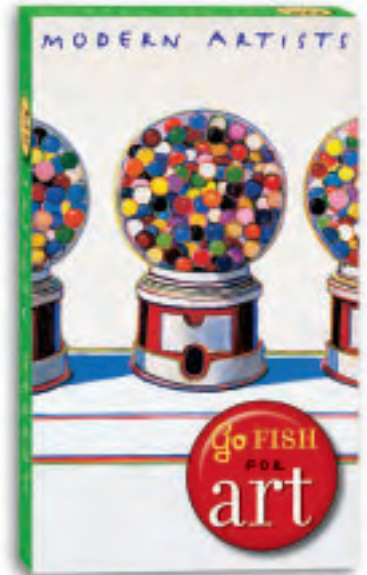
Shokoba is a simple but clever card game of collecting jeweled cards. Inspired by the traditional Italian game of Scopa, players must play a card that matches the sum of the jeweled cards from the table. Win points by collecting the most of each type of jewel, or by clearing the table. Requires strategy and memory to collect the right cards at the right time. Points are kept by collecting little plastic “jewels” in keeping with the theme of the game. This was a favorite among our testers as a quick and easy card game with “cool” bits to collect!

Manufacturer: FoxMind
Web Site: <http://www.foxmind.com>
Ages: 8 and up; 2–4 players
MSRP: \$9.99



Go Fish for Art

is much more than just another Go Fish game. Sure, the rules are the same, making it playable straight out of the box. What makes this game so delightful is the artwork on every card. Modern Artists is the latest in this series of decks that include Impressionist, Renaissance, and Van Gogh & Friends decks. Collect four works from each artist to make books and win the game! Our art lover kids “oohed and ahhed” over the brilliant colors and beautiful works as they visually and verbally reviewed the artists and their works. Even our nonart kids enjoyed getting to know these artists and their works. This game is to art what the old card game Authors is to classic literature. A sure-fire family classic you can enjoy again and again!



Manufacturer: Birdcage Press
Web Site: <http://www.birdcagebooks.com>
Ages: 7 to adult; 2–3 players

Historical Simulation Games

Historical simulation games are to board games what organized sports are to playing in the backyard. Historical simulation games can get quite complex, requiring a serious investment in time and effort. For the gifted mind that revels in the intricacies of politics, diplomacy, and human dynamics—the historical strategy game is a breathtaking next step to serious play. Although they are classified as “hobby” games and, therefore, can be hard to find, it is worth the search to find these high-level strategy games for high-level thinkers.

1960: The Making of the President requires the players to take on the role of either John F. Kennedy or Richard M. Nixon as they vie for the right to lead the country into the heart of the Cold War. Players must contend with issues such as Civil Rights and the economy while planning a winning election strategy. Historical realities such as the newly televised debates and the impact of the “Catholic question” are represented in this historically accurate game. Recommended for teenagers and above who love an in-depth experience, this historical simulation game will take several hours to learn and play. This game allows for immersion in a campaign while testing skills of strategy and political maneuvering. Will history be recreated or rewritten?

Manufacturer: Z-Man Games
Web Site: <http://www.zmangames.com>
Ages: 14 and up; 2 players
MSRP: \$49.99

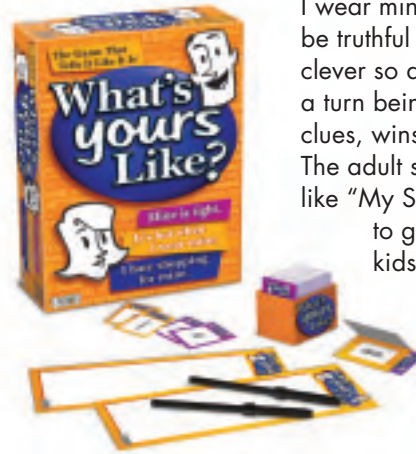


Party Games

As their name suggests, party games are designed to entertain a large group of people. They tend to be less dependent on restrictive physical components such as a board or dice. Most party games are based on social knowledge and communication skills. As such, they make excellent creative educational tools and are easily adaptable for classroom use, providing the social learner another avenue to access academic content.

Party games also are a great way for kids to enjoy interpersonal relationships—or improve social connections and communication skills. NAGC found a great party game that will interest kids and parents alike.

Want a laugh-out-loud funny game to play with either kids or adults? **What's Yours Like?** is a fun new party game that challenges players to guess an object based on a one-line description from each person. For example, if the object is a swimsuit, a clue might be "It's hot when I wear mine" or "I hate shopping for mine." Players must be truthful when giving clues, but they also will want to be clever so as not to give it away too easily. Each person takes a turn being on the "hot seat." Whoever needs the fewest clues, wins. The cards are color coded for kids and adults. The adult side will have items that won't be relevant to kids like "My Spouse" or "My Job." This game challenges players to get creative with their obfuscations—something the kids shockingly enjoy!



Manufacturer: Patch Products
 Web Site: <http://www.patchproducts.com>
 Ages: 10 to adult; 4+ players
 MSRP: \$29.99

Electronic Games

Much to parents' chagrin, kids today seem almost obsessed by electronic games. A careful examination of individual electronic games will reveal certain beneficial content such as historical and cultural background information, scientific and engineering concepts, and life skills. Each electronic game must be assessed individually by a caring and discerning parent. NAGC has found an electronic game that will delight child and parent alike.

Digitz does what educational games are supposed to do—make learning fun! Resembling the world's first electronic game hit—Simon—Digitz has five different games that reinforce important multiplication concepts, while making full use of those qualities that make electronic games so popular—bright lights, amusing sounds, and big buttons to push! Our kid testers said this is the best multiplication game out there precisely because of the rewarding lights and sounds.

Manufacturer: Educational Insights
 Web Site: <http://www.educationalinsights.com>
 Ages: 8 and up; 1 player
 MSRP: \$49.99



Award Winning Games to Stimulate the Mind!

An Adventure in Fun and Learning
 Where Rhyming is the Name of the Game

Trhyme - "Not only does this challenge your vocabulary, it also strengthens your critical thinking. Stimulates learning and skill building." - NAGC

Trhyme Jr. - emphasizes fun and rhyming while building vocabulary and strengthening deductive thinking.



www.trhyme.com



2008

