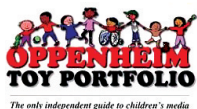


AND THE WINNERS ARE ... TOY AWARDS

| BY AMY CARNEY BEVINS |

You've seen them announced on TV, read about them in magazines, and looked for their "Seal of Approval" on boxes. But what does it mean to say that a toy or game is an award winner? When buying an award-winning toy, you know it has passed some form of testing or review, but who evaluates these products and what criteria do they use? Below is a brief description of several preeminent toy award organizations and a peek at how they make their selections for best toys and games. Be sure to visit their websites for more information and to view their award lists.



The Oppenheim Toy Portfolio (www.toyportfolio.com)

Founded in 1989, the Oppenheim Toy Portfolio is an independent consumer review of children's media and does not charge entry fees or accept advertisements for products they review. Year-round, toys are tested, played with and evaluated by child development and education experts, as well as a national cross-section of parent and kid testers who take the toy home for an extended testing period. The reviewers consider "educational and play value, safety, age appropriateness, and other factors." The Oppenheim Toy Portfolio is headed by Joanne Oppenheim, a foremost authority on child development and education and author of over 40 books, and by Stephanie Oppenheim, a former corporate attorney and publisher and co-founder of the Oppenheim Toy Portfolio. They publish a quarterly newsletter and contribute monthly to NBC's Today show.



Stevanne Auerbach, PhD, better known as Dr. Toy, is a leading expert on toys and children's products. With extensive training in child psychology, education, special education, and child

development and over 30 years experience as a speaker, consultant, and author, Dr. Auerbach has had a major impact on childhood in this country. Four times a year, she publishes her list of award winning toys in categories such as 100 Best Children's Products, 10 Best Creative Products and Best Vacation Products. Among her criteria for selecting winners are "safety, age-appropriateness, design, durability, lasting play value, cultural and ethnic diversity, educational value, learning skills, creativity, good value for price, and, naturally, fun."



Parents' Choice FOUNDATION Parents' Choice (www.parents-choice.org)

Parents' Choice Foundation, established in 1978, is the nation's oldest nonprofit guide to quality children's toys and media. Parents' Choice Awards committees, comprised of educators, scientists, performing artists, librarians, parents and kids, review children's books, toys, music, television, software, videogames, websites and magazines. To be a Parents' Choice Award winner, a product must "entertain and teach with flair, stimulate imagination and inspire creativity. Judges are interested in how a product helps a child grow in many ways: socially, intellectually, emotionally, ethically, and physically. Products must be free of racial or gender bias. Above all, products must not extol violence."



The National Parenting Center (www.tnpc.com)

Since 1989, The National Parenting Center has been advising, supporting and guiding parents with the assistance of worldwide authorities in child development. The Seal of Approval Program, created in 1990 seeks to identify quality child-focused products and services. During an eight-week period, volunteer testers (educators, parents and children) play with and evaluate products using

criteria including "level of desirability, sturdiness, interactive stimulation and other ingredients essential in the make-up of a quality product." Testers fill out questionnaires and provide comments, which are then analyzed to select the winning products.



Major FUN (www.majorfun.com)

Major FUN awards go to toys and games that are just that – FUN. While the products are not put through a rigorous, scientific screening, Major FUN Awards offer a reliable list of family favorites. Toys are reviewed at "Tastings", where game-players get together and try them out. The ones that are the most "fun" are then considered for an award. "Major FUN especially likes games that make people laugh, are original, flexible, easy to adapt, are well-made, durable, easily stored and are easy to understand and teach." ♦

Other organizations that evaluate and review toys include:

iParenting Media
(www.iparentingmediaawards.com)

AblePlay
– Products for children with special needs
(http://www.AblePlay.org)

The Lion & the Lamb Project
– Non-violent toys (www.lionlamb.org)

Canadian Toy Testing Council
(www.toy-testing.org)

TOTY
– Toy Industry Association
(www.toy-tia.org/toty)

MENSA Select
(http://www.us.mensa.org/Content/AML/NavigationMenu/Marketplace/MensaSelect/Mensa_Select.htm)

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