



WHY DIVERSE TOYS COULD MEAN BETTER LEADERS

ELEMENTARY RESOURCES



The iconic Barbie doll now reflects more shapes, sizes and complexions that are present in society. Photo source: Chesnot, Getty Images.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- The toy industry is growing rapidly. Last year, toy companies saw the greatest increase in toy sales since 1999. Shares in Mattel, the company that manufactures Barbie, increased 20 percent between January and July. ([CNBC](#))
- According to reports from the toy industry, the best-selling category of products is dolls. Approximately 13 percent of all toys sold in 2015 were dolls, and an additional seven percent were action figures. ([Toy Industry Association](#))
- For a long time, it was difficult to find dolls with a non-white skin complexion in North America. The first mainstream non-white doll was Christie, an African-American doll released in 1968 that some criticized as being just a Barbie doll with the skin tone changed. The first Hispanic Barbie, Teresa, followed in 1980. ([History Cooperative](#))

- *Why Do You Have Black Dolls?* is a documentary by filmmaker Samantha Knowles that looks at the history of black dolls in America and the community that formed around collecting and celebrating black dolls. The film was titled after a question Knowles was asked as a child. ([Huffington Post](#))
- One of the most significant studies on dolls and race was conducted by Mamie and Kenneth Clark in the 1940s. Children were asked to associate traits with a white doll or a black doll. Both white and black children often associated “good” traits with the white doll and viewed the dark-skinned doll negatively. When CNN replicated the study in 2010, racial bias in American children had decreased, but was still present. ([CNN](#))
- When children in one classroom study were given racially diverse dolls, they naturally formed multiracial play-families and treated the dolls equally. ([NAEYC](#))

NOTE TO EDUCATORS

The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects.

Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. The activity is structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Students are encouraged to further reflect on the issues.

Core Skill Sets:



These icons identify the most relevant core skills students will develop using this resource. Learn more about the WE Learning Framework at www.we.org/we-at-school/we-schools/learning-framework/.

KEY TERMS

- Self-esteem**—the measure of respect and confidence a person has in themselves
- Sideline**—to remove a player from a game or to put a person in a position where they cannot contribute
- Empathetic**—capable of understanding and relating to others' emotions

THEMES AND COURSE CONNECTIONS

- **Themes:** Children's Rights, Local Issues, Global Issues, Inspirational Figures, Community, Values and Ethics, Socially Conscious Living
- **Course Connections:** Language, Social Studies, Science and Technology

MATERIALS

- Front board
- Paper and writing utensils
- Computer/tablet with Internet access and video capability

SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- Recognize the impact of characters and toys on an individual's self-image
- Understand the importance of creating an inclusive society
- Develop a critical and growth mindset when purchasing products that will influence their own image

DISCUSS

1. What is self-image and how is it influenced?
2. What purpose does a range of diversity in children's toys and characters serve?
3. How can characters and toys create a positive or negative self-perception?
4. What is the impact of a television/movie character or toy on a child's perception of self and society?
5. Why is it importance to ensure that children today are influenced by positive images and role models?

DIVE DEEPER

In pairs, ask students to list two of their favourite toys they had growing up, or ones they currently enjoy. Ask pairs to consider and discuss the reason why they were fond of these toys. What do the toys represent to them and would they make any changes to the toy to enhance the play experience? Ask students to share their discussion with the class.

As a class, read the *Global Voices* article "Why diverse toys could mean better leaders." Ask students to reflect and discuss the effect a certain toy or character had on how viewed themselves? While watching movies, television or when playing with toys, do you feel included in the narrative?

Show the video "New shared Barbie will have positive impacts on kids" www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHA_SwGcWlo (2:17). As a class, discuss the following questions:

- a. Why do toy companies feel the need to update and diversify their toy collection?

- b. How will diverse toys affect children who play with them?
- c. What toy companies have made a change to their toy line to reflect a more inclusive society?

In groups of three, tell students to imagine they own a toy company. Their job is to design a character and toy line which demonstrates the variety of diversity in our society and encourages children to be strong and positive leaders in the community. Students may research and design their toy or character using the Internet, online character creation tools, Microsoft office tools or pens and paper.

Students should ensure that their creations meet the following criteria:

- a. Will children enjoy playing with the toy?
- b. How does the collection reflect diversity and inclusion?
- c. How will the character or toy have a positive impact on children?
- d. Does the character positively reflect a person in the community?
- e. Does the character contribute to a sense of respect for others?
- f. Can a child engage with this toy with minimal adult supervision?

After students have created their character or toy collection, each group will present their creation to the class. In the presentation, students should discuss how the toy meets the criteria above and how this toy will enhance a child's life.

RESOURCES

Create your own superhero www.marvelkids.com/create-your-own-super-hero

Mattel play.mattel.com/

Toys R Us www.toysrus.ca/home/index.jsp?categoryId=2567269