

Computers & Kids

NEWS

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Building Skills: One Floor at a Time!

Every once in a while it's time to turn off the computer, television, and video games for some old fashioned fun! When was the last time your child played with wooden blocks or another kind of basic building toy?

Building blocks are wonderful toys for preschoolers to develop fine motor skills. Whether your child builds skyscrapers (see this month's Little Clickers at right) or other structures, he or she is developing visual discrimination, motor planning, manipulative, sorting, and categorizing skills! Builders learn about balance, gravity, and manipulation of shapes with thought and purpose. Each of these skills is literally a building block for later reading, math, and problem solving skills!

Homemade Blocks offer children a chance to look at household items in a new way. Begin by collecting cereal boxes, shoeboxes, and pasta boxes before they are thrown away. Cylindrical shaped boxes like oatmeal boxes also make great building blocks! When using larger, flimsy boxes, stuff the box with newspaper until it is full but not bulging. Tape boxes shut with packaging or duct tape. If you have money to invest in this activity, wrap boxes in contact paper. Encourage children to draw unique designs!

Kapla Blocks encourage children to build "outside the box". Unique because of their single size, Kapla blocks challenge children to turn many of the same shaped blocks into different masterpieces. For inspiration with Kapla Blocks or others, click on the "BUILD" button at www.kaplatoys.com and download lesson plans or instruction sheets for building skyscrapers, bridges, birds, or even the Eiffel Tower!

LEGO's aren't just for boys! You may think of LEGO's as coming in colors like blue, red, and yellow, but now you can add a splash of pink to your LEGO set and inspire little girls to get involved too! LEGO's Belville collection features pretty ponies, royal palaces, and pink landscapes. Get some on-line inspiration from Belville at <http://belville.lego.com>.



Locate and print the above Buckleitner Internet activities at www.computerexplorers.com

Summer reading can also support your child's love for buildings and architecture! Carol Hurst's Children's Literature Site chooses different themes each month. Find books on buildings, along with their star rating, grade range, and supporting activities, at www.carolhurst.com/subjects/buildings.html. Look for fun online activities for your budding architect at archKIDecture (www.archkidecture.org)!

Buckleitner Box

Dear Parents, COMPUTER EXPLORERS has turned 25! This gives me a rare opportunity to think backwards for a change. Things sure have changed since 1984, the year of the first COMPUTERTOTS. I recall a great deal of excitement and debate about using microcomputers with children – much greater than today in fact. This was the same year that Apple introduced a new computer during the SuperBowl – it was called a "Macintosh"! (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYecfV3ubP8>). At the time, I was reviewing software and worked on computers that ran software stored on cassette tapes. The screens consisted of monochrome cathode ray tubes that took about 30 seconds to warm up. Today, of course, the common musical greeting card has more RAM and a much faster CPU than all of those 1 MHz computers, combined. While the technology has changed, our mission today is exactly the same as it was 25 years ago – to harness the power and potential of microprocessors for the benefit of children. I wish you the best in this continuing quest, and look forward to another 25 years!

Warren Buckleitner, PhD, Editor
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