

Am I Bad Mom For Buying My Daughter Her First Barbie?

My daughter's birthday is coming up and for days, I've been mulling over what gift to give her. I want one that will stimulate her desire to play. For ideas, I've been reading Sharifa Oppenheimer's *Heaven on Earth* and exploring what kinds of toys engage a child's imagination.. Suggestions from simple things in nature, to toys that are vacant of sounds and buzzers but with lots of different functions, have always inspired me.

An all-time favorite for young children, both boys and girls alike, is dress-up. My kids have a basket filled with hats, accessories, dresses, and shoes. Recently, we've been trying to add more masculine get-ups so my 3 year old son doesn't have to be a princess if he doesn't want to. We were fortunate to have found a hand-sewn dragon costume at the thrift store this week. I don't sew and I always feel that I am at the mercy of the retail stores near Halloween for my children's costumes. My son has been living as a dragon for 2 days so far.

Another simple idea that has brought tremendous joy has been a basket of colorful silks. We didn't buy them from an expensive natural toy store. We found them in a bag of material at a yard sale. They're just squares of satiny cloth - one blue, one purple, and one white. These silks have been made into blankets and slings for babies, landscapes of water and mountains, peek-a-boo blankies, costumes for superheroes and ghosts, and the list goes on.

Other creative ideas that you can try - filling baskets with different items - big river rocks (these make great vegetables and other food items for baking and cooking), acorns (not for babies! these became little people at our house), pine cones (watch the pokey exterior! but can be great as trees or people), and wooden blocks (great for towers, castles, and mountains).

Less is best when it comes to toys. I went through the children's rooms this weekend and stored a lot in the attic. It's amazing how much cleaner the space feels. With less toys, the children feel less overwhelmed and distracted and actually play more.

As much as I would like to avoid plastic, my daughter has been requesting Barbie dolls! Yikes! I've been enjoying the wooden toy era for the past 5 years and I feel my heart start to palpitate with the thought of a Barbie tainting her fairy themed-bedroom.

I look back on my own childhood and I remember so fondly playing with Barbies. I loved creating their houses and inventing adventures they would go on with me in the car or taking them outside under a bush for a picnic. Hours of pure joy. I don't ever recall thinking that I should look like Barbie or that I wasn't as beautiful as Barbie. I didn't even think of identifying with Barbie.

I may succumb and get my daughter her first Barbie, but I will encourage her relatives to stick with what I know she loves – art supplies. I think our children are dazzled by all the toys the stores and marketers want them to play with, distracting them from their natural inclinations. As soon as my daughter gets up in the morning she's already creating something with paper, paint, or clay. We've had several evenings of tears when it's time to put the crayons away and call it a day.

I also encourage you to find out what it is your child would enjoy to the fullest. Would the toy that they want inspire them to play? Does it encourage self-talk (this is that inner dialogue that is so critical to their brain development) and are they able to be creative with the toy? I asked myself these questions and have decided to get her a Barbie family. I am still firm about modest clothing so there definitely won't be bikini or belly-shirt clad Barbies lying around the house!

What are your child's favorite toys?