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In praise of ... child's play

Leader
The Guardian, Sunday 25 November 2007

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Child's play is something only children can do. Adults have long since forgotten how to be adrift on a ship constructed from an old sheet and an armchair, and lost the knack for galloping fearlessly across fields on a

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pony made of absolutely nothing but imagination. Commonly used as a label for things that are easy, every parent knows that for anyone over about 13, child's play is hard. There is a limited appeal in drinking tea made out of bathwater, or eating cakes lovingly prepared from dried mud, so many grown ups find entering into the game demanding, tedious work. No wonder the Cambridge University Primary Review last week found that, presumably claiming the best of motives, parents are more likely to encourage their children to come and have a quiet sit down and do some reading, or to volunteer to help with homework, than they are to get down and play the way their child would really like. Along with all the other threats to childhood - the consumerism that makes them aware of body image before they are 10, the junk food ads and the stranger danger that keeps them indoors on sunny days - the review has identified the "scholarisation" of childhood, the imposition by anxious parents of a purpose and structure that they understand to be valuable, rather than the carefree, utterly pointless and seemingly worthless entertainment of dolls' tea parties and transglobal exploration. But wasting time is not in fact wasting time. It is child's play. And it is invaluable.

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godrocksnakes

26 November 2007 7:34am

As I enter my 60s I am getting better at child's play. It took a while to realize that by not accomplishing anything I was having more fun than I could have possibly engineered by trying to have fun, buying it or something equally self-defeating.

We really need to send a lot of our life-style experts on a vacation to central Greenland, and begin paying more attention to the real lifestyle experts, our children.



Amadeus37

26 November 2007 10:19am

Children need to get bored to create. Sadly the time being left empty for them to fill for themselves seems to be diminishing. As an example of the effect on their minds: The odd bit of packaging, like an empty egg box, was eagerly grabbed and converted into something - now there is so much packaging it has no effect on children at all. This creating is not fantasy, it is not "just" play: The inventors of tomorrow are toddling about as we write - they need space. We can protect them best with thoughtful care. A child who is on reins will learn to walk more quickly and surely, because they can swing their arms, than the child who has both arms tugged aloft by two "minders" as they take their first outdoor steps.



Silverwhistle

26 November 2007 12:11pm

"Adults have long since forgotten how to be adrift on a ship constructed from an old sheet and an armchair, and lost the knack for galloping fearlessly across fields on a pony made of absolutely nothing but imagination."

Perhaps physically, but not mentally: certainly not those of us who still play FRP games or write fanfiction (not the smutty sort)! It is possible to reach middle-age with

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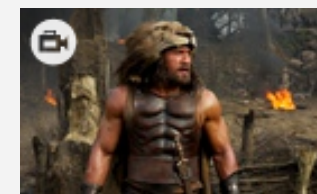
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one's imagination intact!

(And as anyone raised on Monty Python knows, the pony is not made of absolutely nothing, but a pair of half-coconut shells!)



Emma44

26 November 2007 9:48pm

My children have no problem pretending for hours on end. They don't need me to get on the floor and pretend with them - they like it when I do, but know that I have limited patience for it. I prefer reading books to them, cooking with them and going for walks with them. Let children be children and adults be adults.

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