



What's the story behind the toys that entertain millions of children around the globe? Who – or what – inspired a toy inventor to create that plaything that becomes a child's most treasured possession? In honor of National Inventors Month, the Toy Industry Association (TIA) has compiled a few of the stories behind the toys:

	<p><b>Toy:</b> Air Swimmers <b>Inventor:</b> Blake English</p> <p>With an undergraduate degree in Product Design ('09) and a graduate degree in Mechanical Engineering: Robotics ('10) from Stanford University, Blake English got his start in the toy industry when he helped engineer "Flitter Fairies" for William Mark Corp.</p> <p>But it was while visiting an aquarium one day that English came up with the idea for his very first toy invention.</p> <p>"I thought that the swimming sharks looked like they were flying through the water," said English. "I really liked the effect and wondered if it could be done out of the water. The Air Swimmers are a result of that speculation."</p>
	<p><b>Toy:</b> BrickStix <b>Inventor:</b> Greyson MacLean</p> <p>BrickStix inventor Greyson MacLean always loved to build ... but at the age of nine, he became frustrated with the stickers that came with brick sets. If he put them on, he couldn't get them off, and they were also quite limited. He wanted to customize his brick creations into different stories, but he was at a loss. He needed stickers that could be detached, reused and customized ... Some days he wanted a brick to be a newspaper, another day a clock, a control panel, a window... He told his mom about the problem, and she thought he had the makings of a great idea.</p> <p>BrickStix became a family affair, with Greyson's mom, dad, sisters, aunt and uncle working together to design the first set of Stix. With BrickStix, kids can now customize their buildings into a masterpiece.</p>



**Toy:** Perplexus  
**Inventor:** Michael McGinnis

Perplexus started out as Michael McGinnis' 1979 high school art project, when his teacher asked the class to design a board game. Terrible at traditional board games, McGinnis thought it would be interesting to create a 3D version of the classic labyrinth game. After years of tweaks, the Perplexus as we know it today was born.

The main purpose of Perplexus is to help children develop spatial reasoning and hand-eye coordination, providing an added opportunity to own an aesthetic sculptural object that is as visually pleasing as it is mentally and physically stimulating.



**Toy:** Play-Doh  
**Inventor:** Joseph McVicker

In 1954, chemist Joseph McVicker was working for his mother's soap and cleaning products company, Kutol Products, where he created a non-toxic, easily pliable composition marketed as wallpaper cleaner. One day, he overheard a teacher saying that young children found typical classroom modeling clay too stiff to manipulate ... and that's when a light bulb snapped on in his head: his invention could take the place of the modeling clay used in schools.

Using the production facilities at Kutol, McVicker manufactured and tested the concoction in a few Ohio elementary schools. After receiving positive feedback, the product was showcased at a national education convention and then, with serious interest from department stores across the country, McVicker and his uncle, Noah McVicker, created the Rainbow Crafts Company, Inc. in 1956 to manufacture the clay. The Woodward & Lothrop Department Store in Washington, DC, was the first store to sell the product – known today simply as Play-Doh.



**Toy:** Q-ba-maze  
**Inventor:** Andrew Comfort

Q-ba-maze founder, Andrew Comfort, started his career in architecture and then, one day, got the inspiration for Q when thinking of a marble run his grandfather made long ago. He decided to enter the toy business to fulfill a lifelong passion for creation.

Q-ba-maze Inc. was created by Andrew to spread the joy and skills he believed people can gain from exercising their creativity. It is noodling, designing and building while experimenting with cause and effect. Thinking in 3D with colors and cantilevers it's both right-brain and left-brain, part art and part science.



**Toy:** Roll & Play  
**Inventor:** Bill Ritchie

Bill Ritchie, toy inventor and president of ThinkFun, came up with the concept for Roll & Play after visiting a local toy store and asking: "What's the number one question people ask when they walk in here?"

"The answer was simple – 'what's a great game for two-year-olds?'" said Ritchie.

Armed with this knowledge, Ritchie invented Roll & Play, a game for toddlers that builds gross motor skills and encourages creative and active play.



**Toy:** Silly Putty  
**Inventor:** James Wright & Peter Hodgson

Early in World War II, James Wright was working in General Electric's New Haven, Connecticut labs, under a government contract to create an inexpensive substitute for synthetic rubber. One day in 1943, Wright happened to drop boric acid into silicone oil, and was astonished to find that the resultant goo would stretch and bounce further than rubber, even at extreme temperatures. In addition, the substance would copy any newspaper or comic book print that it touched.

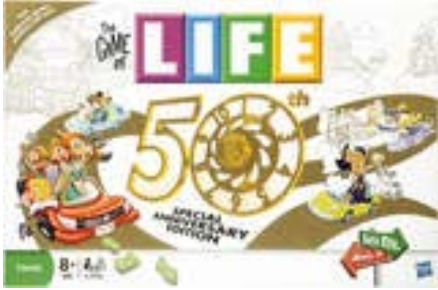


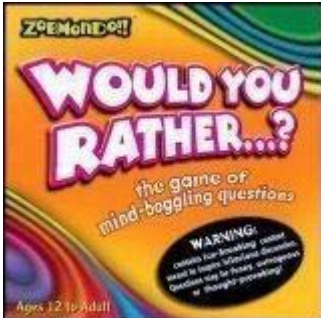
The putty seemed doomed to remain a local curiosity, but in 1949, an unemployed ad man named Peter Hodgson attended a party at which "nutty putty" was the main entertainment. Seeing its marketing potential as a children's toy, Hodgson borrowed \$147, bought the production rights from GE, and began producing the goo. He renamed it Silly Putty, and packaged it in plastic eggs because Easter was on the way. Today, Silly Putty is a sensational, multi-million-dollar seller.





**Toy:** Super Soaker  
**Inventor:** Lonnie Johnson

On a weekend afternoon in 1982, Lonnie Johnson was tinkering with an idea for an environmentally friendly heat pump that would use water instead of Freon. He built a prototype pump, attached some rubber tubing, and brought it into a bathroom. Aiming the nozzle at the tub, he turned it on and produced a blast of water so powerful that the mere wind from the spray ruffled the shower curtains. This, he thought, would make a great water gun.

After seven long years, Johnson acquired the necessary patents and found a company to manufacture the now-famous Super Soaker.

	<p><b>Toy:</b> The Game of Life <b>Inventor:</b> Reuben Klamer</p> <p>Inventor Reuben Klamer says in <i>The Game of Life: An Inventor's Chronicle</i>, a booklet published by Hasbro in 2010 to celebrate the game's 50th anniversary: "I came to Milton Bradley – now Hasbro – in Springfield, Massachusetts, in June 1959 to try to sell them an art center concept. I was turned down. However, James Shea, Sr., president of Milton Bradley, asked me if I would develop a game in celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Milton Bradley Company. I immediately accepted this challenge."</p> <p>Months later, Milton Bradley was showing off The Game of Life, which would become an instant family classic.</p>
	<p><b>Toy:</b> The Ladybug Game <b>Inventor:</b> Kylie Copenhagen</p> <p>Six-year-old Kylie Copenhagen created The Ladybug Game after falling in love with ladybugs during a school science project.</p> <p>"In Mrs. Ditto's first grade class, I learned that ladybugs are the coolest bugs around," said the young inventor. "Since my friends liked them too, I invented a game about them."</p> <p>The Ladybug Game is designed for interactive play between parents and children ages three to seven. Players are drawn into the game with a lively introductory story about the adventures of four ladybugs – Ella Yellow, Rickie Red, Tommy Teal and Olivia Orange.</p>
	<p><b>Toy:</b> Tobbles <b>Inventor:</b> Tony Morley</p> <p>Tobbles was inspired by Tony Morley's own childhood and goofy way of thinking.</p> <p>"I've always been perceived by friends and family to be a little off-center," said Morley. "I find it helpful to be a little askew from the norm. It's also helpful to not be too 'grown-up.'"</p> <p>According to Morley, everyone, from kids to adults, plays with Tobbles. "It's an interesting phenomenon," he said. "It's at home on your mantle piece, in your board room, and in the play room. It's a toy that's also a piece of art."</p>
	<p><b>Toy:</b> Would You Rather...? <b>Inventor:</b> Randy Horn</p> <p>Inventor Randy Horn says that the game Would You Rather goes back to his college days, when friends would ask, "How much money, in cash, would it take to get you to eat a live, kicking, 2-inch cockroach?" Hours of fun were had discussing this one crazy question and its derivatives. Soon, the question prompted people to offer other ridiculous questions and even more entertaining conversations erupted.</p>

	<p>One night while on a blind date, Horn broke out the playful questions to break the ice, and magic happened. That’s when he had a revelation – the questions would make a great board game! The rest is history.</p>
	<p><b>Product:</b> YourChatMat  <b>Inventors:</b> Sam Smith, Paula Prentis, Chris Parrott</p> <p>Chris Parrott, a psychologist; Paula Prentis, a licensed social worker; and Sam Smith, a graphic designer: three determined moms who launched a company in an effort to bring back a critical but dying tradition ... the family dinner.</p> <p>One day, Parrott and Prentis recognized that they could take a key concept they’d utilized throughout their “Your Self Series” of books and apply it to dinnertime. They enlisted Smith to help design YourChatMat, which asks specific, open-ended questions designed to elicit self-reflection.</p> <p>With YourChatMat, everyone participates in lively conversation, making mealtimes more fun. Doing so also helps kids develop in positive, long-lasting ways.</p>
	<p><b>Toy:</b> Zhu Zhu Pets  <b>Inventor:</b> Russell Hornsby</p> <p>Zhu Zhu pets are the brainchild of toy inventor Russell Hornsby, who came up with the idea when he tried to think of the one pet that kids loved and parents hated: messy, squeaky, small-brained hamsters. Tapping into every child’s love for pets and the rich pattern of children’s play with rodents, Hornsby invented ZhuZhus.</p> <p>Not wanting to create another “watch me” toy, Hornsby created a magic world for the pets to inhabit.</p> <p>“Many children’s toys allow them to create fantastic universes and we combined that element into the toy,” explained Hornsby. “ZhuZhu pets look incredibly realistic and have been programmed to act at random. Their world is filled with cars and ramps, boats and planes, and wheels and balls.”</p>