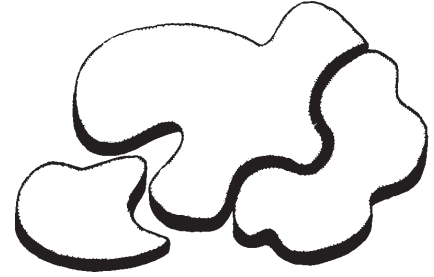


MAKING PUZZLES



Have you ever tried to put together a jig-saw puzzle? For a young child a simple five-piece puzzle can be just as “mind-bending” and just as much fun. Puzzles have long been basic play equipment for preschoolers. When a puzzle is carefully selected, it can provide a child with a wide variety of learning opportunities.

LEARNING FROM PUZZLES

When a child manipulates puzzle pieces, he or she can practice controlling the small muscles of the hands. The control of these fine muscle movements develops slowly and depends upon a great deal of practice. Puzzle pieces should be large enough and sturdy enough to allow for chubby preschool fingers. A simple first puzzle may consist of only one piece that fits into a cut out slot. You can improve such puzzles for use by clumsy little hands by attaching knobs to the puzzle pieces.

Eye-hand coordination is another skill puzzles help perfect. A preschooler can begin to use visual cues such as patterns and colors to help match pieces together.

A puzzle can teach a child how parts fit together to form a whole. For the inexperienced preschooler, choose a puzzle that has a clear single image

such as one large puppy or fish. Also look for puzzles that have pieces based on recognizable parts of a single image, such as the tail, nose, eye, or fin. Parts of the body are easier to learn when each one can be picked up individually and fit in its proper place.

Puzzles help exercise a child’s memory. Many children delight in seeing just how fast they can fit puzzle pieces together once they have figured it out. A valuable tool in remembering how pieces fit is the ability to verbalize or talk about how pieces go together. You can help a child by using verbal directions such as “All the blue pieces go here,” or “Where does the puppy’s tail go?” As puzzles get more complicated you can point out shape relationships such as “you need a smooth piece here,” or “this edge is curved.” Another way to encourage the use of verbal skills is to ask a child to tell you where he or she is going to put a piece or to describe the kind of piece that will fit.

A simple form board—a puzzle with single geometric shapes—can teach shape discrimination. Circles, squares, triangles, and rectangles are the basis of our alphabet, and an important pre-reading step is learning to tell them apart.

SELECTING PUZZLES

As in choosing any toy for preschoolers, a good general rule for puzzles is “start simple and work up from there.” An inexperienced or unskilled child can become frustrated by too many pieces or pieces that are too small. A good place to start is with single piece puzzles made of wood or heavy cardboard. Preschoolers often quickly develop enough skill to handle puzzles with 20 or more pieces. But it is important to add more complicated puzzles only after the child has practiced the necessary skills. Puzzle patterns should also be simple to begin with. First puzzles should be simple, familiar images - one large kitty or bunny. It is easier to put a puzzle together if you have a mental image of what the finished product looks like. Older preschoolers may become interested in abstract free form designs, but these may be very difficult and require some initial help from you.

Another key quality for a preschooler’s puzzle is sturdiness. A favorite approach of the novice puzzle solver is to push and jam pieces together. Pieces that break or bend easily are frustrating. You can increase

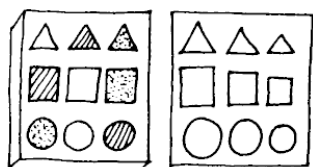
the life of a puzzle by providing proper storage space. You can neatly stack wooden board puzzles. Use small, individual boxes or coffee cans and plastic containers for other types of puzzles. It is a good idea to replace missing pieces or discard the puzzle once pieces are lost.

Preschoolers enjoy **personalized** puzzles. It is easy to glue photographs onto heavy cardboard and cut them into simple, personal puzzles. Another way to personalize puzzles is to select them on a child's favorite theme, such as animals or construction equipment. If your preschooler is interested in a special subject, you can hunt for magazine pictures that can be made into puzzles.

PUZZLES TO MAKE

Form Boards

A form board is a puzzle with basic geometric shaped pieces. You can construct a form board from thin plywood or heavy paper. You need a jigsaw for cutting out the basic shapes for a plywood form board. These pieces can then be put back into their individual slots. For a cardboard or paper form board, cut geometric shapes out of the



Form Boards

material and draw corresponding outlines on another piece of cardboard or paper. For variety, introduce colors—matching red, blue, yellow shapes into separate color-coded slots. Another variation is to graduate sizes such as a three-inch, two-inch, and one-inch series of shapes.

Flannel Box

A small gift box can become the base for an endless variety of puzzles. Begin by gluing a piece of felt on the lid of the box. You and your child can then select a variety of pictures and cut them to make a puzzle. Then glue strips of flannel onto the backs of the pieces. Puzzle pieces backed with flannel stick to the felt covered box and can be stored inside the box.

You can create another type of flannel box puzzle by filling the box with felt pieces cut into basic geometric shapes in a variety of sizes and colors. These shapes can be used to create a picture on the box lid.

Wooden Puzzles

Scraps of plywood cut into six-inch or larger squares, circles, rectangles, and triangles can be made into puzzles. Simply glue a picture or paint a simple



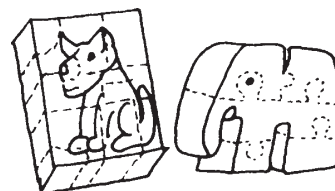
Flannel Box

picture on the plywood and saw it into a puzzle. An older preschooler may enjoy painting his or her own picture that you can saw into a few pieces. A variation of the wooden puzzle is the cube puzzle. Begin with a board one inch thick and six inches square. Glue or paint a picture on both sides of the board, and saw it into one inch cubes. Preschoolers delight in mixing up the images on the two sides as well as correctly solving the puzzle.

Posters and Photographs

Large colorful posters can be cut into delightful puzzles. It is possible to buy inexpensive reproductions of famous works of art as well as other types of posters. You might glue the posters onto tag board (strong cardboard) before you cut them into puzzles.

Family photographs can become very personal puzzles. A photograph that has been enlarged will probably be more satisfying since the image is clearer. As with the posters, you will probably want to provide a sturdy backing for the photographs before you cut them.



Wooden Puzzles

File: Family Life 4

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Stanley R. Johnson, director, Cooperative Extension Service, Iowa State University of Science and Technology, Ames, Iowa.