



Chicago Historical Society



BUILD IT WITH LINCOLN LOGS!

Grade level: Third through fifth grades

Estimated time: Four class periods

Specific Topic: Toy advertising

Subtopic: Examining Chicago's toy industry through Lincoln Log advertisements (1950–60) and comparing Lincoln Logs to toys of today

Teacher background information

John Lloyd Wright and Lincoln Logs

John Lloyd Wright was the son of the famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright. At a time when the popularity of construction toys was increasing, the younger Wright created a toy called Lincoln Logs.

Wright and his siblings grew up in Oak Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. The Wright family had a playroom in their home filled with toy blocks and games. At the time, several companies sold versions of toy logs. Wright probably played with these early toy logs, and it is possible that they gave him the idea for Lincoln Logs, which he created between 1916 and 1917.

Wright may have also been influenced by his father. Around 1917, Frank Lloyd Wright was building the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, Japan, and the younger Wright made a visit to his father's construction site. The building used a unique foundation of interlocking beams, which were intended to make the structure earthquake proof.

Lincoln Logs were made of redwood and notched at each end. The notches allowed the logs to interlock,



similar to the foundation of the Imperial Hotel. Children could use the logs to build cabins, forts, and fences and use their imaginations to think about what it would have been like to live in pioneer times. Parents approved of Lincoln Logs, because they were safe and educational. Lincoln Logs fostered children's concentration, hand-eye coordination, and imagination.

Wright's company, the Red Square Toy Company, first marketed Lincoln Logs in 1918. Wright chose



the name for his toy very carefully. The logs were introduced around the time of the World War I, when Americans were encouraged to buy products made in America. Wright decided to name the logs after Abraham Lincoln, because the name conjured up a positive image of pioneer life, especially in Illinois. Wright eventually changed the name of his company to the John Lloyd Wright Toy Company.

Lincoln Logs were an instant success. Production remained strong through the 1940s, even during World War II. During the war, many toy companies had to stop or delay toy production because the government restricted the use of certain materials, particularly metal. Being made from wood, Lincoln Logs were not affected by the restriction of materials. After the war, small metal figures were included in the log cabin sets, including metal people and animals: pioneers, American Indians, horses, and other livestock.

Lincoln Logs were one of the first toys to be advertised on television. In 1953, the toy was promoted on a show called *Pioneer Playhouse*. The advertisements were aimed at a target audience, most likely middle- to upper-class families who had a television in their home and could afford to purchase educational toys for their children. Lincoln Logs are still in production and continue to be a favorite construction toy.

Key concepts

Advertising, mail-order catalogs, and rural and urban audiences

Key questions

How were toys advertised in the 1950s? Who were the target audiences in the 1950s? To what modern-day toys can Lincoln Logs be compared? How are toys advertised today?

Goals of this lesson

Students will use primary sources to analyze advertisements, prices, and styles of Lincoln Logs from Carson Pirie Scott catalogs from 1952 to 1960. Students will then compare a modern-day toy to Lincoln Logs of the 1950s by analyzing differences in pricing, methods of advertisement, and ways to obtain the toys (mail-order v. Internet).

Objectives

1. Students will examine Lincoln Logs through advertisements (primary source documents) from various years.

2. Students will compare and contrast Lincoln Logs of the 1950s to modern toys.
3. Students will think critically about advertising of the past and the present.

Materials

With the exception of the modern day advertisements, master copies of all images and student handouts are provided.

1. A modern toy advertisement from a local department store (Marshall Field's, Kohl's, Target, Wal-Mart, etc.)
2. Carson Pirie Scott catalog pages (CHS, one year per group, photocopy pages and cut them apart, more than one group can have the same year, as necessary)
3. "Catalog Analysis: Using a Primary Source" worksheet (one per group)
4. "Past and Present Toy Comparison" worksheet (one per student)
5. Chalkboard or overhead projector
6. Basic school supplies: pencils and paper

Procedures

Prior to Day 1: For homework (or extra credit) have students bring in three examples of toy advertising from newspapers, catalogs, flyers in the mail, or the Internet.

Day 1

Begin by asking if anyone in the class can define advertising (making a public announcement of the qualities and advantages of a product to increase sales). Then ask the class for examples of today's most popular toys. Make a list of five to seven examples on the chalkboard (or overhead projector). It would be best to have advertisement examples for all of the toys on the list.

Put students into small groups (or assign partners). Write the Advertising Questions (listed below) on the chalkboard. Have each group choose three toys from the advertisements they brought in or the list on the chalkboard. Ask students to study the advertisements and answer the questions on separate sheets of paper. Come back together as a class. Ask for volunteers to share their thoughts about the questions.

Advertising Questions and Teacher Answer Key

- List three toys. (Answers will vary.)
- How are the toys advertised?
Answers may include: On television; on the Internet; on food containers, such as cereal boxes; flyers in the mail; in fast foods, “Happy Meals”; etc.
- Choose one advertisement. How does it try to sell the toy? Describe the colors, images, and words the advertisement uses.
Answers should accurately reflect information from a specific advertisement.
- How and where can you buy these toys?
Answers may include: Buy it at a store (ask students to name specific stores), on the Internet, from mail-order catalogs, buy food and get it free, etc. Be sure to spend some time talking about mail-order catalogs, as many students will be unfamiliar with the concept.
- Why are these toys so popular? (Answers will vary but should be insightful.)

On the chalkboard, write, “Ways Toys are Advertised.” Record a list of examples as a class. To conclude, ask the class if they can explain the difference between advertise and advertisement.

Day 2

Begin by reviewing the definition of advertising and the toy advertisements discussed on Day 1. Transition by asking students: How were toys advertised before television and the Internet?

Introduce students to the history of Lincoln Logs (see the “Play with a Purpose” lesson or the Teacher Background Information). Remind students that John Lloyd Wright invented Lincoln Logs in 1917 and they are still sold today! To initiate discussion, ask: How and where would you buy Lincoln Logs in the past? (If it doesn’t come up in the discussion, remind the class about mail-order catalogs.)

Begin a discussion of mail-order catalogs. Explain that these catalogs were printed for two reasons:

(1) For the purpose of advertising products, so they

could be ordered and delivered through the mail for people who lived in rural areas. If necessary, define rural: a farming or agricultural community. (2) To advertise what was available at Carson Pirie Scott for people who lived in the urban area of Chicago. If necessary, define urban: located in a city.

Put students into small groups. Distribute one Lincoln Log advertisement (each is taken from a Carson Pirie Scott catalog page) and one “Catalog Analysis” worksheet to each group. Instruct students to examine the advertisements and complete the worksheet. Conclude by collecting the worksheets and explaining to students that they will share their findings tomorrow.

Day 3

Have students join their groups from Day 2. Re-distribute the Lincoln Log advertisement and analysis worksheets to each group. Ask for volunteers to present their findings (one group from each year should present). Discuss the discoveries made by the groups. Encourage students to share any unusual discoveries unmentioned by other groups. Use the following questions to initiate discussion:

- What changes do you notice about Lincoln Logs over time?**
Possible answers: The number of pieces in the set changed, the price increased, and each picture was different.
- Why do you think the packaging of Lincoln Logs changed over time?**
Possible answers: To make the toy look more interesting, because the number of pieces changed, or to appeal to a different group of kids.
- Why is there a different picture in the catalog each year?**
Possible answers: It would be less interesting if it was always the same or to increase sales—making it look different can help do that.
- What changes do you notice about the price of Lincoln Logs over the years?**
Possible answers: The price increases—maybe prices change because the number of pieces change; in 1960, the prices become numbers that are not rounded.

5. **Who is the target audience for these ads?**

Possible answers: Children, parents and grandparents who buy educational toys, or teachers.

Conclude by reviewing what students have learned about advertising through today's lesson.

Day 4

Review yesterday's discoveries about catalog advertising. Use the following questions to initiate discussion:

1. Why were catalogs so important during the 1950s?

Answer: Because there was no easy way to advertise. Very few people had a television and the Internet wasn't invented.

2. Who was reached by catalog advertising?

Answer: Through mail-order catalogs Lincoln Logs could be exposed to both urban and rural kids.

Transition by briefly reviewing the advertising methods of modern toy companies from day 1. Discuss: Is it easier to advertise today because of television and the Internet? Is it easier to buy toys today? Briefly compare and contrast advertising today to advertising of the past. List a few examples on the chalkboard or overhead projector. An easy example is differences in price.

Distribute a "Past and Present Toy Comparison" worksheet to each student. Instruct students to work independently to complete the worksheet, but allow them to reference previous materials from the lesson. Collect the worksheets and review what students have learned about toy advertising.

If time allows in class, or as a homework assignment, ask students to invent a toy and design a catalog entry. Allow them to use a Carson's catalog page (visit the online version of this lesson to print the complete catalog pages) or current advertisement as a model. Student advertisements must include a picture of the toy (students who prefer not to draw could cut out different magazine pictures to create a collage of a new toy), the name of the toy, descriptive and persuasive language about the toy, and the price.

Suggestions for student assessment

Formal assessment can be done through the Advertising Questions exercise or the Catalog Analysis and Past and Present Toy Comparison

worksheets. The student-created advertisements can also be assessed for completeness and creativity. Class participation may also be monitored for assessment.

Extension activity

The 1950s and 1960 catalog pages contain many other toys that could be the focus for a lesson (visit the online version of this lesson to print the complete catalog pages). Students could analyze the additional toys and place them in categories: transportation toys, construction toys, mechanical toys, fantasy toys, etc. Students could also create their own toy categories.

Additional resources

O'Brien, Richard. *The Story of American Toys from the Puritans to the Present*. New York: Abbeville Press, 1990.

Rich, Mark. *100 Greatest Baby Boomer Toys*.

Iola, Wisconsin: Krause Publications, 2000.

Sommers, Steven. "A Century of Chicago Toys, 1880–1890." *Chicago History* 11, no. 3 (fall and winter 1982): 185–197. (Available at the Chicago Historical Society.)

Web resource

"Fascinating Facts" about Lincoln Logs
www.ideafinder.com/history/inventions/lincolnlogs.htm

This lesson fulfills the following Illinois Learning Standards:

English Language Arts

- State Goal 1: Read with understanding and fluency.
- State Goal 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.
- State Goal 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess, and communicate information.

Social Science

- State Goal 15: Understand economic systems, with an emphasis on the United States.
- State Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States, and other nations.

History Lab is made possible through a generous grant from the Polk Bros. Foundation. These materials were researched and written by TeNnile Goff. Images and artifacts included in this lesson are for classroom reference and research use only and are not to be used for commercial reproduction, display, broadcast, or publication unless authorized by a letter of permission from the Chicago Historical Society. History Lab project coordination by Heidi Moisan of the Chicago Historical Society. The Chicago Historical Society gratefully acknowledges the Chicago Park District's generous support of all of the Historical Society's activities.



TC-7A—ASSORTED BLOCKS by Donald Biever. 20 plastic blocks, 1 7/8 in. square. 8 blocks clear plastic with 3 dimensional figurines inside, 12 are multicolored ABC blocks. **2.50**
TC-7B—WHIRL A BLOCK CART by Donald Biever. Fun for small fry. 6 removable blocks mounted on plastic cart. Blocks revolve as cart is pulled. **1.95**

TC-7C—LINCOLN LOG SET. Teach history through playing. Made of selected woods, stained brown and waxed to simulate actual logs used by the pioneers. Set contains 131 pieces and 4 page design book (illus.) **4.00**
TC-7D— 79 pieces **2.00** **TC-7E—** 177 pieces **6.00**

TC-7F—NIPPY THE PUP by Winchester. Hold the magnetic bone close to his mouth and his head follows with the movement of child's hand. Hold it too close and he'll snap it away. Made of washable lambskin **4.95**

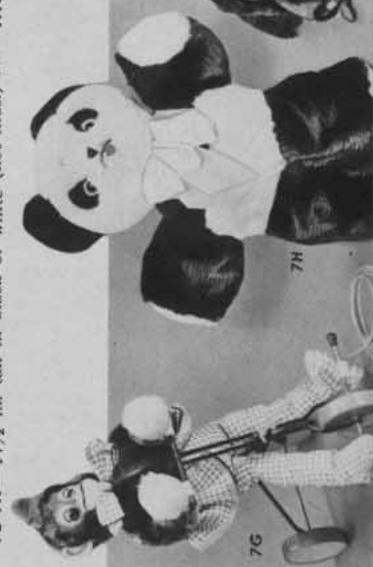
TC-7G—MONK ON BIKE by Character Novelty. Legs actually pedal when toy is pulled. Monkey of plush brown rayon and checked cotton percale. Eyes securely sewn. Metal bike **2.95**

TC-7H—CUDDLE PANDA by Character Novelty. 12 in. tall black and white Panda of rayon plush with securely sewn eyes. Embroidered nose. White double bow **2.95**
TC-7J—CUDDLE PANDA, 16 in. tall (not illus.) **4.95**

TC-7K—SOFTY DOG by Character Novelty. Cuddle dog of rayon plush with embroidered wool yarn eyes, nose. Children love the big bow, the bell in his paw. Handsome beige **3.95**

TC-7L—SNAP BLOCKS by International Modern Playthings. Geometrically shaped blocks that snap and fasten into many moving, rolling toys. Molded of Tenite plastic and finished with non-toxic, easy to clean colors. 12 piece set **2.29**

TC-7M—STANDING POODLE by Woolnough. Perfectly proportioned poodle trimmed in the true French manner. Soft pile fabric available in black or white. 10 1/2 in. tall **4.95**
TC-7N— 14 1/2 in. tall in black or white (not illus.) **9.95**



Chicago Historical Society, Carson Pirie Scott toy catalogs



T15-A—SNAP-LOCK BEADS (5 mos.-4 years). By Fisher Price. Bright, bouncy, unbreakable beads encourage squeezing, fastening, arranging by color. They push together—pull apart—can form 30" string. Washable; safe for teething too. 16 polyethylene beads in eight assorted colors. **1.59**

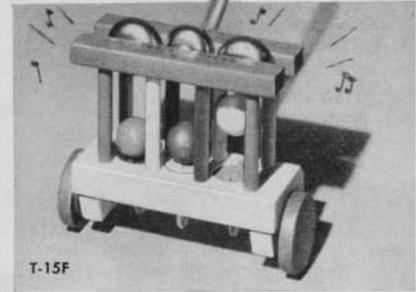
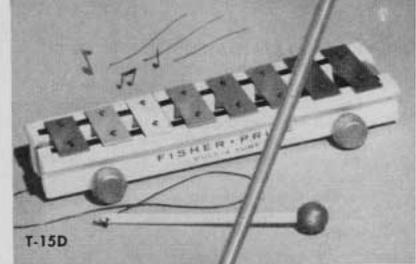
T15-B—GABBY GOOFIES (1-5 years). By Fisher Price. That chatter you hear is "Pop" as he leads his wobbly brood across the floor . . . until eager hands reach out! Brightly colored hardwood with acetate wings. Daddy's head wiggles and all wings whirl. 13" long, 5½" high, 6½" wide. **2.00**

T15-C—DOCTOR DOODLE (1-5 years). By Fisher Price. Pulling a cheery fellow helps satisfy tot's urge to be active. The hardwood bird quacks every time his bill opens. His wings flap and tail feathers wave in a lovable, ridiculous way. 10" x 7½" x 6½". **3.00**

T15-D—PULL-A-TUNE XYLOPHONE (1-7 years). By Fisher Price. Concealed mallets play automatically when child pulls toy; mallet serves for sit-still play on octave scale. Enameled wood with steel keys. Develops color recognition and interest in music. 14" x 2¼" x 5". **3.00**

T15-E—CORN POPPER (9 mos.-4 years). By Fisher Price. Unique concealed mechanism bounces 14 colorful wooden balls against unbreakable acetate dome. The popping sound fascinates children and encourages walking. Brightly enameled wooden base, wheels and handle. Strongly made. 6¼" x 6½"; 18½" handle. **2.00**

T15-F—POP 'N RING (1-4 years). By Fisher Price. They push; they watch; they listen! Unusual design bounces acetate balls against shiny bells, to make music. Colorfully enameled wood. 8½" x 7¼"; 20" handle. **2.69**



safe, sturdy, amusing, instructive

... for youngsters



T15-G—GRAD TINKERTOY (2-12 years). Always popular, educational wood construction toy teaches by color association. Instruction book of diagrams, stunts and games. Its 215 parts can combine and interchange with other sets. **3.00**
T15-H—149 part set. **2.00**



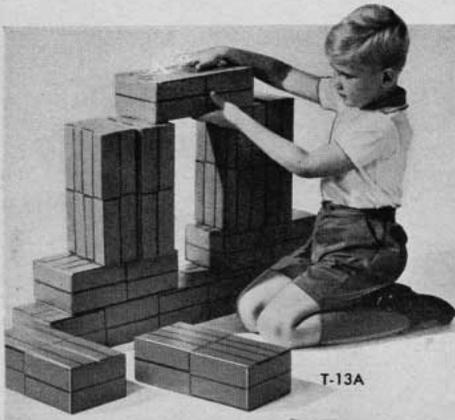
T15-J—LINCOLN LOGS (5-12 years). For group play or alone. 178 stained waxed wood logs, design sheets in can container. A favorite to build cabins, block-houses, stockades etc. **5.00**
T15-K—91 piece wood log set for small builders. **2.00**



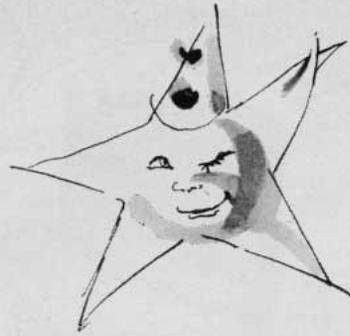
T15-L—PLAY-DOH-TRI-PAK (3-12 years). Three 10½ oz. cans of a new modeling compound (not a clay). Will not stain hands, floor or furniture. The three colors, sunset red, azure blue, golden yellow, can be blended. No moistening needed, ready to use. **98¢**



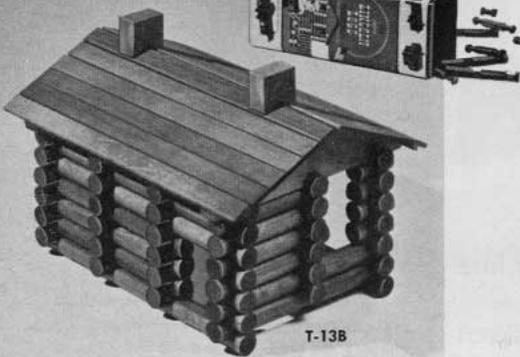
T15-M—PAINTSTIKS by Young Products (2-6 years). For budding artists. Paint in stick form—assures fun without mess! Completely safe, washable, non-toxic. 12 regular size Paint-sticks in assorted colors, tray and generous roll of art paper. 8½" x 13½". **1.98**



T-13A



T13-A—STURDY GIANT BLOCKS. Heavy duty reinforced carton fiberboard, will hold over 300 pounds. Two-tone, 11¼x5½"x3¾", can be cleaned with damp cloth. 16 blocks to set. Lightweight, safe. By Toymaster. Ages 3-12 yrs. **4.98**



T-13B

T13-B—LINCOLN LOGS. 178 stained waxed wood logs, design sheets in can container. A favorite to build cabins, blockhouses, stockades. For ages 2 to 9 years. **5.00**

T13-C—91 piece wood log set. **2.00**

T13-D—AMERICAN PLASTIC BRICKS. Easy, interlocking 1¾" bricks, half bricks and gable bricks for true-proportion constructions. Accurately-scaled doors and windows open and close, roofs resemble shingling to create a variety of realistic-looking buildings. Contains 290 pcs. By Halsam. For ages 5 yrs. up. **5.00**

T13-E—208 piece set (not shown). **3.50**

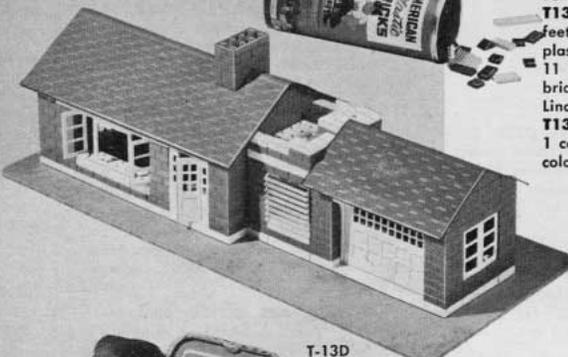
T13-F—459 piece set (not shown). **7.50**

T13-H—MUSICAL CLOCK TOP. Hands on dial turn as top spins and hums. Fascinating way to learn to tell time. Brightly colored plastic and metal. 10" high. For ages 2 to 6 years. **2.00**

T13-J—MUSICAL TELEPHONE. Concealed musical instrument plays a tune when you turn the handle. Dial returns by spring action, rings bell. Bright red polyethylene. By Steel Stamping. For ages 1 to 4 years. **2.00**

T13-M—TOT TRAIN AND TRACK SET. 12 feet of railway! High impact interchangeable plastic track layout, hardwood trains. Includes 11 curves, 3 straights, 1 switch, 2 complete bridges, 1 yoke, 1 lead-in, 1 bumper, 4 cars. By Lincoln Logs. For ages 2 to 9 years. **5.00**

T13-N—Small set includes 8 curves, 1 switch, 1 complete bridge, 1 straight, 1 lead-in and a colored 3-car train (not shown). **3.00**

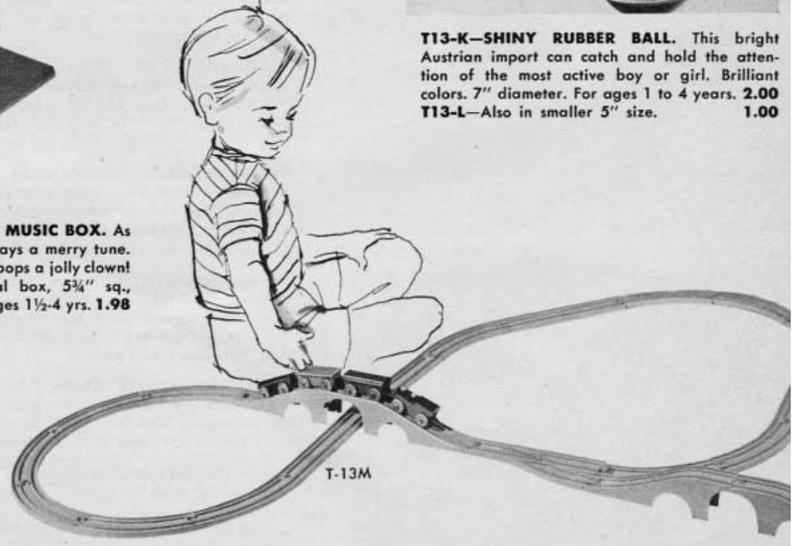


T-13D



T-13G

T13-G—JACK IN THE MUSIC BOX. As crank is turned, box plays a merry tune. The top opens and out pops a jolly clown! Lithographed all metal box, 5¾" sq., 6¾" high. By Mattel. Ages 1½-4 yrs. **1.98**



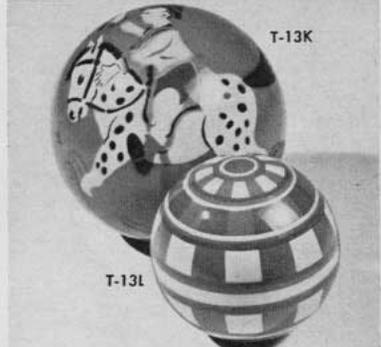
T-13M



T-13H



T-13J



T-13K

T-13L

T13-K—SHINY RUBBER BALL. This bright Austrian import can catch and hold the attention of the most active boy or girl. Brilliant colors. 7" diameter. For ages 1 to 4 years. **2.00**

T13-L—Also in smaller 5" size. **1.00**

what happy hours of safe, care-free fun Playskool has in store for tots!

pictured on this page:

- T6-1—DELUXE HAMMER-NAIL & PEG DESK.** Combines hammer-nail fun with blackboard writing and landscape peg play. Sturdy saddle seat activity desk with many play accessories. 25½"x21½"x18½" high. Ages 3 to 8 yrs. **7.54**
- T6-2 — TAKE APART TRAILER TRUCK.** A realistic wooden truck. Cab over engine swings down to reveal motor. Driver is removable. Rack on trailer has wooden screwdriver. Strong pull cord. 22" long. Ages 2 to 5 years **7.54**
- T6-3—HAMMER-NAIL SET.** Make figures, numbers, designs on 12" square composition pounding board. An ample supply of laying sticks, nails and hammer is included. Ages 3 to 8 years **1.46**
- T6-4—LINCOLN LOGS WITH 32 VINYL FIGURES.** Original round logs for building forts, cabins, houses. Selected stained and waxed wood logs, bright accessories. 178 wood pcs., design sheet. 5 to 10 yrs. . . **4.54**
- T6-5—32 figs., 129 wood pcs., design sheet 2.94**
- T6-6—91 wood pcs., design sheet 1.64**
- T6-7—TOOL BENCH.** An oversize work bench. Excellent coordination toy. With metal wrench, wood hammer, screwdriver, rule, screws, bolts, vise, nails. Bench 11½"x5½"x9½". 2 to 5 yrs. **2.31**

T7-4 — WOODEN FREIGHT TRAIN.

- Load up the 2 open gondola cars on this sturdy non-toxic finished train. With locomotive and caboose, it's 28" long. Easy to couple. Ages 1½ to 3½ years . . **2.31**
- T7-5—COL-O-ROL WAGON** pulls and stores 21 non-toxic colored pieces for building towers, bridges. 13"x9"x3½" streamlined wagon with strong pull cord. Ages 2 to 5 years **2.31**
- T7-6 — CRIB RAIL BOAT.** Sliding on playpen rail causes paddle wheel to spin; rocks on floor. Colorful, sturdy, safe. 7"x5¾"x2½". 3 to 18 mo. . . **1.26**
- T7-7—GOLDEN BOOK NESTED BLOCKS.** Redwood boxes, with vivid animal alphabet lithographs, to nest and stack. Largest is 6½" sq. 2 to 5 yrs. **3.74**
- T7-8 — LACING BOOT.** Teaches shoe tying! "Old woman" and 6 "children" of hardwood "come out" when shoe is unlaced. 6"x3"x8". 3 to 6 yrs. . . **2.31**
- T7-9—RATTLE PUSH.** Gay wooden balls tumble in 7" wide cage. 21" sturdy handle helps baby balance. Non-toxic colors. 6 to 18 mos. **1.26**
- T7-10—POSTAL STATION.** Teaches coordination. Child fits 12 vari-shaped blocks into appropriate slots in city mail box. With stringer for block beading. 11"x6". 1½ to 3½ years **2.94**
- T7-11—COBBLER'S BENCH.** Indestructible, reversible bang bench, pounding mallet, 8 large pegs. 4½"x5"x9¾". For ages 1½ to 3½ years **1.26**
- T7-12—GOLDEN BOOK CHANGEABLE PICTURE BLOCKS.** 12 wood blocks, 72 surfaces, 6 colors. Child matches color backgrounds—creates 69 picture combinations—Lithographed blocks are 1½"x2½"x2½". Ages 3 to 6 yrs. . . . **1.64**
- T7-13—DAIRY WAGON.** Child pulls milk truck, picks up truck carrier with its six white hardwood bottles for door-to-door delivery. Big 7¾"x6"x6½" wagon with pull cord. 1½ to 3½ yrs. . . . **2.31**

pictured on the opposite page:

- T7-1—FIRE TRUCK.** 3 firemen and chief ride in position or stand on ladder which extends 25" from ground and swings in all directions. With waterless hose. Over 16" long. 2 to 5 years **4.54**
- T7-2—LANDSCAPE PEG SET.** Peg board is stenciled with road, lake and railroad. Child makes scenes by placing pegged lights, poles, cars, houses, boats, etc. 5 knobs raise play area from table. 14½"x13¾". 3 to 8 years **1.87**
- T7-3—DUFFLE BAG O' BLOCKS.** Build, stack, haul, match—120 colored ¾" unit system blocks in 7 shapes. Washable twill bag. Approx. 13½". 3-6 yrs. **3.74**

It's so convenient to shop by mail or phone. Handy order form follows page 42.



CATALOG ANALYSIS: USING A PRIMARY SOURCE

Name _____ Date _____

Use the catalog page to answer the following questions.

Year: _____

1. Describe the picture in the advertisement. How are the Lincoln Logs packaged?

What is included in the picture?

2. What are the different types of pieces in the set? How many pieces are included?

3. How much does the set of Lincoln Logs cost?

4. Describe the words that are used to sell the toy.

5. Who is the target audience? Who do the advertisers hope will buy the toy? How can you tell?

6. Describe something else eye-catching about the advertisement.

PAST AND PRESENT TOY COMPARISON

Name _____ Date _____

Directions:

Compare Lincoln Logs from the 1950s to a modern toy.

1. Name of modern toy: _____

2. Describe the toy:

Color: _____ Shape: _____

Size: _____ Made of: _____

What special features does it have? How do you play with it?

3. Describe the Lincoln Logs:

Color: _____ Shape: _____

Size: _____ Made of: _____

What special features do Lincoln Logs have? How do kids play with Lincoln Logs?

Use the descriptions above to compare and contrast Lincoln Logs to the modern toy you selected. Complete the diagram below.

Lincoln Log differences Similarities between both toys Modern toy differences

