

ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

Jennifer Olski

[Assignment: Choose any subject. As you prepare to classify, determine the principle of classification. Ask yourself this question; What is the common element or quality that characterizes all parts of the group? Examine the purpose of your classification. Do you wish to explain, entertain, or persuade?]

(1) I well remember how, as a child, I eagerly awaited the arrival of Christmas catalogues from various stores. With their yearly distribution, I began the anxious countdown to the Christmas season and anticipated the arrival of toys on Christmas morning. I spent hours paging through different catalogues, circling pictures of toys I wanted, writing and rewriting letters to Santa Claus. Of the thousands of toys advertised, my mind--with the thoroughness that belongs only to children--sorted them into groups: fad toys, educational toys, and basic toys. From these groups I picked out those toys that I hoped would be under the tree with my name on the tags come Christmas morning. I have outgrown most of my toys, but the toys sold to children today remain basically the same and can still be put into three different groups.

(2) Most children today spend considerable time, as I did in my younger years, choosing toys out of the fad group. Children do not necessarily refer to them as fad toys. They are better known as the "I've just got to have this" toys. Each year manufacturers produce multitudes of new toys, some of which especially appeal to a broad sector of children. Through ingenious advertising gimmicks, these toys invade the minds of children and harass the wallets of parents. Having a short store-shelf life, their popularity lasts just as long unless they become mass-marketing projects. Today's fad toys include My Little Ponies, All-Star Wrestling dolls, Transformers, and Smurfs. Chances are that within a year, most kids will have forgotten what these are. The toys usually come in sets of four, five, or even six. Kids have to have all of them--not just one--and all their accessories as well. As soon as parents have bought the last one in the set, children lose interest in the toys. They get shoved to the back of shelves or buried in the bottom of closets. The next time anyone will see the toys is the following summer when someone decides to have a rummage sale.

(3) Should these toys acquire their own Saturday morning cartoons, full-length motion picture features, bedsheets, or breakfast cereals, thus holding a child's attention longer than three months, the toys will automatically self-destruct. Heads pop off, hair falls out, parts get lost, appendages become sticky with child

grime. The toys are not designed to last and are not made to withstand hours of children's brutal play. The price parents pay is not for quality, but rather for the privilege of their child's owning the popular toy.

(4) Children rarely include educational toys on their lists. They know that Santa Claus does not bring educational toys; relatives do. Adults like to think that such toys will be positive influences on children. Legos, wooden blocks, paint-by-number kits, and finger paints are meant to foster creativity in the minds of the young. Other toys teach specific skills. Dressy Bessy and Dapper Dan are helpful aids when teaching a child to dress himself or herself. Candy Land, a board game, and See and Say talking boxes introduce colors, numbers and different sounds. Electronic toys such as Spelling Bee, Quiz Whiz, Merlin, and Little Professor refine spelling, mathematical, and reading skills. Toys in this group tend to appeal to children of all ages.

(5) Educational toys last forever. They are constructed to withstand the temper-tantrums of disgruntled children. Seldom does a child admit that he or she has fun playing with educational toys. They are openly and boldly scorned by children in the company of friends and playmates. In secret, though, educational toys often receive much playtime, even though they usually are only played with on rainy days after the other toys have been set aside. Parents often save educational toys in hope that someday they will have grandchildren who will benefit from them.

(6) Finally, children turn to the group known as the basic toys to supplement their Christmas lists. Basic toys are timeless toys. They are often handed down from generation to generation with no complaints from the younger ones. It is upon basic toys that children build their toy collections. Baby dolls, stuffed animals, trucks, balls, and board games are just a few examples of basic toys. If a child has a favorite toy, it most likely belongs to the basic group. Year after year, children return to these beloved toys for play. Basic toys are the last to be thrown away and the first to be packed to take along on vacations. These toys are taken to doctors' offices, dentists' offices, churches, schools and playgrounds.

(7) Eventually, basic toys wear out or break. At this stage they become more valuable and irreplaceable in the eyes of the owners. They are reverently adored and retained as remnants of childhood to be cherished far into adulthood. Adults look back on these toys with fondness and nostalgia. Their children's toys remind them of the baby dolls and trucks of their own childhood. Basic toys are the only ones that span the time and changes between generations.

(8) Christmas mornings always brought toys, more toys than many kids ever deserved. I had my Timey-Tell doll (Timey-who?) and my Dressy Bessy doll. Nerf balls, Barbie dolls, and Tonka trucks had their special places under the tree. I even got Candy Land two years in a row. Admittedly, my younger years were centered almost solely around the acquisition of toys. My toys now include cars, computers, and stereos. Children, though, still page through Christmas catalogues, bending page corners, ripping out pictures, hoping that their wishes for toys will be granted when they look under the tree on Christmas morning. Children have come to count on Santa Claus for fad toys, relatives for educational toys, and parents for basic toys.