

family



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FATHERS DIARY

Use games to make learning fun

By the end of the day, parents really are exhausted. Housekeeping, a full-time job and child-rearing drain every ounce of available energy from your body, and your brain also feels imposed upon.

Your kids questions are important and need to be answered right away, but you may not think so. However, if you were very young and didn't know too much about this ever-expanding world we live in, you would want answers to questions, and very quickly at that.

In addition to answering questions your kids ask out of the clear blue sky, try to inspire questions about the world of today, tomorrow and yesterday by using games and general play. Kids, after all, seem to be at their intellectual best when having a good time. Let each activity you participate in with your children have a direct bearing on their knowledge.

Several years ago, my oldest daughter, Elizabeth, now 12, was studying the colonial period. She had to know dates and such names as William Penn and Captain John Smith. All she wanted to do was play with her dolls. Names and dates from almost 400 years ago seemed irrelevant.

Convincing her that knowledge of history creates a sense of patriotism and belonging was as difficult as teaching names and dates. What kids think is good for them often conflicts with our thoughts on the matter.

I knew I had to meet the challenge of getting her to learn history through play. Why not with dolls?

A quick trip to the library got me an interesting book on the history of American dolls. That night after supper, Elizabeth and I went to her room and played with her dolls. After a few minutes of setting up, I posed the natural question: "I wonder how old the first doll made in America is?"

Without a second of silence after my question, Elizabeth quickly responded: "Oh, Dad, that's easy. William Penn gave his daughter a doll made of wood. Two weeks ago Mommy took me to the library and got me a doll book."

Have you ever felt beaten at your own game? That was my feeling. Although Elizabeth seemed to be one step ahead of me about dolls, she didn't understand the connection between Penn's first doll to his daughter and the colonial period she was studying in school.

The stage was set and we discussed the idea of little girls traveling on big sailboats across the Atlantic Ocean from Europe to America, holding their precious dolls dressed in animal hides. I tried to create a picture of a little girl during the colonial period who had nothing to call her own except a homemade doll she could cuddle in her arms. After a while, the colonial period took on a kid's meaning. Dolls made the colonial days vivid and worth remembering.

When we enjoy something, we learn. If it takes play to teach kids, I'm all for it. As parents, however, we have to be prepared to direct and teach during the play activity.

The game of parenting isn't easy, though. You can imagine how I felt when Elizabeth asked me what a *watteau Sacque*, *ruche* and *palasade* were!

Consider the following books for your library:

"A Parent's Guide To Children's Reading," by Dr. Nancy Larnick, Trident Press.

"Best Books For Children," by Patricia Allen, R.R. Bowker.

"A Parent's Guide To Children's Play And Recreation," by Alvin Schwartz, Collier Books.

"The Rainy Day Book," by Alvin Schwartz, Trident Press.

"Play For Convalescent Children In Hospitals And At Home," by Ann Marie Smith, A.S. Barnes.