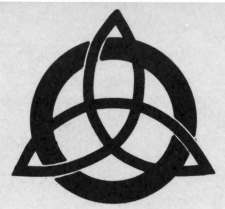


HOME ECONOMICS GUIDE



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Learning Is Child's Play

Attribute Blocks

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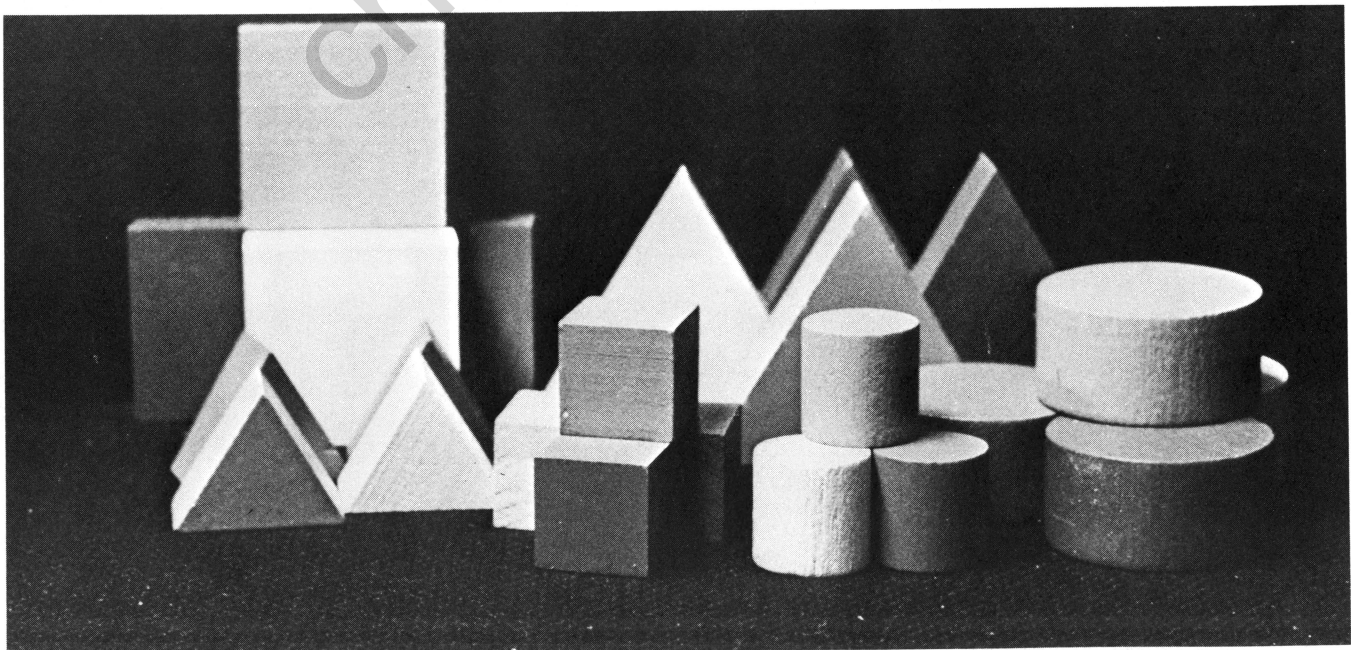
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Imagine how difficult it would be to describe people or objects if you couldn't refer to attributes such as shape, size, and color. People are often pointed out as being "the lady in the red dress" or "the large man wearing the blue suit." We identify and describe people and objects on the basis of such attributes as taste, odor, texture, size, shape, and color. Attributes may also be referred to as the pro-

erties, characteristics, or qualities that something has; the words all basically mean the same thing.

Being able to identify, name, and describe various attributes helps organize thinking. The world seems clearer when children can distinguish between big and small, blue and red, or sweet and sour. It's much easier to understand something you can describe.



Attribute Blocks

There's evidence that children's feelings about learning are acquired early in life. One method of strengthening these early learnings is to encourage them to observe, point out, identify, name, and describe people and things according to their attributes. This should be done long before children begin to talk, perhaps even at birth.

The framework for grasping relationships and classifications is the ability to recognize shapes, sizes, colors, etc. Therefore it is important that children develop an early ability to work within this framework and grow confident about their problem solving capacities.

A simple set of *Attribute Blocks*, which are easy to make, help children learn to identify, name, and describe sizes, shapes, and colors.

Description

You need one set of 16 large shapes - a circle, a triangle, a square, and a rectangle with one of each in red, green, yellow, and blue - and, one set of 16 small shapes - a circle, a triangle, a square, and a rectangle with one of each in red, yellow, blue, and green.

Your set of *Attribute Blocks* should be durable and different enough in size to be easily identified as small or large. All corners and edges should be smooth and the paint should be non-toxic and washable.

Purpose

These blocks are designed to help the child:

- learn to observe, identify, and describe things according to their attributes.
- understand that things can have more than one quality (blocks can be round and small as well as different colors).
- use memory and logic in solving problems.

Although the real world isn't as easy to describe as these *Attribute Blocks*, working and playing with this set is an experience that children can succeed at and feel good about.

Game I

This game is planned so that differences in color, size, and shape are discovered. Pick out eight blocks that are alike in some way - for example they could all be squares.

Have the child pick up one of the blocks. Ask the child what it is. Then, select another block from the floor and tell how it's different. "My block is different than yours because your block is blue and mine is yellow."



Using the specific color name and the word *different* tells the child much more than merely saying "This is different than that one."

Then, have the child pick up another block from the set and tell you how it's different than yours. If they can't tell you how it's different, go ahead and tell them. Don't force the child to describe the two blocks. This will make the child feel pressured and take the fun out of the game. If they seem puzzled or upset you can ask them some leading questions: "Are they the same color?" "Are they the same size?" "Are they the same shape?" "Do they fit over each other?"

Continue until all the blocks are gone or until the child gets tired, bored, or fidgety.

Game II

This approach emphasizes the idea of sameness or matching, that each block is like the others in at least one way.

Use any block assortment and put them between you and your child. Pick up two blocks that are alike in some way and tell how they're the same. "Both of these blocks are squares," or "Both of these blocks are green."



Then, ask your child to pick up two that are alike in some way and tell you how they're alike.

If they have trouble describing them, help out with clues, "Have you looked at the color?", "Did you check them for size?" Always encourage effort and be alert to the child's feelings. If you pressure children or make them feel they have failed by not knowing the answer they will become discouraged and quit trying. The way you respond to children's answers affects their desire to continue and their confidence.

Game III

When children are comfortable about their ability to describe the blocks according to their color, shape, and size, they are ready for this more difficult game. You need eight blocks that go together in some way (for example, all the circles). Lay them all on the floor or table in front of the child. Mix them up so they aren't in any special order. Give the child plenty of time to see and play with them. Ask them to close their eyes. Take one block away. Ask them to try to guess which block is missing. If they have an idea of what the group was, how they all were alike, they can logically guess which one you hid. If they don't guess, ask them what color or size they think it is. It's helpful to see and examine the blocks still there. If the child is helped to pair up circles, they're able to discover which color doesn't have a partner.

If they still don't guess, show them the block you hid. Put it back with the others.

Always show the child the missing block as soon as they guess—right or wrong. Tell them what it is—it's size color, or shape. "The one missing was the large red circle."

Game IV

An advanced form of Game III uses all 32 blocks. Spread them on the floor in no particular order. Give the child time to look at and play with them. Then, as in Game III, ask them to close their eyes while you take away one block. Ask them to guess which block is missing.

To develop a greater sense of partnership switch roles. Let the child hide a block and see if you can figure out which one is missing.

It's not easy, is it? How did you go about determining which block was missing? To gain some insight into the child's thinking ask them how they know which block is missing.

Summary

Children need to feel they are able to learn and that learning can be fun as well as rewarding. The *Attribute Blocks* are designed for this purpose. Identifying, naming, and describing objects based on their attributes, these games concentrate on logic and reasoning ability rather than memorization.

Attribute Blocks allow youngsters to make discoveries on their own. The games set the stage for the higher level of logical thinking that will be required to solve problems throughout life. Children are eager to learn if allowed to move at their own pace, play freely, ask questions, and become a part of the kind of daily happenings that can help them gain knowledge about themselves and their role in life.