

It's a retro revival as classic toys make a comeback

BY CHANDRA ORR
Copley News Service

He's baaack! That cuddly little critter that drove parents nuts in the 1990s is back on toy store shelves with a brand-new look and enough processing power to rival the Apollo moon lander. That's right — Furby has returned.

Call it a retro revival. Call it smart marketing. Either way, everything old is new again. But this, in itself, is nothing new.

"This isn't really a new practice," said Adrienne Citrin, spokeswoman for the Toy Industry Association. "Classic toys have a long history of being reinvented and reintroduced because what's old and retro to an adult is new and different to a child.

"Right now the kids who grew up in the '70s and '80s are coming of age and having their own kids, so toys like Cabbage Patch Kids and Strawberry Shortcake are back," she said. "Even toys like Furby, it really hasn't even been that long since it came out the first

time, but it's still kind of kitschy to kids in their teens and 20s."

Nostalgia plays a part for parents, but kids just want to have fun — and low-tech toys like dolls and action figures let kids be kids.

"All the kids growing up these days are so technologically savvy," Citrin said. "With these toys they can just play. These toys are novel to them."

Still, the latest incarnations of the classics are designed to appeal to a new audience.

"Some of the toys are as before, but a lot of companies are giving them an updated twist to make them relevant to the marketplace," Citrin said. "It doesn't matter if it's a child today or a child in the '70s, if it's going to be a toy that a child loves, it has to have the play element. But if you have something that works, why not adapt it to be viable in today's marketplace?"

And adapt they have. From enhanced technology to pop culture references, few of the redesigned toys



CNS Photo courtesy of Hasbro

Furby's back from the not-so-distant past, this time telling interactive knock-knock jokes, smiling, singing, dancing and — to the relief of parents everywhere — going to sleep on command.

are exactly as before. For example, the new Furby tells interactive knock-knock jokes, smiles when

singing and dancing and, much to the relief of parents everywhere, even goes to sleep on command.

Classic "Star Wars" characters are also making an appearance, this time in miniature form. The latest way to play out the battle between the rebels and the Dark Side is part action figure, part strategic gaming. Old favorites like Obi Wan Kenobi and Jabba the Hutt skirmish against new characters to satisfy nostalgic collectors and kids alike.

The latest My Little Pony figures feature more glitter and sparkle and a whole new host of characters. Strawberry Shortcake has traded in her frilly dress for casual jeans, while the new, more culturally diverse crew from the Cabbage Patch sports the latest in 'tween-friendly fashion. No decade is off limits when it comes to reviving the tried and true.

"We're even seeing toys from generations before," Citrin said. After all, parents aren't the only ones with a sentimental streak. Grandparents, too, want to share their childhood favorites and the baby boomer generation has

made toy manufacturers sit up and take notice.

"Grandparents have a huge spending power," Citrin said.

From the wild-haired Trollz, revamped from the 1960s icon, to Candy Land, which now comes with a DVD, toy companies are reaching way back for retro favorites. Even Operation the Game has a modern twist: Homer Simpson and his ubiquitous "D'oh!" have replaced the familiar face and buzzing sound.

Several of the toys hitting shelves again spawned feeding frenzies the first time around? While every toy company hopes to hit upon the next must-have toy, chances are these revivals will simply be sentimental favorites this holiday season. Sentiment does have its perks, though.

"It's nice for families to be able to play with these toys together," Citrin said. "It's really a great bonding experience when a parent is passionate about a toy and has good associations from their childhood."

Holiday can bring on a bad case of 'The Gimmes' with children

BY CHANDRA ORR
Copley News Service

With a constant bombardment of commercials and the sheer anticipation of Santa's visit, kids can quickly get a case of "The Gimmes."

But the last thing parents should do is give in. From tantrums in the toy store to incessant nagging, children have a host of nerve-rattling tricks at their disposal. With the right game plan, however, parents can easily combat the holiday wish list frenzy.

"Kids have giant consumer appetites starting as young as they can speak," said Stacy DeBroff, author of "The Mom Book: 4,278 of Mom Central's Tips — For Moms, From Moms" (\$20, Free Press). "Whether watching cartoons or Saturday morning TV, children are bombarded with advertisements for everything from stuffed animals to cell phones.

"Kids want everything in sight and often pay no attention to cost — and they are completely willing, at the drop of a dime, to throw a massive tantrum. It makes going into a toy store, espe-

cially around the holidays, a completely dangerous mission for parents."

Setting and enforcing limits are the keys to keeping kids off of Santa's naughty list. The pressure to get the latest game or gadget is enough to make any parent lose their resolve, but parents should never give in to their child's impulsive demands, DeBroff said. Getting one more gift to appease the little one quickly puts the child in control. And buying a coveted toy to get the tantrum to stop is likely to backfire.

"Let the child know that you have reasonable limits, that no amount of whining, pleading, cajoling or begging is going to get you to make an impulsive purchase," DeBroff said.

"Parents get overwhelmed by their child's response, whether it's a tantrum from a toddler or an evil look from a 'tween, and they give in. You have to be completely resolute on what your limit is — and you need to be able to stick to it."

Enforcing limits is perhaps easier said than done. An all-out, stomp-the-floor, red-faced crying fit in the middle of the mall has a way of changing things. Guilt, frustration and impatience can quickly weaken a tired parent. But no matter how bad things seem, giving in will only make it worse.

"Kids will pull out all the stops. They will say, 'You must not love me because you didn't buy this,' and we hate to think that we are depriving our kids. We tend to cater to our kids and guilt

feeds into that. It's very easy to get into the endless cycle of saying 'No,' then giving in later. It opens up the door to begging and creates a dynamic where you seem to be the depriver instead of the giver," DeBroff said.

"A generation ago parents would have said, 'No, it's not up for discussion.' Now parents have this whole lengthy discussion which opens the door for a possible change of heart. They're actually letting the child control the holiday gift buying limits. Parents feel that they are stretching the limits of their generosity, but their kids are labeling them as selfish. As parents, we need to turn that around so that's not the way the child thinks about it."

Letters to Santa are the ultimate teaching tools.

Children learn to prioritize their wants and needs and become part of the decision-making process. Whether at home or in the store, any urges immediately get added to the list. Later, children can prioritize the gifts. Impulse desires move to the bottom, while the most coveted gifts go at the top of the list. Older children seeking big-ticket items will learn to make compromises: Are they willing to forgo a few little gifts in favor of one expensive item?

"Children have to think about what they care about and what they want. They

understand that Santa can't get everything. This is a way to teach children to set priorities and, starting at around age 9, kids can really make trade-offs. At that age, they have really strong preferences for what they like, so give them three choices. They will usually pick one because they are forced to evaluate the comparative value of those things."

Such activities engage children in the gift-giving process. They may get fewer surprises, but they will have fewer disappointments on Christmas morning, DeBroff said.

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