

# The History of a Toy

**L**ook in your toy box and try to guess which toys are modern and which have been played with by children throughout history. Which toy do you think has the most history and can be traced back the furthest in time? How about the yo-yo? Surprised? The yo-yo is believed to have originated in China about 2,500 years ago. Explorers have even found drawings of yo-yos on ancient Egyptian temples. Back then they were not plastic, of course, but were made of wood or clay and were just called "discs."

Today we think of a yo-yo as being a child's toy, but in the late 1700s King Louis XVII played with a toy "emigrette"—a yo-yo made of glass and ivory. In the opera *The Marriage of Figaro*, the nervous Figaro shows he is upset by constantly playing with an emigrette. Even the soldiers of Napoleon's army played with yo-yos to calm their nerves before going out to do battle. In 1791 the emigrette became known as the "Prince of Wales Toy," and was still played with mostly by adults.

In 1866 the yo-yo finally made it to the United States when two men from Ohio received a patent for what they called the "bandalore," a yo-yo with a weighted rim.

The yo-yo was also known as the Filipino Toy. In 1920 Pedro Flores brought the first Filipino yo-yo to the United States and began a company in California. In 1928 Donald F. Duncan Sr. saw this toy and liked the idea so much that he bought the whole company from Flores and renamed the toy the "yo-yo." The Duncan Company moved to Luck, Wisconsin, which became known as the yo-yo capital of the world and was producing 3,600 wooden yo-yos per hour. Duncan decided to promote the yo-yo to children by teaching them how to use it and how to do tricks with it. He hired people to go all over the United States holding contests and demonstrating tricks. The yo-yo became wildly popular. By 1962 the Duncan Company had sold 45 million yo-yos and the country had only 40 million kids! It seemed that there was a yo-yo on every corner and in every home in the USA! Indeed, many adults were *still* playing with yo-yos!

After a few years, the word *yo-yo* became so popular that the Duncan Company could no longer claim the name for itself. When other companies were able to use the name yo-yo, the Duncan Company lost so much business that it filed for bankruptcy and closed in 1965. Today, the Flambeau Plastic Company still makes and sells eleven different models of the popular Duncan yo-yo. One new kind even has a "brain," so that it will return to the holder's hand if it begins to spin too slowly.

So look into your toy box again and this time pull out a yo-yo. See if you can get it to "sleep" or if you can remember how to "rock the cradle" or "walk the dog." Then try to imagine children (and adults) in far off lands and times playing with the same basic toy that you are holding.

By Mary Rose