



Good as gold

These toys win judges' high marks

by Ellen Metrick
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Each year, toy manufacturers present a new wave of products that make us think, laugh and explore. This year we saw a number of notable trends. One of the most pervasive and challenging for manufacturers is "kids getting older younger," in which children age out of toys much earlier than in the past. Another major shift is the emergence of products that encourage higher-level thinking.

Of course, safety has been a renewed concern after the massive toy recalls of recent months. While NAPPA judges thoroughly test toys for play quality and sustainability, we have to rely on government agencies and manufacturers themselves to take each toy through rigorous safety tests and to abide by mandated safety standards. Be sure to check the Consumer Product Safety Commission recall lists at www.cpsc.gov before making purchases.

Ages 5 and up

Karito Kids

Each of the five 21-inch dolls in this collection has a different ethnicity that shines through beautifully mastered facial features, hair and clothing. A fictional story accompanies each doll and highlights the culture, people and landscape of her country. On the Karito Kids Web site, doll owners can select a children's charity to which a portion of the purchase price can be donated. Gia, Lulu, Zoe, Wan Ling and Pita Dolls with Books, KidsGive, \$99.99 each; ages 6 and up; www.KidsGive.com.