

multicultural toys



Expanding Kids' Horizons

Makers of multicultural toys offer children new ways to see the world | **By Colleen Bohan**

The world does not revolve around me." That appears to be the message of a number of manufacturers who have recently entered the multicultural toy market. While the category may have historically evolved as a movement to provide children of various ethnic backgrounds with toys that reflect their own traits and experiences, these days it seems the prevailing drive for many of the latest entrants into the multicultural toy market is an urge to provide all children, with a base for understanding lifestyles that differ from their own.

Talking the talk

Ted Hester of Denver-based Bangs Cuts, maker of the new Bangs Bilingual Bratty, tells *Playthings* that he sees his Spanish-English/English-Spanish bratty toy as way to provide kids with the chance to take a "first step toward being a global citizen." He explains that his product—which features a plush cat accompanied by an interactive TV game that gives native Spanish or English-speaking elementary school children basic vocabulary lessons in the other language—represents a move toward "taking awareness of and celebrating the differences between" the English-speaking and Spanish-speaking children that so often coexist in U.S. classrooms.



"We can't be so isolated like we have been in America... we have to celebrate our differences. This is a great first step," says Hester. Bangs first became available last fall at a suggested retail price of \$22.

Bangs Cuts isn't alone in its efforts to help kids become bilingual at a time in their lives when they are most receptive to learning new languages.

Once Upon a Target, Fla.-based and -timed company founded by bilingual educator, filmmaker and songwriter Ruth Butler, offers a suite of products designed to teach English-speaking children Spanish and Spanish speakers English. The company's Boca Beth Bilingual Backpack (\$19.99) includes a music CD, a bilingual DVD, a 48-page coloring/activity book presented with Spanish and English on each page, a puppet and a child-sized suitcase. Its learning system provides a foundation of more than 225 words and 100 phrases in both languages, the company says, with the help of music and movement. The product line "provides parents and teachers the all-in-one solution to introducing Spanish early alongside English—with no second language experience necessary on the part of the child," Butler says.

Cherry, South Plainfield, N.J., is also expanding its bilingual offerings in 2009 with two additional products. The infant and preschool toy maker's Bilingual Talking Bear is a plush teddy that teaches children their first numbers and words in English and Spanish. Press the bright button on the bear's tummy to hear favorite nursery rhymes, count along with the bear and discover the names of fruits and animals. Squeeze the hands and feet for verbal encouragement to interact with the bear. Cherry's English-Spanish Talking Vacation Car (pictured on our cover) encourages kids to the names of objects and corresponding sounds, plus tell stories that kids complete by recognizing missing objects and solving riddles. Both toys retail for a suggested price of \$49.99.

Other companies have taken a more direct route to the Spanish-speaking market. Indianapolis-based Forever Games, for one, markets a line of games and a plush with DVD set based on *El Chavo*, an animated



Counter-clockwise from above: *Playthings* Best World Best award, from Alexander (left) International (left photo), Cherry's Bilingual Teddy Bear (top left), Forever's Karts, Kids Travel Classroom and dolls, Part Next from Marmoset-Gallop's Global Green Park line

series based on a still wildly popular Mexican sitcom from the 1970s about a street vendor who lives in a barrel. Some of the products, like Forever's *El Chavo* board game, are printed entirely in Spanish, with English instructions available from the company.

Playing with an open mind

Laura M. Barger, CEO and president of Kidline, tells *Playthings* that a desire to "teach kids about how to give back and to help inspire world-mindedness" inspired her and Lisa Helen Proctor, the company's chief operating officer, to develop their line of Karto Kids dolls, with dolls and books.

The original Karto Kids were introduced in 2007. Each of the 23 such dolls, which retail for a suggested \$30.00, are designed to depict a character from a different country and culture. Each comes with a story book featuring the doll's character, filled with information about that character's culture.

Kidline draws home its message of world-mindedness through a charitable giving component tied to the purchase of the dolls. The company donates 6 percent of the wholesale price of each product to the Plan International children's charity. Customers see a special code that comes packaged with each product to log into karto-kids.com and specify an area for which they'd like their donation to be used, for instance they can choose to push their money towards funding education, healthcare, food or home expenses for chil-

Outlook: Paradigm-shifting products

Playthings

Specialty Splash

Making The Most Of Diversity

Makers of multicultural toys are expanding in a world we have not seen

The Line On Lead Testing

Specialty Splash

Specialty Splash