world view.

enjoy a privileged peep-show of an age

our knowledge of subsequent events, we

both in images and words. Suspending

of which are now digitized and available

Digital Library project, this exhibition
draws both on these games and on the

Ephemera. Taking its cue from an Oxford

the John Johnson Collection of Printed

found among the 680 subject sections of

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In addition to illuminating childhood

earlier times, games give fascinating

social history of their time,

both in images and words. Suspending

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with different assumptions, with a different world view.

Comic Metamorphoses

Comic metamorphoses (pictures, dissected in various ways, which could then be mixed up with comic effect) enjoyed a long period of popularity in the first six decades of the 19th century. The examples in the exhibition range from delicate cards to substantial wooden blocks in kitchen boxes, many of which were produced in Germany for the international market. While most showed humans (in various fancy and national costumes) and animals, Neuj-Wagen-Metamorphosen (item 1) uses images of different types of transport.

A different form of metamorphosis was the superimposition onto a figure (or a head, frequently androgynous) of a variety of exotic costumes (harlequin's, Turk's, knight's, etc). Sollers of England (item 6), a manuscript item, achieves the same effect by an ingenious overlaying of four costumes (harlequin's, Turk's, knight's, etc). The figure (or a head, frequently androgynous) of a variety of exotic costumes

Paper Dolls and Protein Figures

Playing with paper dolls and their dresses could be an end in itself, an educational pursuit, or a means of involving a child in a story. The dressing of paper or cardboard figures in different clothes (items 12, 16, and 17) was a pastime which lasted for many years. Costumes of different nationalities were very popular (items 8–11), and taught something of the lives of others when used as a prompt for further information. The moral tale of Little Faery (items 13–15) was fixed in the mind of the child to whom it was being told by the simple process of moving Faery's head from doll to doll following the story.

Elegant and Instructive Games

Georgian and early Victorian board games were invaluable instructional aids, in areas such as geography, history, and morality. Many were race games, played with a spinner and teetotum rather than dice, which were associated with gambling. Georgian games were typically mounted on linen and sold in slip-cases, with accompanying booklets which described in detail geographical phenomena, towns, or historical events. Often such commentaries were not limited to the purely factual, but indulged in a moralising or didactic message: sometimes, as in A new and accurate representation of the Kings and Queens of England (item 53), the puzzle could hardly be made up without knowledge of the chronology of English monarchs. Here too the facts are supplemented by comments, often caustic, on the kings or queens (among whom is Oliver Cromwell!): 'Edward 4 ... Profligate and atheistical' (item 53).

Later, when regular schooling covered basic subjects, many games became more recreational, while still developing skills in the young. Strategy games (items 38, 40, 41), often modelled on the game of Fox and geese, were popular with boys. Many late 19th-century boxed games were produced in Germany, which was the centre for chromolithographic printing.

Scientific Pursuits and Mathematical Puzzles

Many aids were produced to facilitate an understanding of astronomy. Fold-out light cards were particularly valuable in choosing the solar system and the constellations related to their names. Urania's mirror (item 22) is a particularly fine example.

The toy theatre, a square cut out into seven pieces of different pictorial shapes (items 24 and 25), is believed to be an ancient Chinese puzzle, although it was not recorded in print in China until 1813. The toy theatre became very popular in 19th-century Europe, when travel to China opened up.

The magic square (item 26), where the numbers in each column, row, and diagonal add up to 34, was depicted in 1514 by Dürer in his print Melencolia. Mechanical addition (item 23), and its companion, Mechanica' multiplication (not shown), are forms of mechanical calculators.

Jigsaws and Dissected Puzzles

Dissected puzzles (the term for puzzles before the use of the jigsaw to cut the pieces) often combined the use of spatial skills to assemble the puzzles with a didactic message, sometimes, as in the 18-inch length portraits of the Kings and Queens of England (item 53), the puzzle could hardly be made up without knowledge of the chronology of English monarchs. Here too the facts are supplemented by comments, often caustic, on the kings or queens (among whom is Oliver Cromwell!): 'Edward 4 ... Profligate and atheistical' (item 53). Early puzzles were often dissected maps. The re-use of a plate or, as here, lithographic stones, can be seen in Roarem Castle (items 57 and 58), where the game was re-published as a jigsaw game, complete with its spines, twointments, counters, etc. The cutting of such puzzles (a separate skill) would have been outsourced, as evidenced by the disappearance of the Standring imprint from the Roarem Castle jigsaw. Variants on the standard dissected puzzle were the block puzzle (item 50) and the double-sided puzzle (item 56).
In the 18th century the notion that learning the ABC could be linked to play was embodied in the hornbook (item 72), a bat-shaped piece of wood on which was fixed a slip of paper bearing the alphabet, vowels, and syllables, the invocation to the Trinity, and the Lord’s Prayer. When not hitting things with his hornbook, its owner could run his letters. Although they must have been produced in their thousands, few survive today; this example is the earliest known and is apparently unique. By the late 18th century hornbooks had been replaced by battledores (items 61–67), vertically bat-shaped objects, made of card, usually folded twice, with the alphabet as centrepieces and often illustrations and other text. The splendidly coloured example (item 65) was an expensive luxury toy. The endeaver to make learning fun stretched the ingenuity of publishers and toy manufacturers alike. Picture books, panoramas, cards, wooden blocks and discs, dominoes, all were employed in the worthy task of teaching the alphabet.

Alphabets are Fun

Writing and drawing gave rise to a large number of aids and materials. 'School pieces' or writing blanks (items 102–107) were sheets with printed borders and a blank centre, given to children from c.1720–1860, usually at Christmas, to fill in and show how their handwriting had improved during the year. The ‘vignette’ ‘Shewing his friends his schoolpiece in’ The progress of education (item 102) shows the presentation of such a writing sheet.

The Little Builder

Exhibition Guide

Parlour Games

Before the days of television and personal computers, parlour games were a favourite way of spending time on dark evenings and rainy days. Games including forfeits (items 94 and 95) were especially popular in the early 19th century, as were ever more complex word games (items 96–98), which demanded that the players remember longer and longer pieces of text, or again incur forfeits. Some scientific experiments (items 99–101) seem astonishingly risky to our safety-conscious eyes, but were undoubtedly successful in teaching chemistry and physics to the young.

Outdoor Games

The illustrations in this section show a variety of games played by children, from the almost balletic activities of Schoolboys' diversions (item 131), depicting six games from ‘Hare and hounds’ to ‘The devil on two sticks’ to the intensity with which the little girl holds her battledore and looks at the shuttlecock in Original poems (item 130). The Girl's own book and Girl's own book (items 133 and 134) are comprehensive compendiums of children's sports and pastimes. The wooden blocks (item 132) can be arranged up to form six different pictures according to the accompanying patterns. In Female gymnastics (item 130) the fashion for physical exercise is shown on a set of wooden pieces; the game also included dancing routines, another popular pursuit for young people in the mid-19th century.

Brush, Pen, and Pencil

There were many books on the art of drawing or watercolour, notably here 16 strips of John Clark's Polyorama (item 164), 160 right-angled triangles which could be put together in any combination to form a landscape. The 16 strips of John Calis's Myriorama (item 128), for example, could be combined in 20,922,789,888,000 ways.

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Other aids to drawing and composition included the Mymoramic or Polymoramic (or Chorioramic) of the 1820s (items 125–129). Related to metamorphosis, these usually consisted of 12, 16, 18, or 24 strips which could be put together in any combination to form a landscape. The 16 strips of John Calis's Myriorama (item 128), for example, could be combined in 20,922,789,888,000 ways.

There were many books on the art of drawing or watercolour, notably here The progress of a water-coloured drawing (124) which shows the gradual build-up of washes to create a watercolour. Examples shown include exercise books filled with children’s work; drawing slates (with patterns),胖 boil, quills, nibs, and a portable ink pot.