

Resource Round-Up

Resource Round-Up is a regular department in which we review and feature books, toys, games, CDs, videos, learning kits, and other materials that parents may find helpful in raising their high-potential youngsters. Resources included in this department have been reviewed and evaluated by the editors of Parenting for High Potential. Submit products that are intended for children, youth, or family use to: Karen Yannacio, PHP Resource Round Up Coordinator, 8 High Point Circle, Apt 301, Quincy, MA 02169.

We also publish reviews of books intended specifically for parents if we find that they will have interest and value for parents of high-ability children. Send books to be considered to Dr. Donald J. Treffinger, Editor, PHP Magazine, 4921 Ringwood Meadow, Sarasota, FL 34235.



Annual Holiday Toy List 2007

by Karen Yannacio

It's that time of year again – the time of year when we discover the newest, hottest, freshest, and most creative toys and games on the market. The products chosen for the 2007 Annual Holiday Toy List had that “WOW” factor for our testers. In fact, to sum up the findings, these are the games our testers didn't want to put down. They begged to take the products home, wanted to share them with their friends, and asked about locating stores so they could buy their favorites – all great signs that these new toys are ones to know about. Each product has qualities that are unique, fun, exciting, and creative. We have grouped the toys and games into four categories: Interactive Games, Board Games, Hands-On Games, and Miscellaneous Games. The “Interactive Games” involve group discussions and encourage interaction among players. The classic “Board Games” involve a board or playing surface and might also employ cards, dice, or other manipulative pieces. The “Hands-On Games” are played mainly through manipulation and movement of parts. Some of the games in this category are more exploratory in nature and might not necessarily have a winner or a loser, but instead encourage discovery and critical-thinking skills. Finally, the “Miscellaneous Games” category includes games that can be played through the use of a computer or a new gadget.

Keep in mind that the ages listed in the reviews below are those suggested by the manufacturer; however, younger (even pre-school) gifted children have found great pleasure and satisfaction in playing several of the games designed for much older children when adults helped them figure out the rules. We encourage you to investigate the products to see if they might be just the ticket to stimulate learning and skill building for your child, regardless of age.

Information about many of the toys from the list, including direct links to the manufacturers' websites, can be found in our online Resource Directory at: <http://www.nagc.org/resourcedirectory.aspx>.

Interactive Games

AlphaBall by Learning Resources (www.LearningResources.com). Ages 6 and Up. \$36.95.

Toy testers who enjoyed unscrambling words and spelling challenges couldn't put this game down. This electronic toy offers a choice of six scramble games (word mix, word scramble, and wonder words, each in English and Spanish). Some of the games are timed. For example, in “word mix,” players have only two minutes to spell as many words as possible from the scrambled word on the display. “Wonder word” is similar to Hangman, with players trying to solve word puzzles. This game has music, sounds, and lights to encourage the building of spelling and language arts skills in both English and Spanish.



Contrario by FoxMind (www.FoxMind.com). Ages 13 to Adult. \$14.99.

A “Contrario” is a created expression drawn from different categories such as music, film, literature, geography, and history. Players are challenged to solve each “Contrario” through clues drawn from



synonyms, antonyms, idioms, and other word plays. There are two clues for each “Contrario.” Here is the first clue: Florida nightmarin’. Next clue: music/The Mamas and the Papas. If you said “California Dreamin,” you’re right. The 165 double-sided cards each have eight “Contrarios” to solve, which means there are many opportunities to stretch lateral thinking skills and logic to solve each mystery. What’s great is that this game could be played with points for a winner or could be used as a conversation game casually without keeping score. Either way it’s a lot of fun.

Hit or Miss by Gamewright (www.gamewright.com). Ages 10 to Adult. \$19.99.

Ready to “think-in-sync”? The goal of this fast-paced and action-packed category word game is to list lots and lots of words that correspond to the category card. After the 45 seconds on the timer are up, it’s time to roll the die. If it lands on “HIT,” players each choose the word they think everyone else most likely wrote down on their own lists. If the die lands on “MISS,” players choose the word from their list that they believe no one else wrote down on their lists. Success comes when players are “in sync” with others while also being creative enough to brainstorm and list awesome words to win big points.



Pretend & Play: World Traveler by Learning Resources (www.LearningResources.com). Ages 3 and Up. \$32.95.

Get your play passport ready, because with the *Pretend & Play World Traveler* kit players will be on their way to lots of unique destinations. Pretend that you’re in another country or another city. Use airplane tickets to board the plane, then use train and bus tickets to sightsee. But don’t forget to bring binoculars, money (Euro, Canadian and American), wallet, play camera, and more to make each “journey” memorable. The products in this kit give imaginative play life-like objects to make the play all that more real. All that’s needed is imagination for this traveling kit to inspire endless journeys.

Questionary by Spark Games LLC (www.sparkgamesllc.com). Ages 11 to Adult. \$19.99.

The object of this game is to guess the word on the other team’s card. The catch is that players can only ask yes or no questions that pertain to their word or phrase. Our toy testers said that this game was “brain teasing” and “hilarious” and kept them entertained and laughing for most of the game play. Testers also commented that the game was challenging because

players really have to think about the clues and their own yes or no questions to win. This game is also a great interactive group activity because players jump right into shouting out questions to try to quickly determine the solution.

Such & Such by Patch Products (www.PatchProducts.com). Ages 10 to Adult. \$30.00.

Such & Such combines the art of carefully worded clues with cleverly paired phrases for a witty competition between players. Think of words that go together, such as peanut butter and jelly or Homer and Marge (Simpson). Players need to keep pairs in mind because that’s what it takes to win. For example, if the clue is “These are at the crux of the debate over which came first” did you immediately think of “chicken and egg”? This game has 500 sets of clues on 250 cards along with five pawns for player, a sand timer, and a scoreboard. This game was enjoyed by our testers when competitively playing for points, as well as when played casually without points.

Toss Your Cookies by Gamewright (www.gamewright.com). Ages 8 to Adult. \$11.99.

The object of the game is to be the first player to collect five of a type of cookie (Oreos, chocolate chip, gingerbread, sugar, frosted, pinwheel and others), plus the milk card, by passing, swapping and tossing cookie cards according to instructions on the dice. Players enjoyed thinking quickly during this game. Players must watch out for the half-eaten cookie; it will spoil the set. This is a fast-paced and fun game that finished with a victorious shout of “Snickerdoodle.”



Zing! by TLI Games (www.tligames.com). All Ages. \$24.95.

Let the imaginative storytelling begin. *Zing!* is a sentence building, open-ended word game for 2 to 4 players. Stories are created when individual word tiles are played on a gridded game board. For example, a player could create a sentence like this – “A” “juicy” “farm” “cake” “splattered” “all” “over” “them”. The game includes over 450 elementary, edgy, or esoteric word tiles along with 100 blank “wash off” word tiles, a dry erase marker and score cards. This is a creative and enjoyable game with enough twists and turns that players never know who will win.

Board Games

Code Breaker by Cogno (www.cogno.com). Ages 7 to Adult. \$19.95.

Toy testers loved how *Code Breaker* was a combination of *Pictionary* and memory games. This game starts as a simple matching game but adds a really fun twist. Each card has an image on one side and a plain, white surface on the other.

Players randomly place all cards image side down in the playing area. The goal is to try to make as many matches as possible. Players flip the cards to try to make a match, but if it isn't a match, they can then write down a "code" on the top of the card with the dry erase marker as a memory jogger for the next turn. The secret code could be a symbol, a picture, a number or anything else that will help in making matches. Our testers wanted to be sneaky in writing down the codes so they didn't give other players clues to make matches and earn points. It required a lot of creativity, critical thinking, and memory to win! A winner of seven national awards, this twist on an old classic delivers a lot of creative coding, drawing, memory, and skill.

KEESDROW by Pywacket Games (www.Pywacketgames.com). Ages 8 to Adult. \$24.99.

For all of you wordsmiths out there, do you notice anything interesting about the title of this game? What if you spell it backwards? That's it! This is a "word seek"ing game. But instead of the usual searching for the same, old words, our testers thought it was unique that each game always had a new selection of words from which to choose. Mix up the many different letter tiles, place them randomly on the board, and then start searching for words. Once you find one, grab it by placing a green colored peg in each letter to spell out the word. Count up the points (point values vary from letter to letter) and let the next player find a word. If the next player (or any player) plays your same letters to form a new word they replace your green pegs with yellow ones. Then if players use those yellow letters in their word, they replace the yellow pegs with red pegs. But watch out – once the red pegs appear because that means stop – no more using those letters. It's a game that lets players scan for new words, use words multiple times, while trying to outwit and out-spell the competition.

Mix Up by Out of the Box (www.otb-games.com). Ages 8 to Adult. \$19.99.

Four in a row just got a lot more challenging and fun with the mixed up game of *Mix Up*. Using a combination of three different colors and three different shapes there are many more



ways to achieve a "four in a row" win than ever before. One player wants to win a four in a row with colors while the other player wants to win a four in a row with shapes. Our toy

testers loved the concentration required to study the game board. Figuring out where to slide their game piece became a fun and

challenging play. Sometimes the tile they played inadvertently helped their opponent.

Newton's Apples by BriarPatch (www.BriarPatch.com). Ages 7 and Up. \$24.99

As the saying goes, "what goes up must come down" and that's exactly what gravity does for *Newton's Apples* game. Players begin with all the green or red apples at the top of a slanted playing board. By using crates in the eight different rows the goal is to block the opponent's apples from falling to the bottom row. Crates can be lined up, used to build bridges over rows, or combined to build elaborate apple blocks. Our testers thought this would be an easy game but reported that they really had to think hard and smart about where to position their crates to use gravity in their favor. Whatever it takes to defy gravity and get the apples to the bottom first. This three dimensional game is one that you definitely will "fall for."

Spill Your Guts by Learning Resources (www.LearningResources.com). Ages 7 and Up. \$26.95.

STAT - how quickly you can put the patient back together? Here is a game that asks questions about the human body and its organ systems. When you answer correctly, you earn an organ to place in the body tray. But...when you answer incorrectly, you end up spilling the guts. Time to start over. Anatomy can be complicated, but fun too. Collect the most correctly answered question cards to win. The testers who went to this game again and again said that they had an interest in becoming a doctor as a possible career and enjoyed learning more about the human body in a game format.

Traverse by Educational Insights (www.EducationalInsights.com). Ages 7 and Up. \$24.99.

Ready for a new twist on the classic game of Checkers? Does the game of Chess confuse you? If you answered yes to both of these questions then check out *Traverse*. *Traverse* is checkers "gone wild." Our testers thought that this game was easier to learn than chess yet more challenging than checkers. They appreciated the balance this game gave to both chess and checkers combined. *Traverse* is a strategy game that will appeal to many different family members. Each 3-D playing piece moves across the board from the starting line to the finish line by using classic checkers moves. Jump, slide, and advance your way across but be careful that you don't get captured. Like the game of chess, the different shapes of the playing pieces can move only in certain directions (e.g., the circle piece can move in any direction while the square piece can only move horizontally or vertically).

Trhyme by L.M. Rdeux Innovations, Inc. (www.trhyme.com). Ages 12 and Up. \$29.99.

Trhyme is the name and rhyming is the game. The challenge is to figure out the answer using the three clues. Sound easy? Here's the challenge – *Trhyme* (pronounced trime) uses rhyming as its base in all its answers. If the clues are "insane, unmotivated, and unclear," can you figure out the rhyming answer? If you guess "crazy, lazy, and hazy," you have the trhyming spirit. Not only does this challenge your vocabulary, it also

strengthens your critical thinking. Our testers also enjoyed the challenge of trying to figure out the rhymes in their time limit before other players could steal their rhyme. The first player to reach the center of the game board wins.

Hands-On Games

Architecto by FoxMind (www.FoxMind.com). Ages 7 and Up. \$34.99.

Reminiscent of Tangrams, but using 18 precision-cut geo blocks, players recreate the 2-D Architecto images into 3-D forms. Architecto's clear illustrations are leveled according to ability, starting with basic and ending with advanced. Additionally, each illustration gives clues about how many of each block to use to build the image. This set is a good workout for geometry, spatial vision skills, and problem solving, along with a healthy dose of perseverance. Our testers had a great time as they tried, tried, and tried again to be the architecto of the creations.

Equilibrio by FoxMind (www.FoxMind.com). Ages 5 and Up. \$34.99.

Equilibrio uses the same geo blocks as *Architecto* and, like *Architecto*, encourages the development of spatial skills, geometry, and balance. Each structure requires the building blocks to be carefully placed together with each other to maintain balance. Throughout the book the illustrations of the structures progress from easy to difficult in balance positions. The challenge of thoughtful geometric moves makes this game one that little builders will want to pull out again and again.

A World of LEGO Mosaics by LEGO (www.LEGO.com). Ages 4 and Up. \$19.99.

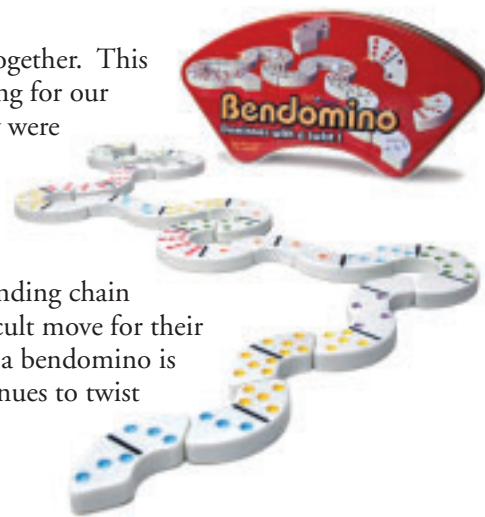
Picture this – drawing with LEGO's. That's basically what you'll be doing when you use the LEGO Mosaics. With the array of shades of colors and transparent plates, children can create a drawing in 3-D. The square, clear base plates, along with the variety of colored bricks, offer the illusion of a picture drawing or paint by numbers type of image once finished. Children can use the step-by-step building instructions to create their LEGO image (butterflies, crabs, kites, etc...) or they can create their own image as well. Either way creations will

be unique. The LEGO Mosaics combined the art of creation with the skill of building.

Bendomino: Dominoes with a Twist by Blue Orange (www.blueorangegames.com). Ages 5 to Adult. \$15.95.

Another new "twist" on an old classic game, *Bendominos* offer players a new challenge to the game of dominoes. Each domino has a unique twisted, bended shape with different colored dots. Just like regular dominoes, where you need to match by number to add to the chain, *Bendominos* also requires that

the domino pieces fit together. This made it extra challenging for our toy testers because they were not only looking for number matches but also a spot where the domino will physically fit into the snaking, winding chain while setting up a difficult move for their opponents. Each time a bendomino is played, the chain continues to twist and turn around the playing surface making this game full of think-ahead strategy.



Rattled by Educational Insights (www.educationalinsights.com). Ages 8 to Adult. \$14.99.

Shake, shake, shake this rattle to mix up the eight letters and then be the first to find the longest words possible. A version of the classic game Boggle, players want to create words that have at least four letters to score points. When players decide on a word, they call it out. Opponents then have 30 seconds (timer included) to find a longer word to score the point for that round. Testers commented at how it really pushed their vocabulary while simultaneously had them thinking critically as they tried to build high scoring words. The first player to score 20 points wins.

Ringgz by Blue Orange (www.blueorangegames.com). Ages 8 and Up. \$29.95.

This game was so popular with our toy testers that they actually grabbed it to play when there was free time between sessions. Why did they love it so much? It's a strategy game that involves players really observing and analyzing the other players and their moves on the *Ringgz* board. The object of *Ringgz* is to conquer territories while preventing acquisitions by opponents. The game involves the use of colored rings. Each ring has a different diameter that allows players to stack them within each other as territories are marked. Our players' favorite part was how the excitement built as each ring was placed on the board. They found the challenge increased when players took chances with their ring placements. The tension between common sense and risk-taking strategy is what keeps this game active, exciting, and captivating.

Rush Hour Deluxe Edition by Think Fun (www.ThinkFun.com). Ages 8 and Up. \$19.99.

This updated version of the classic *Rush Hour* offers a new modern design, bright metallic cars, and a collector's gift box great for travel. The task at hand is to find a solution so the red car can escape the tangled gridlock of cars. With five levels of play (including Grand Master level) and 60 specially selected puzzles, there are endless hours of traffic jams to solve. Using critical thinking, problem solving, and strategy development skills to help the red car escape traffic is not only fun but also addictive.

ShakeDown by Patch Products (www.PatchProducts.com). Ages 7 to Adult. \$25.00.

ShakeDown is a stack 'em game that requires great amounts of balance, concentration, and problem solving. On your turn, carefully lift up the *ShakeDown* tower and draw a card from the bottom of the base. If the card has a task to complete (such as spinning the tower or placing it on the ground), that is done first. Otherwise you continue to place the card on the spreading stack of cards on the top of the tower. Each card needs to have at least one corner sticking off of the edge of the top stack to count. But be careful, because with each card that is added to the growing stack, it gets more and more shaky which could cause the cards to come "shaking down." Don't let that happen. Children need to think critically for the card placement and they need to think logically as they draw cards from the building stack. Think you can stack the cards wide? Or will you make 'em slide?

Miscellaneous Games

Aerobloks by Tinker Minds Inc. (www.aerobloks.com). Ages 5 to Adult. \$99.99.

The days of using blankets or couch pillows to build forts and secret castles may become a thing of the past with *Aerobloks*. *Aerobloks* are lightweight, see-through, durable, inflatable blocks that connect to each other to form any creation you want. Each block is safe (no sharp edges or corners and no loose parts or choking hazards), durable (supports up to 145 pounds of weight), easy to use, and attractive. The blocks can be quickly inflated with their special pump (included) and, when not in use, the blocks fit compactly away. The booklet illustrates how to build 20 different play structures (e.g., locomotive, stage, lemonade stand, barnyard, fort) with clear color illustrations and friendly text. Additionally, it shows which structures are easier and more difficult to put together. Of course, building won't stop with these directions – let your child's creativity take over. Testers remarked at how it made their creative brain wake up and with their architectural curiosities they were building and designing for hours. *Aerobloks* truly are a new, creative take on a classic kinesthetic activity.

Aquadoodle: Go N' Doodle by Spin Master (www.aquadoodletoys.com). Ages 24 months to 5 years. \$19.99.

Does your young child love to doodle, draw, and decorate? If so, check out this on-the-go doodling machine that requires only water. That's correct. The *Aquadoodle* is a mess-free product that encourages an artist to create again and again on the same canvas. It encourages the idea of doing multiple drafts of a drawing and of building on ideas. Fill the wand with water and immediately begin drawing on the double-sided special board. Once the board is filled with doodles, flip it over to the back and start again. As each surface dries, the drawings fade away, providing a fresh drawing

surface for the artist to begin again. The water evaporates in only minutes, so it's great for quick sketches, fast drawings, and fun times.

BAFFLE by Flying Rabbit Enterprises, Inc. (www.bafflegame.com). Windows and Mac Compatible. Ages 8 to Adult. \$19.95.

Baffle is a game that challenges, entertains, and makes you problem solve with every move you make. The goal of *Baffle Classic* is to place all 25 pieces on the game board so that every horizontal row (indicated by green lines), vertical column (indicated by red lines), and corner-to-corner diagonal (indicated by blue lines) contains one piece of every shape and one piece of every color. There are five different colors and five different shapes to move around the 5 x 5 board. You could think of this game as a type of shape Sudoku. Seem easy? Give it a try. Our testers were hooked on finding a solution and with a variety of challenge levels all testers could feel comfortable yet challenged in their appropriate game level. With 57,600 possible solutions along with the 60 playing levels there are many dimensions of play.

Dado Cubes by Fat Brain Toy Co. (www.FatBrainToyCo.com). Ages 3 and Up. \$24.99.

What Fat Brain Toy Co. calls "a new twist on classic building blocks," these 10 colorful plastic cubes —scaled from 1 inch to 5 inches — allow for limitless creative and open-ended construction opportunities. With slits on each cube, you can interlock them to create numerous three-dimensional structures that intertwine proportion, structure, balance, and imaginative design. Build vertically, horizontally, or however you imagine in your creations. Strengthen your spatial skills as you try lots of different design structures over and over again. Individuals of all ages will appreciate and enjoy the simplicity of the *Dado* design with the vastness of possibilities in creations.

Hugg-A-Planet by Peace Toys (www.PeaceToys.com). All Ages. \$19.95.

If you've ever sung the song, "I've got the whole world...in my hands" then you'll really understand these soft, plush toys.

Hugg-a-Planet offers "out of this world" planets. From our planet Earth to



the planet Mars, to the moon and beyond, you will not only get comfortable with the soft pillows but can learn a little about our world as well. Testers felt that the planets were a great reference for world events and a welcoming and approachable way to learn about geography. It became a quick conversation starter for world events. There is color detail and accuracy in geographical features.

iCoaster by MEGA Brands, Inc. (www.megabrands.com). Ages 6 and Up. \$79.99

To quote one of our testers, “Can I pleeeeeease take this home with me?” *iCoaster*, a huge favorite with our testers, lets the builders construct their own innovative and sophisticated design by using magnetic construction. Testers applied their engineering, architectural, and design dreams in constructing these coasters. Imagine making a design combining light, sound, and speed. The 10mm spheres travel through the loops, turns, and twists and, when it passes through the sensor, music plays. If you don’t like the music provided (10 different beats and over 20 different sample tracks) it’s possible to hook up your own MP3 player to create individualized background music. Lots of “wow’s” and “ahhhh’s” were heard as *iCoaster* was being used.

I Dig Prehistoric Shark by Action Products International, Inc. (www.apii.com). Ages 6 and Up. \$19.99.

By far one of the most popular items with our toy testers, this archeological discovery toy intrigued children of all ages. It gave them the chance to act as marine biologists. With a supplied steel hammer, chisel, and plastic goggles, children carefully chip away at a sandy, gravely brick to uncover “ancient” artifacts from the sea. What will you discover?

Pet Vet 3D Wild Animal Hospital by Viva Media (www.viva-media.com). Platform: Win 98 SE/ME/2000/XP, Vista. AGES 7-13. \$29.99.

Calling all animal lovers – this game is for you. Take a step into the wild jungle to test your vet skills as you care for zebras, lions, elephants, and more. The work takes place in an African national park where the job is to face the challenges of feeding, cleaning, petting, playing, training, and caring for these wild “pets.” Not only do you learn about basic care of animals but you also learn how to juggle managing a clinic, assigning tasks to employees, and keeping books with all of the various procedures. This veterinary simulation game offers three different levels of play and over 100 different animal illnesses for treatment. This game gives children a chance to take business roles as an entrepreneur along with strengthening their specific interest of animals and veterinary care. If you have the desire to learn about what a vet faces day to day, you have a wild side, and love the jungle atmosphere, then try your skills as a wild animal vet in this new simulation game.

Play Foam by Educational Insights (www.EducationalInsights.com). Grades Pre-K and Up. \$9.99.

Moosh it, squish it, bend it, and create whatever your imagination envisions with *Play Foam*. These colorful foam sculpting beads come in six bright colors that can be used to build and create. The open-ended possibilities with *Play Foam* build the creative mind. Children can squish the beads in their hand, or they can mold them over any objects to create a foam wrapping.

Play Foam can do amazing things. And the best part is that this foam will not dry out. Even when left out for days, the sculpting beads are ready to be used again.

The Learning Calendar by Fat Brain Toy Co. (www.FatBrainToyCo.com) Ages 8-Adult. \$14.95.

Now every day can start off in an exciting and fun learning way. *The Learning Calendar* offers a 17-month (August 2007 to December 2008) calendar that shares historical events on the actual date that it occurred. Each day highlights an important event from the world of science, history, politics, art, theatre, music, literature, and much more.



Daily photographs along with the blurb of information make it super appealing to read and provide a fun way to start conversations. Additionally, there are numerous hands-on activity suggestions related to the information for that day. This calendar is great for the school aged, college aged, and

adult aged individual because it offers information about our world, our history, and our environment. Beautiful, informative, useful, and captivating – *The Learning Calendar* creates daily learning discoveries.

Magic School Bus Activity Kits by The Young Scientists Club (www.KidScienceKits.com). Ages 5 and Up. \$19.99 each.

The Magic School Bus has a variety of science kits that truly appeal to the young scientist’s curiosities. Children can openly experiment, tests hypotheses, and explore their interest in science. All kits include hands-on activities, complimentary projects that correspond with the Magic School Bus TV shows, DVD’s and books, and information to keep the young scientist wanting more. Our testers tried out three new kits this year:

1. Interested in light, rainbows and colors? Check out *The Mysteries of Rainbows*. Wear rainbow glasses, design a rainbow spinner, bend white light, mix colored paddles and more.
2. Perhaps your young scientist has a fascination with the human body. Be sure to investigate *The Journey into the Human Body*. In this science kit you will get to bend bones, make joints, map taste buds, build a stethoscope, perform iodine starch tests, and other amazing experiments all while learning so much about the human body.
3. Wonder where germs come from? *The World of Germs* includes materials to grow bacteria and fungi. Make a fungus bubble. Use yeast to inflate a balloon. Whatever experiments you do with this kit you’ll learn so much more about our germ world and how we respond to germs.