



For the past 19 years, the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) has recruited tween and tiny toy testers to select which just-released toys and games most appeal to high-ability children. This year, Science & Arts Academy (SAA), an independent gifted PreK–8 school in Des Plaines, IL, was selected for the 2<sup>nd</sup> consecutive year to test 35 games and toys from 15 different manufacturers. More than 230 gifted and talented students, plus parents and teachers, provided valuable feedback and enjoyed partaking in the fun.

As the toys and games arrived, many students took note of the growing pile of toys and games and eagerly awaited the launch of game trials. The front office staff catalogued the toys, readied the rubrics, and alerted teachers when the games would be available for testing. May was deemed “NAGC Game Month.”

The students used three level-specific rubrics: Young Learners (Pre–K); Grades 1–3; Grades 4–8. After the completion of classroom trials, families signed out games for in-home testing, using a family rubric.

Throughout the 4 weeks of testing, more than 450 rubrics were completed by students and families across various grade

levels. These rubrics collected data on packaging, length of game play, overall feelings of the game itself, and other metrics. Most students played 5 to 6 different games during the testing period. Games with the highest overall average scores based on multiple criteria were selected as “Top Picks” and “Honorable Mentions.”

Toy testers took their job very seriously. Students found that testing the games and toys was not only loads of fun, but also hard work when providing genuine, honest feedback for the manufacturers. After the trials concluded, students eagerly requested information about the games so that they could add them to their own collections.

Students were enthusiastic and thankful for the opportunity to once again be game testers; one student said, “I wish they’d let us test games every year!”

*Many thanks to the student, teacher, and family toy testers at Science & Arts Academy (SAA), especially Bethany Mullins, who spearheaded this year’s review process and authored this article. Student photos are courtesy of Corina Vaccarello, SAA Lower School teacher. Toy and game photos come from the manufacturers.*

## Top Picks

### Crowded Waters

Manufacturer: Educational Insights  
Mfr. Recommended Age: Age 8+  
Testers’ Recommended Age: Ages 8–12  
[www.educationalinsights.com](http://www.educationalinsights.com)  
MSRP: \$19.99

Crowded Waters is a fast-paced game where players place their sharks to block opponents; the last shark with room to move wins the game. One student declared this game “epic,” “fun,” “stupendous,” and “the best game ever played.” Students noted the game was most fun with multiple players. It was popular with first and second graders who were determined not to become fish food!



Top Picks

**IQ-Blox**

Manufacturer: Smart Toys and Games, Inc.  
 Mfr. Recommended Age: Ages 6–10  
 Testers' Recommended Age: Ages 6+  
[www.smartgamesusa.com](http://www.smartgamesusa.com)  
 MSRP: \$9.99



The latest in the IQ Series of travel pocket games, IQ-Blox offers 120 challenges to fit on a rectangular game board, with ring-and-ball shapes and four white walls. Students found IQ-Blox to be “mathematical,” “wonderful,” and “exciting.” IQ-Blox provides an instant break for those who like puzzles or need quiet downtime. Teachers, parents, and students all agreed that this one is a winner!

**Ozobot**

Manufacturer: Ozobot  
 Mfr. Recommended Age: Ages 7+  
 Testers' Recommended Age: Ages 7–13  
[www.ozobot.com](http://www.ozobot.com)  
 MSRP: \$49.99



The hands-on, programmable, robotic Ozobot intrigued students from 3rd–8th grade. Students found the intelligent game piece easy to operate right out of the box and enjoyed designing and controlling different paths using the provided map, player-designed maps, or their own iPads. Several older students thought the Ozobot was “epic” and “addictive.” Ozobot is a great way for kids to enhance their technology, creativity, and gaming skills.

**The Reel Script**

Manufacturer: SimplyFun  
 Mfr. Recommended Age: Ages 8+  
 Testers' Recommended Age: Ages 7+  
[www.simplyfun.com](http://www.simplyfun.com)  
 MSRP: \$36.00



The Reel Script is a game that exercises a student’s love for creative writing and movies. Players bid on script lines in order to build a script and pitch it to the group. Players vote on the best script, with one player winning the round to collect points. One parent enjoyed how this game works to “develop language, writing, and sequencing skills.” Some students found the instructions confusing, but a helpful online video is available to explain the rules.



**Riddle Cube**

Manufacturer: Educational Insights  
 Mfr. Recommended Age: Ages 8+  
 Testers' Recommended Age: Ages 7+  
[www.educationalinsights.com](http://www.educationalinsights.com)  
 MSRP: \$19.99



The challenge of Riddle Cube was enjoyed from the youngest to the oldest testers. Students open the game, and begin play immediately because it’s simple to understand, yet challenging. Players must move quickly in order to match their shape to a challenge card; the first person to match the challenge wins the card. Students thought Riddle Cube was “competitive,” “exciting,” and “creative.” Various levels of difficulty make this game a shoo-in favorite for all students.

**Rush Hour Shift**

Manufacturer: ThinkFun Inc.  
 Mfr. Recommended Age: Ages 8+  
 Testers' Recommended Age: Ages 6+  
[www.thinkfun.com](http://www.thinkfun.com)  
 MSRP: \$24.99



Many of our families requested this game because they were excited to see a two-player version of the classic Rush Hour... and they were not disappointed by Rush Hour Shift! Students as young as first grade enjoyed battling older siblings or parents to see who would reach the other side of the playing grid first. Parents enjoyed the ease of set up and called Rush Hour Shift a “great spatial planning game,” and “a great addition to any family’s game night.”

## SmartMax Tripod

Manufacturer: Smart Toys and Games, Inc.  
Mfr. Recommended Age: Ages 3+  
Testers' Recommended Age: Ages 3–9  
www.smartmax.eu  
MSRP: \$59.99

SmartMax Tripod offers fun, creative, hands-on building time for students using special Y-shaped, sonic-welded bars and large 1.8-inch diameter metal balls that simply click together. Testers, who liked building both simple structures and complex geometric shapes, called it “cool” and “awesome.” The shapes’ larger size is suitable for smaller hands.



## Worry Eaters

Manufacturer: Haywire Group  
Mfr. Recommended Age: All Ages  
Testers' Recommended Age: Ages 6–13  
www.haywiregroup.com  
MSRP: \$15.99–\$22.99

Worry Eaters are cuddly creatures that come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and colors to stash and manage your child's worries! Students wrote or drew their worries, “fed” them to the Worry Eater, and were then better able to discuss and manage their feelings. One teacher said, “Every child should have one of these because who doesn't worry about something?” One student in particular found the Worry Eater to be “uplifting” as it relieved some of her stress. Worry Eaters are a great tool for children in grades 2–8.



## Stinky Pig

Manufacturer: Patch Products, LLC  
Mfr. Recommended Age: Ages 6+  
Testers' Recommended Age: Ages 6–8  
www.patchproducts.com  
MSRP: \$11.99

Stinky Pig is a fast, exciting, “hot potato” style game with a twist. Students particularly enjoyed this game during their scheduled 10-minute breaks, making it ideal when time is limited. The game is easy to open, operate, and understand. Children roll the dice to see which way to pass the singing pig, but you don't want to be the one holding him when he “toots!” Student laughter could be heard throughout the building when Stinky Pig was out to play.



## Yowza!

Manufacturer: Patch Products, LLC  
Mfr. Recommended Age: Ages 7+  
Testers' Recommended Age: Ages 6–10  
www.patchproducts.com  
MSRP: \$7.99

Yowza! is an exciting way to spend an afternoon. First through fourth graders found this game to be a ton of fun because who doesn't love yelling words like “zap,” “boom,” and “bam?” In this fast-paced game, students shout onomatopoeia words while discarding their cards; but if their discard matches the word just shouted, they pick up the pile. Students found this game to be “exciting,” “fun,” and “full of Yowza!”



## Honorable Mention

### Do You Know Shakespeare?

Manufacturer: SimplyFun  
Mfr. Recommended Age: Age 12+  
Testers' Recommended Age: Ages 12+  
[www.simplyfun.com](http://www.simplyfun.com)  
MSRP: \$38.00



Testers recommend incorporating Do You Know Shakespeare? into classroom learning or a family's home game collection. This trivia game helps develop knowledge of Shakespeare, his literary works, and combines risk-reward analysis with exciting fun.

### Kanoodle Extreme

Manufacturer: Educational Insights  
Mfr. Recommended Age: Age 8+  
Testers' Recommended Age: Ages 6–13  
[www.educationalinsights.com](http://www.educationalinsights.com)  
MSRP: \$14.99



Kanoodle Extreme offers more than 300 different 2D and 3D puzzles to challenge your brain. Kanoodle Extreme is an advanced version of single-player Kanoodle Genius. Older students loved its versatility, with virtually endless possibilities.

### Star Realms

Manufacturer: Star Realms  
Mfr. Recommended Age: Ages 12+  
Testers' Recommended Age: Ages 10+  
[www.starrealms.com](http://www.starrealms.com)  
MSRP: \$15.00



If you're looking for a new challenging, engaging deck-building game, then this is it! Star Realms is a space-themed combat card game, with the goal of dominating the galaxy. Students particularly enjoyed that there are two options for play: physical cards and board, or a downloadable online version.

### Stratego

Manufacturer: Patch Products, LLC  
Mfr. Recommended Age: Ages 8+  
Testers' Recommended Age: Ages 8+  
[www.patchproducts.com](http://www.patchproducts.com)  
MSRP: \$29.99



Kids agreed this updated version of Stratego is still enticing, exciting, and loads of fun for players of all ages looking for a challenge. For single- and multi-player online versions and apps, go to [www.stratego.com](http://www.stratego.com) or [www.youdagames.com](http://www.youdagames.com).

### Three Little Piggies

Manufacturer: Smart Toys and Games, Inc.  
Mfr. Recommended Age: Ages 3+  
Testers' Recommended Age: Ages 3–5  
[www.smartgamesusa.com](http://www.smartgamesusa.com)  
MSRP: \$24.99



Three Little Piggies is a 3D brain-teaser that helps small hands build spatial awareness through a well-known story. Children solve 48 challenges to help the pigs build houses, play outside, and stay safe from the wolf. A teacher reported, "Every preschool-aged classroom should have this game."

### Tumble Trax Magnetic Marble Run

Manufacturer: Learning Resources  
Mfr. Recommended Age: Ages 5+  
Testers' Recommended Age: Ages 3–10  
[www.learningresources.com](http://www.learningresources.com)  
MSRP: \$24.99



Tumble Trax Magnetic Marble Run provides fun in the classroom or at home with magnetic foam pieces, four marbles, activity cards, and a variety of challenges to create an exciting marble trail. Children develop engineering and problem-solving skills by rearranging the pieces to make the marble stop, slow down, speed up, or change directions.



## About National Association for Gifted Children

The National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) is an organization of teachers, educators, other professionals, parents, and community leaders who unite to address the unique needs of children and youth with demonstrated gifts and talents, as well as those children who would be able to reach their potential with appropriate educational experiences.

Well-informed parents make a difference. Membership in NAGC is the best way for you to improve the future for gifted learners, especially your own! Visit [www.nagc.org](http://www.nagc.org) to find out more.

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