

MAKING LIFE MORE FUN

Next-Generation Puzzles: Simple Looks Are Deceiving

(NAPSA)—With standardized test scores on the decline, a growing number of parents are concerned about their children's educational prospects—as well as the amount of time they spend in front of the computer and playing video games.

To the rescue: a new generation of puzzles that sharpen critical skills like reasoning and problem solving, with a strong power to engage.

Puzzling Greatness

For centuries, puzzle makers have tried to create brain benders that take serious perseverance, if not a genius IQ, to solve. The most enduring tend to be simple in appearance, but then turn out to be anything but easy to solve. Rubik's Cube may stand as the best-known modern example.

"That's the lure of a great puzzle, an 'I can do this' first impression," says Bill Ritchie, CEO of ThinkFun, Inc., maker of hit puzzles like Gordian's Knot and Rush Hour. "It's what gets you started, and why you can't stop."

While computers have greatly influenced and accelerated puzzle development, the best puzzles still spring from critical human insight—or obsession.

The Power of Six

"When researching whole numbers, I became fascinated with the number six, because it creates quadrillions of possibilities in three dimensions," says Dr. Derrick Niederman, an MIT Ph.D.



A challenging puzzle can be a terrific gift to stimulate creative thinking.

and puzzle inventor. "So I got right to work on a 3-D puzzle based on six."

Dr. Niederman went on to create a puzzle with a square base with 36 holes into which 36 tower pieces can fit: six each of six distinct colors. The solution lies in fitting in the towers so that there is only one of each color in each row and column, forming a perfect cube.

World-class puzzle experts like Nick Baxter, captain of the U.S. Sudoku team, say Dr. Niederman hit the mark. "It looks and sounds simple, but it will have you up at night," says Baxter.

Dr. Niederman's invention, dubbed 36 Cube, is now available through ThinkFun at leading retailers nationwide. An online trial version is available at www.ThinkFun.com.