



"Play" Activities December 2017–March 2018

Tweak a Pinball Machine

In 1871 Montague Redgrave received a patent for "Improvements in Bagatelle." This early form of pinball contained metal pins, bells, and a spring-loaded launcher. During the 1970s pinball reached its height of popularity in the U.S. The rock band The Who even memorialized the game in the song *Pinball Wizard*. How can you improve this pinball game? What can you do to make the game more fun to play? Look for the Bagatelle patent model on display in [Inventing in America](#).

Create a Costume

Some of the most popular objects in this museum's collection are costumes. These costumes are often connected to iconic characters or films. But we do not need to star in a movie to have a great costume. Play, particularly with costumes, can allow us to step beyond ourselves and become a part of anything we imagine. What type of costume will you create? Where would you wear your costume?

Invent a Board Game

For decades families and friends have enjoyed playing board games. Some of the most iconic of these games are *Monopoly*, *Sorry*, and *The Game of Life*. Board games have also been themed around TV shows, battles, and science fiction. In 1974 Parker Brothers even created a game about invention called *The Inventors*. What will your board game look like? What are the rules for playing your game? Look for the board game *The Inventors* on display in *Spark!Lab*.

Design a Video Game Controller

The first at-home video game system was created by inventor Ralph Baer. He wanted to find a way to make TV more interactive. One of the keys to interacting was the game controller. In 1972 Baer's game system called the Magnavox Odyssey began making its way into homes. What type of game control will you design? How can you make your controller easier to use? See [Ralph Baer's workshop](#) and the "Brown Box," his video game prototype, outside of *Spark!Lab*.

Invent a Piece of Protective Gear

Sports have a huge influence on our culture. Playing some sports, however, means taking the risk of getting hurt. In order to keep sports-players safe, inventors have created ways to protect the human body. What can you invent to protect an athlete? In what kind of sport would your invention be used? To see an innovative Air Power football helmet, visit [Inventive Minds](#) and check out the sports equipment on display in *Spark!Lab*.

Invent a Rolling Toy

Mr. Machine rolled its way out of the 1961 Sears catalog and into homes across America. A transparent body revealed this rolling toy's inner workings. During the early 20th century, rolling toys took us to market and carried our baby dolls. Toys on wheels, from cast-iron figures on horses to remote-controlled robots, continue to capture our imaginations. What will your rolling toy look like? Can you invent a rolling toy with fewer than four wheels?

Create a Lifelike Character

Dolls, puppets, and animatronic toys are designed to connect with us in lifelike ways. One unique thing about these types of toys is that they can be designed to imitate life. In 1890 Thomas Edison created dolls that, with miniaturized phonographs, could speak. The toy was heavy, fragile, and a bit scary. It is one of Edison's inventions that flopped. Can you create a character that seems to have personality? Who is most likely to play with your character? Visit [American Enterprise](#) to see a [talking doll](#) invented by Thomas Edison.

Design a Dollhouse

One of the most popular objects in this museum is Faith Bradford's dollhouse. She gave the 23-room dollhouse to the museum in 1951. The not-so-tiny home is furnished with collected miniatures as well as custom-made pieces and imaginatively purposed items, like matchsticks as shelved books and buttons as stacks of dinner plates. Can you design a home for miniatures? How many rooms will your dollhouse have? Explore [The Dolls' House](#) between *Spark!Lab* and *Wonderplace*.