

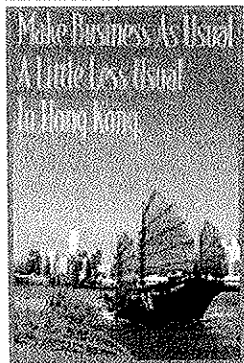
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THE ASSOCIATED PRESS/MIAMI  
 By LAURA WIDES-MUNOZ  
 Associated Press Writer

## Hispanic toys, games hit holiday displays

**DEC. 18 3:12 P.M. ET** As 6-year-old Lizbeth Sanchez helped her mother shop for Christmas presents on a recent December afternoon, she stopped mouth agape at the Dora the Explorer talking dollhouse welcoming her in English and her native Spanish.

"She likes Dora because she's learning English, so it helps her," explained Lizbeth's mother Celenia Paulino, who recently moved her children from the Dominican Republic to Miami.

The bilingual dollhouse, and its even more popular cousin, Dora's talking kitchen, are among a growing number of Hispanic-themed toys and games on display this holiday season as manufacturers vie for the dollars of one of the fastest growing markets in the nation.

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And getting the heck out of the office.

But toy companies are also counting on the crossover effect, as American children nationwide begin to add these toys and games to their holiday wish lists.

"These toys are source of pride for Latina families, but also it is now just considered cool for general families," said Brenda Andolina, director of brand marketing for Mattel Inc.'s Fisher Price.

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DJIA	10875.59	-6.10
S&P 500	1267.32	-3.62
Nasdaq	2252.48	-8.15

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Brooklyn resident Jenn David-Lang's 4-year-old Zoe daughter is a Dora fan and will likely get a talking Dora doll from her uncle this year for Chanukah.

David-Lang said she's glad Zoe's picking up some Spanish but adds that Dora's appeal "has become just more of a generic thing, not because she speaks Spanish or is Latina."

Dora, whose Nickelodeon show is among the top-rated for 3-5 year olds with its interactive approach, has led the way, earning an estimated \$4 billion in retail sales since the company unveiled her line of toys and accessories in 2002.

Following her success, Scholastic just rolled out a toy line for its PBS series about 10-year-old Maya and Miguel, bilingual twins whose high jinks often get them in trouble. Meanwhile, the small Miami-based company Baby Abuelita nabbed a contract with Toys R Us to sell its Spanish lullaby-singing grandma and grandpa dolls in Florida and California.

And on the electronics front, Hasbro has added a Spanish option to its new DVD Candy Land game.

Even MGA Entertainment Inc.'s Bratz dolls, the sassy, ethnically-vague line that first challenged Barbie's world domination four years ago, recently added more Hispanic-looking dolls, promoting them at November's Latin Grammys.

Andolina says the demand reflects good business sense for the \$20 billion toy industry, which saw its sales dip slightly in 2004.

"We're a company that develops products for age zero to five. When you look at the birthrate statistics, we're fast approaching one in four births being to Latina moms. There is a large up-and-coming market."

Hispanics in the United States jumped from about 35 million in 2000 to an estimated 40 million in 2004, reaching 14 percent of the population, according to the U.S. Census.

They are likely to have larger families and are on average younger than the general population -- about 15 percent of Hispanics are 14 and under, compared to about 9 percent of people nationwide.

For manufacturers, that means more kids demanding more toys.

To attract the more than 50 percent of the Hispanic market that speaks Spanish, this season Cranium Inc. rolled out a Spanish version of its popular game in which players answer trivia questions, draw pictures and even model clay. The new version features cultural references the company hopes will be relevant to players throughout Latin America as well.

Companies like Cranium that seek such a broad Hispanic audience face challenges.

Cranium researchers had to avoid Spanish words and phrases used only in certain regions, and they had to find content that was relevant across the continent.

"We were careful to use things that resonate with all of our market," said Cranium international editor Cristina Urrutia. "'Cielito Lindo,' is a Mexican song, but people in all the different markets would know the song and be able to hum it."

More Hispanic-themed toys are on the way. Dora's cousin Diego gets his own line of toys in 2006. Meanwhile, another PBS's cartoon, "Dragon Tales," which features a Hispanic brother and sister who befriend dragons, has added a new character: Enrique, their Puerto Rican-Colombian neighbor. If all goes well, a line of bilingual Enrique toys could be on shelves next year.

Miami University marketing Professor Arun Sharma says the popularity of ethnic and foreign-themed toys is not new. The little French girl Madeline has long been a favorite

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Foreign-themed toys is not new. The late French gift manufacturer has long been a favorite with American girls, while Japan's Pokemon and Yu-gi-oh! cards are huge with young boys.

Sharma believes the popularity of bilingual toys and games may fade as second and third generation Hispanic immigrants assimilate. Ultimately their appeal must rest on more than ethnic and language loyalty, he said.

For 5-year old Tiffany Advincula, Dora's appeal is obvious. Asked why she wants the new dancing Dora doll, the Miami Beach native didn't hesitate.

"I like her ballet dress," Tiffany explained.

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