

NEBRASKA TRAILBLAZER

Nebraska
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



No. 11

A Nebraska Childhood



Try to imagine living in a world with no television, telephones, electricity, or cars.

This “world” was very real for the first pioneer children who lived in Nebraska. When this photograph was taken in 1889 in Custer County, Nebraska, seven out of ten Nebraskans lived on farms. Families like the Deerdorff family (shown here) made their living from farming and lived in sod houses. For the Deerdorff children and others like them, life on the prairie presented many challenges.



One challenge which Nebraska children faced was in helping their families on the farm. Parents often could not afford to hire other adults to help with all of the work. They relied upon their children to do their share. Rose, Martha, Esther, Dietrich, Jacob, and Herman Regier helped out with the milking on their dairy farm near Henderson, Nebraska, in 1910.

Both boys and girls had many chores to do. Boys helped to plant and harvest crops. They also learned to hunt for food to help feed the family. Girls helped with gathering eggs, cooking, cleaning, mending, and taking care of younger brothers and sisters. Ted and Jack Dew appear to be enjoying themselves. They are gathering cow chips to use for fuel for their family's home in Cherry County in the late 1890s.



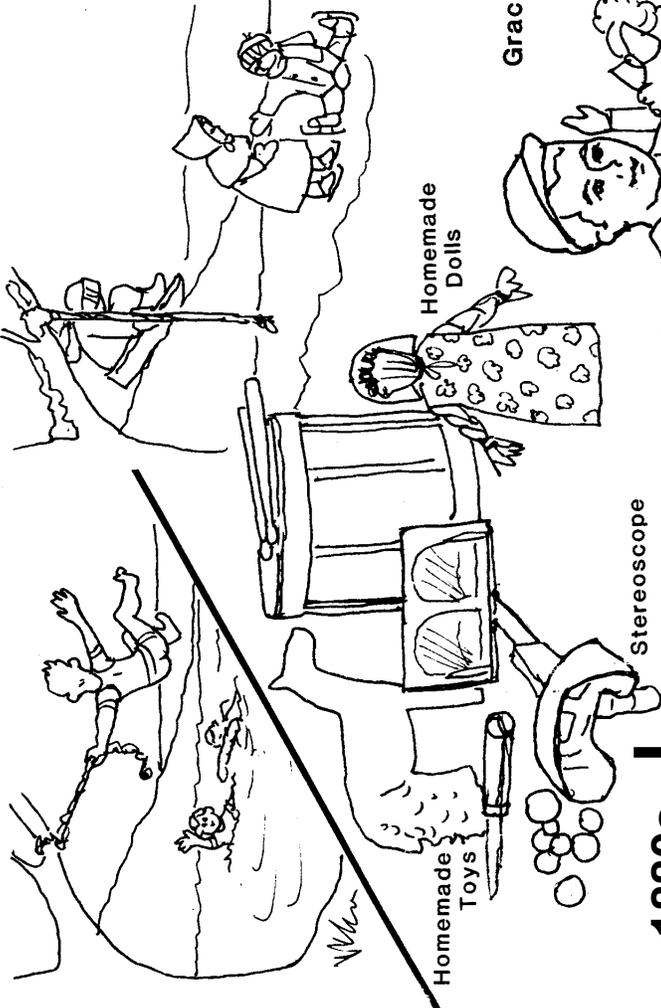
Because children were needed to help at home, they often did not go to school. For some rural children, education outside the home was not seen as a necessity. Those children who did go to school in the country attended every day of the week, except for Sunday, from October to May. In this way they could be at home during the main planting and harvesting seasons.

School was conducted in one room for all grades. Only eight grades were taught. School supplies, like paper and pencils, were difficult to get on the prairie and were expensive. Students often had to memorize their lessons, or write on slates. The teacher of this school, Ellen J. Bruner of West Point, Nebraska, found work teaching children on the prairies of South Dakota in the late 1890s. Today, most students in Nebraska, even those who live in rural areas, go to school in town.



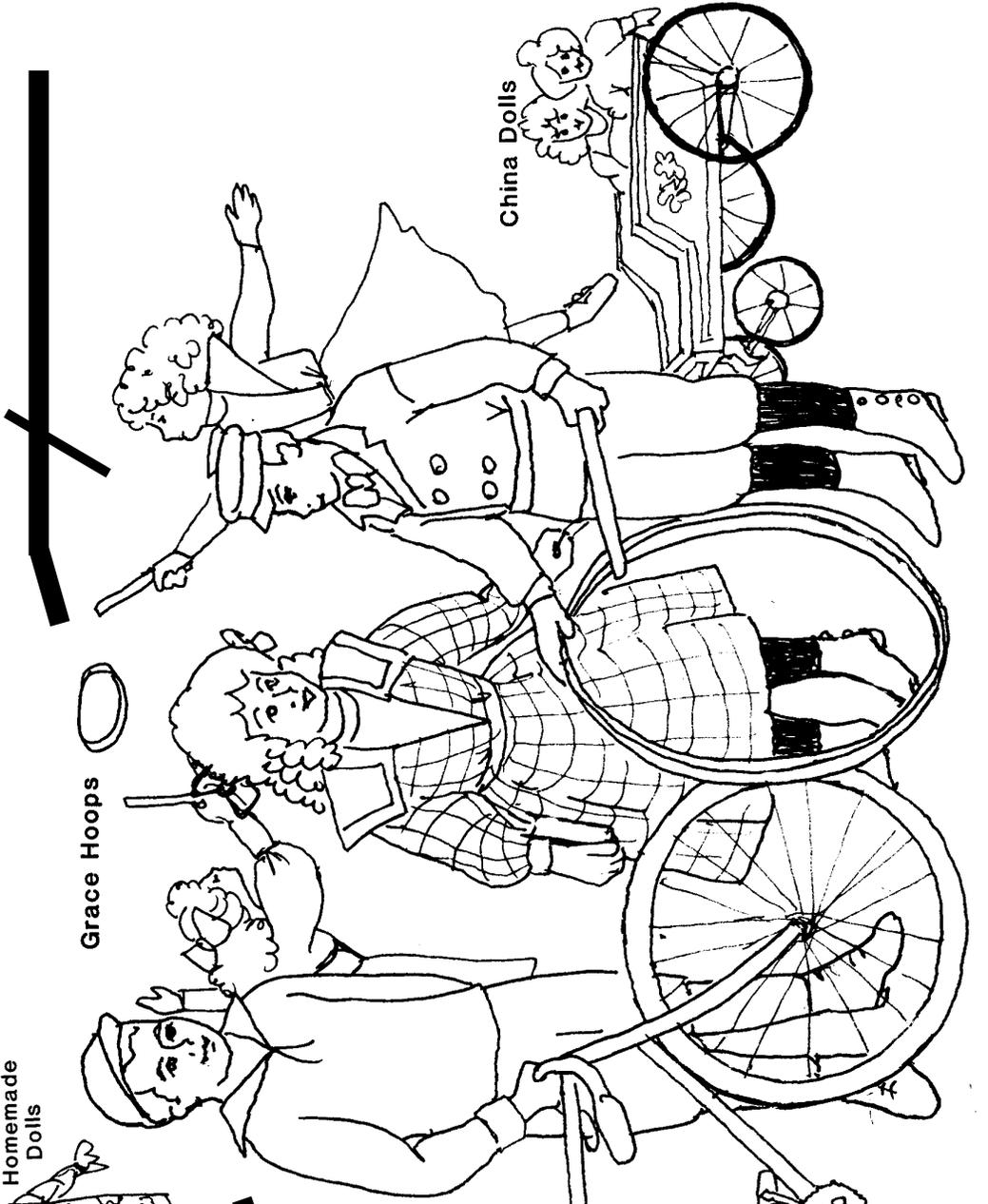
TOY TIMELINE

People who study the history of toys know that popular toys appear again and again. Sometimes they are in the same form; sometimes they are "new and improved." What do you suppose the toys of the 21st Century will be like? Will boys and girls of the future play with some of the toys you play with today?

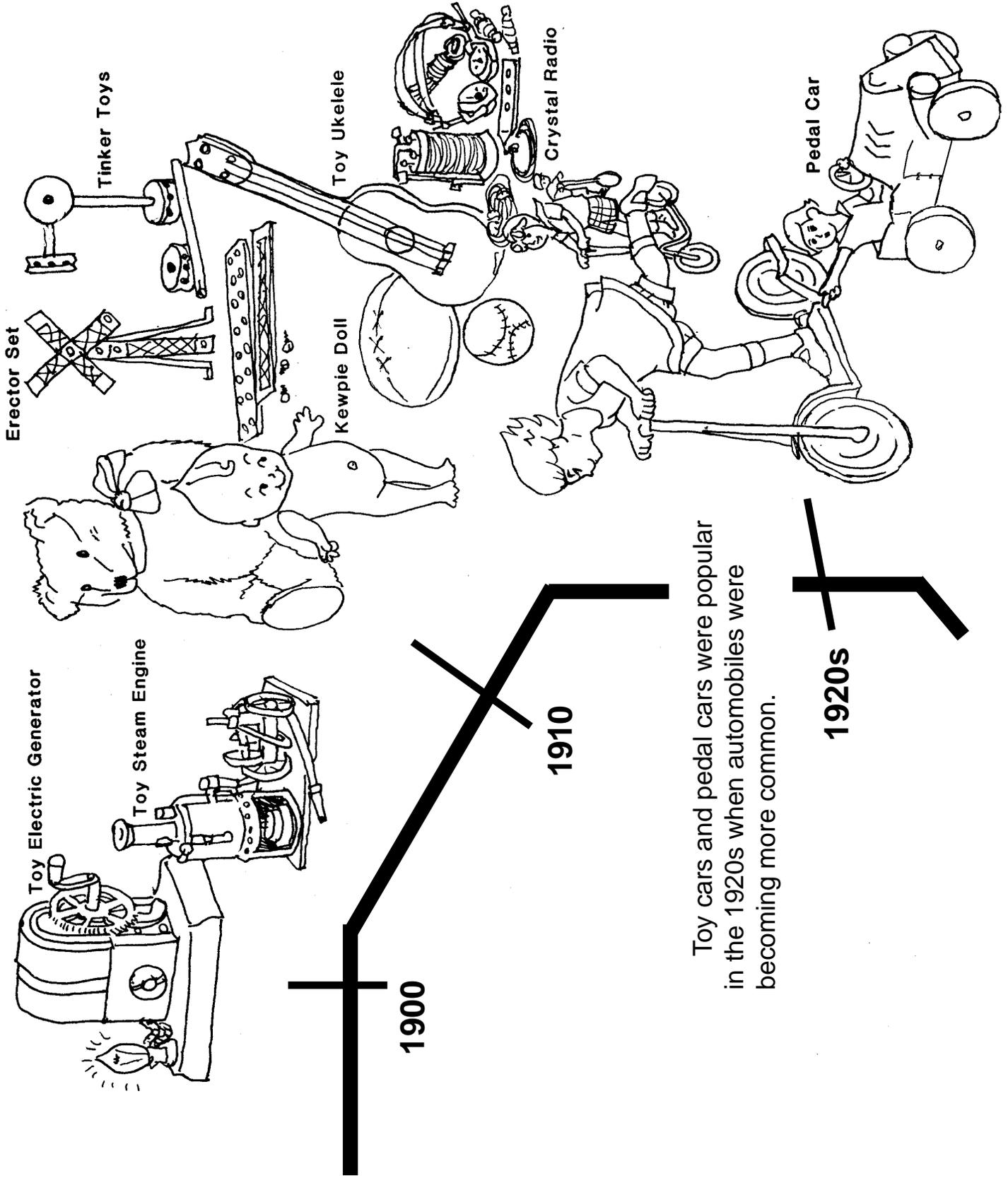


1880s

Bicycles were very popular in the 1890s, but only for boys. A girl riding a bicycle was frowned upon. Girls were expected to play with "genteel, lady-like" games and toys.



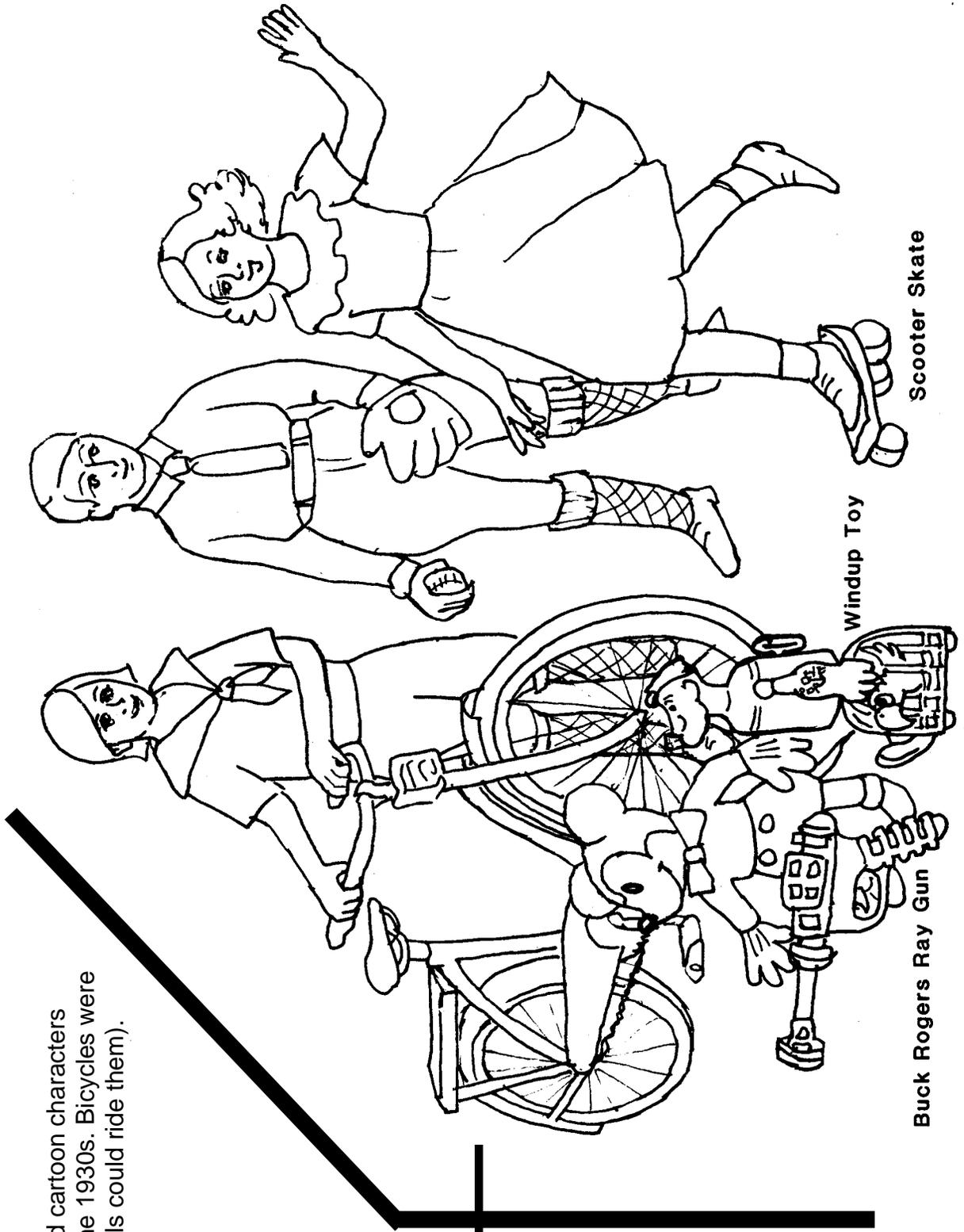
1890s



Toy cars and pedal cars were popular in the 1920s when automobiles were becoming more common.

Movie stars and cartoon characters were favorites in the 1930s. Bicycles were back, too (even girls could ride them).

1930s



Buck Rogers Ray Gun

Windup Toy

Scooter Skate



Davey Crockett
Coonskin Hat
(with glow-in-the-dark eyes)

Flyback

Chemistry Set

Hula Hoop

Slinky

1940s

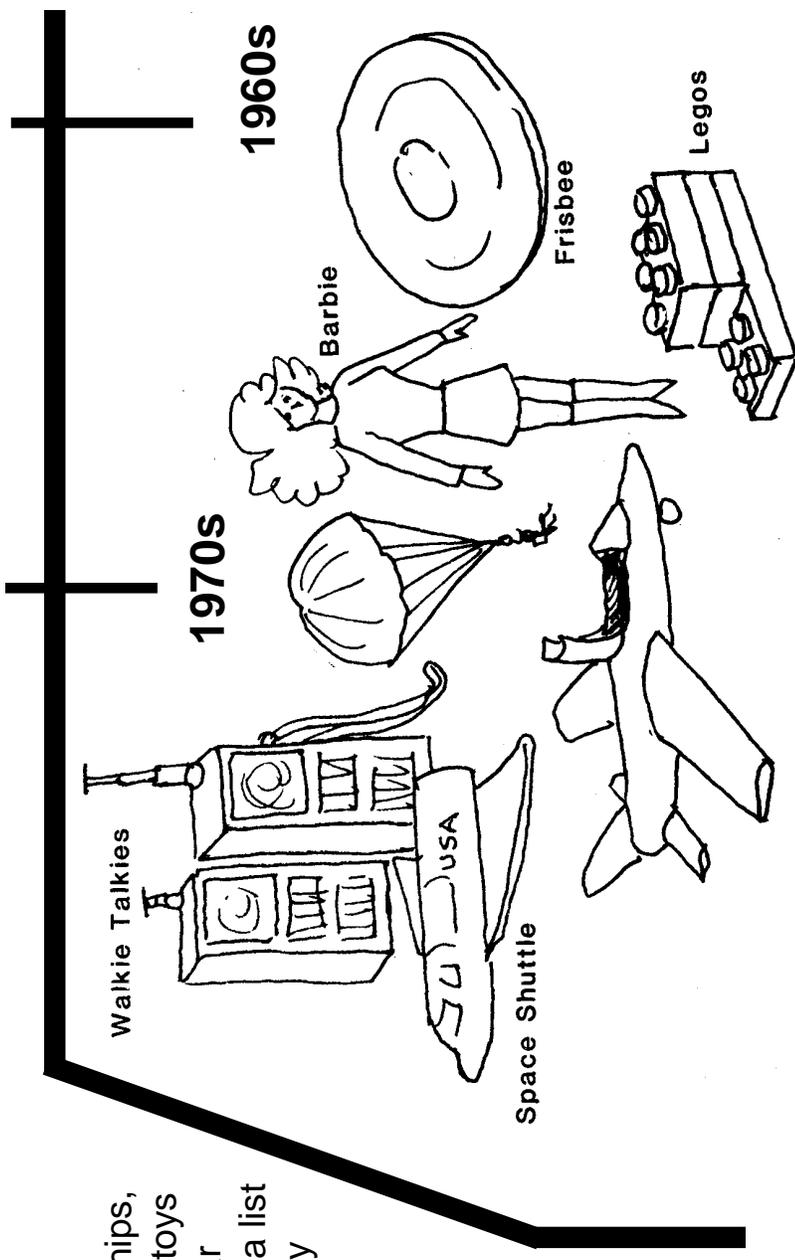
1950s

Science and television
influenced the 1950s.

Remote control toys, rocket ships, and space exploration and laser toys and games have become popular today. In the space below, make a list or a drawing of the toys you enjoy playing with.

1980s/1990s

TODAY



Walkie Talkies

1970s

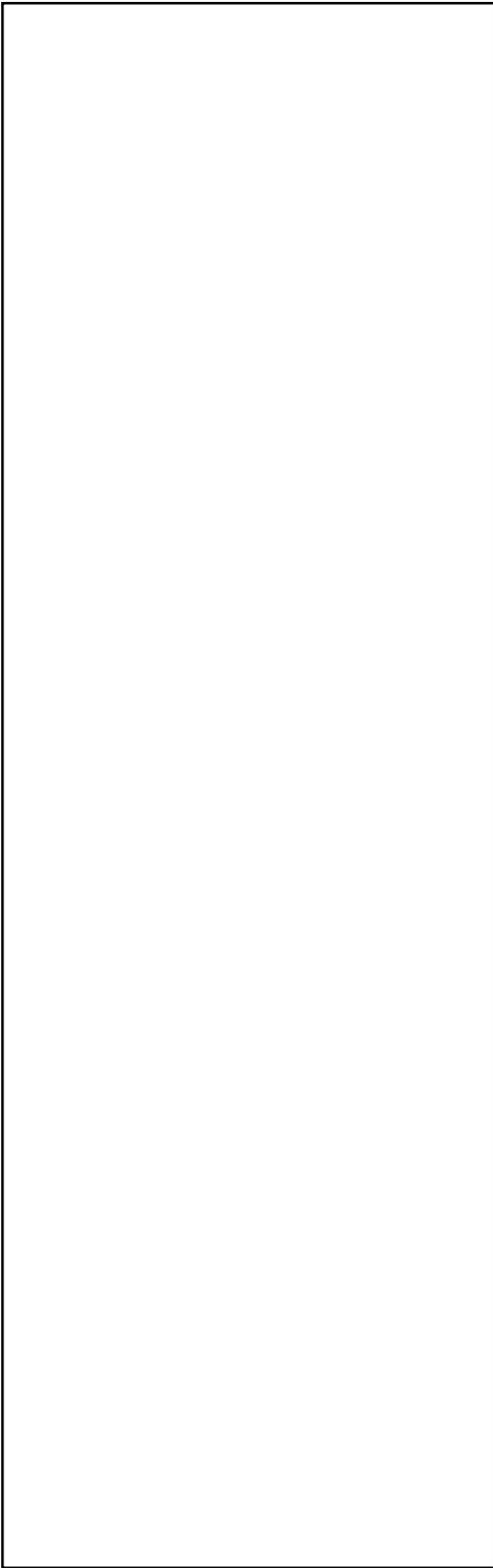
Barbie

1960s

Space Shuttle

Frisbee

Legos



“When Your Grandparents Were Children”

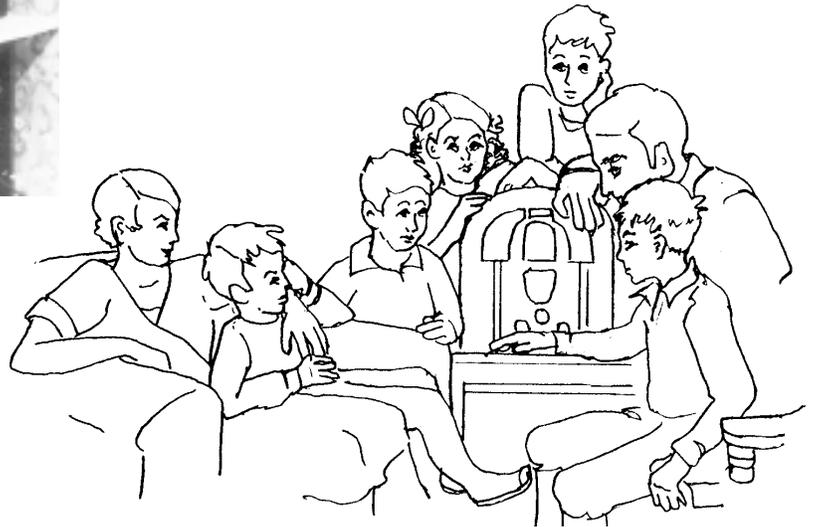
Your grandparents were probably the same age you are now sometime during the 1920s or 1930s. Did they grow up on a farm or in a town? How was their life different from yours?

During the 1920s, most Nebraska families still lived on farms. However, by 1930 four out of every ten Nebraska children lived in a town.

Many new inventions in the early twentieth century made life in town seem more inviting to some Nebraska families. Automobiles, radio, electricity, telephones, and motion pictures brought many opportunities to children who lived in towns. Children who remained on farms also found that the same new world was opening up for them to discover.



Prior to 1920, radio was really only a hobby. Some children made their own radios, called crystal sets. This is Jerry Soderholm of Wahoo, Nebraska.



Electricity brought many new things to Nebraska children living in towns and cities such as refrigerators, lights, washing machines, toasters, and – above all else – radios. “Looking at the radio” became a favorite pastime of Nebraska children and their families. The first radio broadcast in Nebraska was in October, 1921, on Roland Anderson’s station in Wahoo.



Some Nebraska children actually got to perform on radio shows themselves. This postcard was made of Myron Woten. It is likely that Myron sang and played his guitar on a radio show on KBGZ in York in the 1930s.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 1, 1936

LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE



Radio was a source of news and information, but, mainly, entertainment. Some of the most popular radio shows for children were those based on their favorite cartoon characters. Readers followed their adventures in daily newspapers such as the *Lincoln Journal* and the *Omaha World-Herald*. The radio programs brought these characters to life. Buck Rogers and Little Orphan Annie were two of the most popular radio shows that were inspired by the comic strips during the 1930s.

While radio was the most popular form of entertainment at home, movies provided the entertainment outside the house. In the 1930s, you could see two movies or a "double feature" such as "Ramona" and "Our Gang" for ten cents.





One of the most popular stars of the 1930s was a child herself. In 1934, at the age of five, Shirley Temple made her film debut. Beauty shops were soon swamped by girls who wanted Shirley's curly hairdo. The dream of most little girls was to own a Shirley Temple doll which came in a box signed by Shirley herself!

Shirley's success led many young Nebraskans to dream of becoming movie stars too. People from Hollywood came to Lincoln, Nebraska, in the late 1930s, looking for the Shirley Temple of tomorrow.

DREAM OF EVERY GIRL
AND EVERY CHILD COMES TRUE
FRIDAY NIGHT, OCTOBER 25th
ON THE STUART THEATRE STAGE!

FREE SCREEN TEST! FREE VOICE TEST!



METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER'S

Traveling Motion Picture Studio arrives in Lincoln Friday, Oct. 25th, under the sponsorship of

GOLD & CO.
and **THE STUART Theatre**
JUST THINK OF IT!

GOLD'S and **The STUART**
BRING you an opportunity that comes once in a lifetime! And ABSOLUTELY FREE!

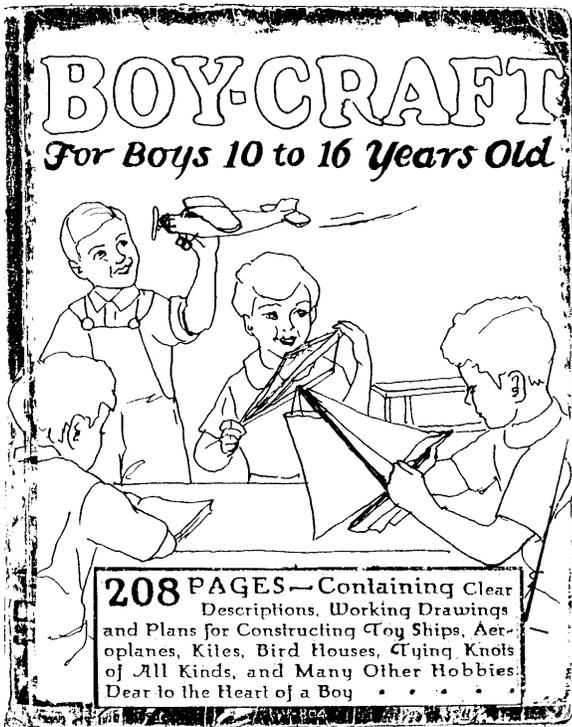
APPLICATION

Name _____
Street address _____
City _____ Phone _____
Height _____ Weight _____ Complexion _____

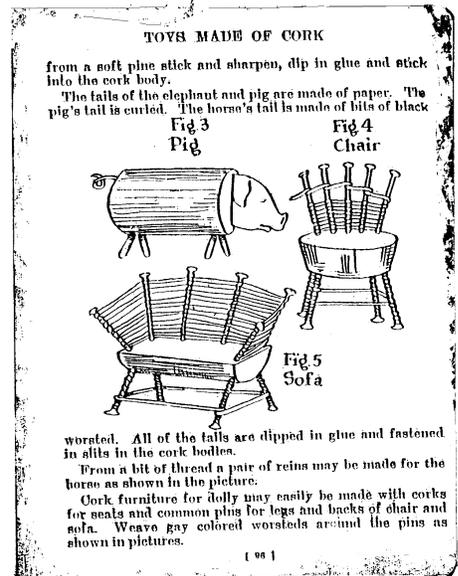
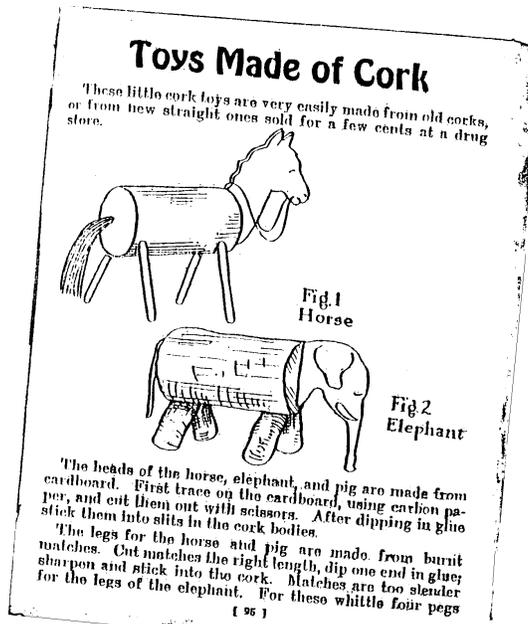
Legal Guardian _____
This entry blank, properly filled out, must be accompanied by photo-graph of person and must be brought to the Motion Picture Studio at 10:00 a.m. on Friday, Oct. 25th, in person. To receive and receiving this application, applicants agree to abide by the decision of the appointed judges in both preliminary as well as final selection, and grant permission to Gold & Company and STUART to use their photographs and other information contained. Photographs may be retained for other purposes under no liability paid.

EXCLUSIVE!
November 1931
1932
1933





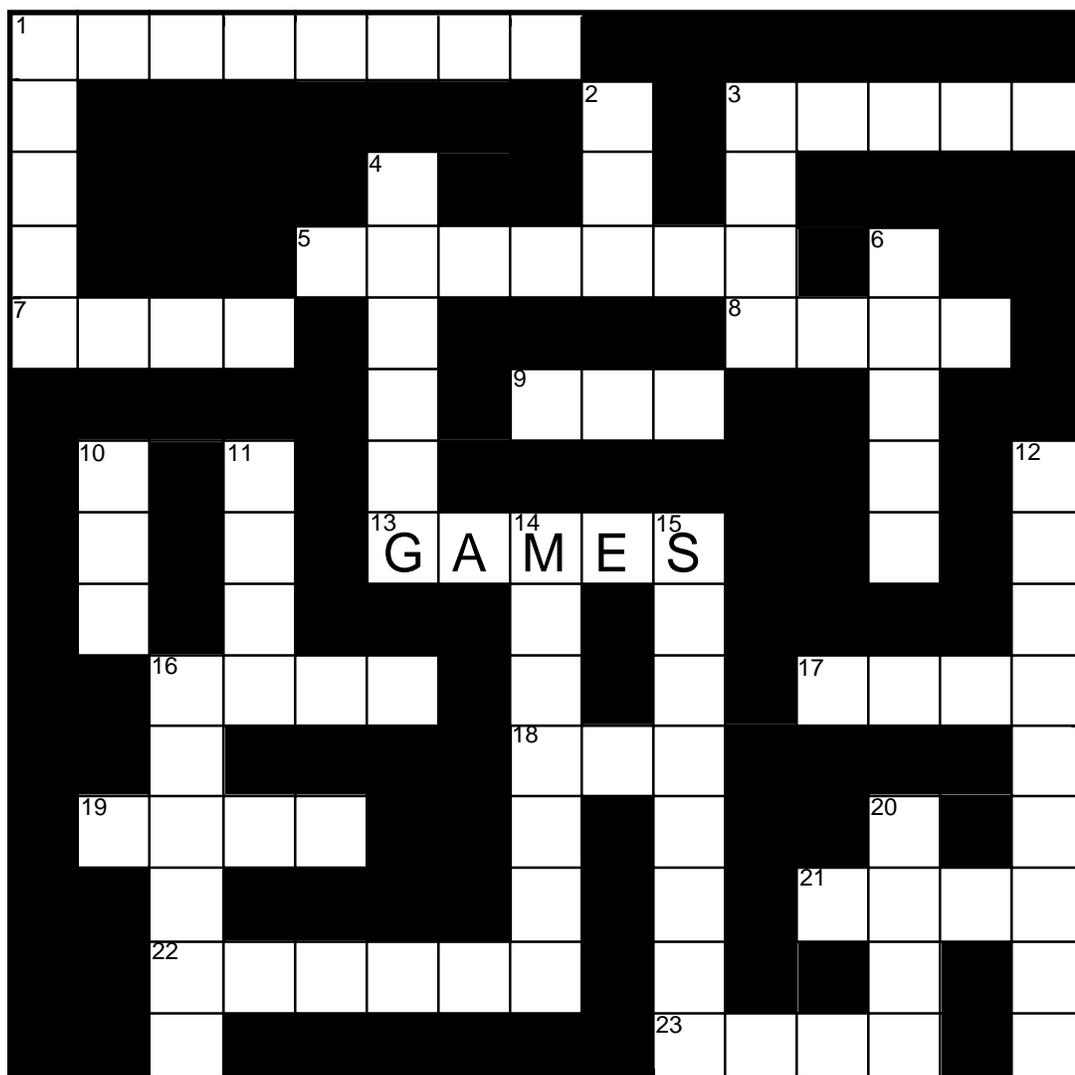
Besides movies and radio there were many other ways to have fun. Thanks to Rural Free Delivery (RFD) mail service, children in the country had access to magazines like *Boycraft*, which provided numerous suggestions for building toys. These playthings were easy to make, inexpensive, and also fun to play with.



The first automobile was seen in Nebraska in 1900. By 1910 there were more than 15,000 "horseless carriages" and "tin lizzies" in the state. The invention of the automobile required better roads so rural families could travel to towns easier. This is Mr. Lon Whitcomb and the town car he built himself in 1905. Eleven children are along for the ride in Beatrice.

FUN AND GAMES!

Fill in spaces with names of games or activities.



ACROSS

1. Played with flat red and black circles.
3. Don't _____ on thin ice!
5. On a _____ built for two.
7. Sink or _____.
8. Paper _____.
9. You're IT!
13. Fun and GAMES.
16. Works best when it's downhill.
17. Sailing, sailing!
18. _____ and arrow.
19. They're biting. Let's _____.
21. Search
22. _____ elbow.
23. _____ frog.

DOWN

1. Bishops and pawns.
2. _____ tac toe
3. Same as 16 across.
4. Horseback _____.
6. Blind man's _____.
10. Bowl me over! _____ pins.
11. Base _____.
12. I'm X; You're O.
14. Cats-eyes and glassies.
15. Snowfort ammunition.
16. Stand tall on _____.
20. Skip or _____ rope.

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NEBRASKA STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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