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Toy Book: a presentation from a design perspective



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Abstract This article explores the universe of interactive books for children, highlighting their evolution and main characteristics. Children's picture books, known for their diverse formats and materials, go beyond being simple reading supports by combining visual and verbal communication to enrich the reading experience. Through differentiated layouts, varied materials, and innovative printing techniques, these books encourage interaction and sustained engagement with reading. Their design is closely linked to the narrative, creating cohesion between form and content that appeals to both young readers and the adults who purchase them. The experimental interface of toy books expands the possibilities of integrating content and form, reinforcing the role of editorial design in the creation of engaging and interactive works. From a design perspective, this article presents toy books by considering the relationship between text, image, and the history of this medium, contributing to broader discussions in Brazilian design research.

Keywords Toy Book, Illustrated Book, Book-Object for Children, Editorial Design.

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Livro-Brinquedo: uma apresentação a partir do olhar do design

Resumo *O presente artigo explora o universo dos livros interativos para crianças, destacando sua evolução e principais características. Os livros ilustrados infantis, conhecidos pela diversidade de formatos e materiais, ultrapassam a função de simples suporte de leitura ao combinar comunicação visual e verbal para enriquecer a experiência do leitor. Por meio de diagramações diferenciadas, materiais variados e técnicas de impressão inovadoras, esses livros estimulam a interação e o engajamento com a leitura. Seu design é desenvolvido em consonância com a narrativa, criando uma coesão entre forma e conteúdo que atrai tanto os pequenos leitores quanto os adultos responsáveis pela compra. A interface experimental dos livros-brinquedo amplia as possibilidades de integração entre conteúdo e forma, reforçando o papel do design editorial na criação de obras interativas e envolventes. Assim, o artigo apresenta o livro-brinquedo sob a perspectiva do design, considerando as relações entre texto, imagem e história desse suporte.*

Palavras-chave *Livro-Brinquedo, Livro Ilustrado, Livro-Objeto Infantil, Design Editorial.*

Libro-Juguete: una presentación desde la perspectiva del Diseño

Resumen *El presente artículo explora el universo de los libros interactivos para niños, destacando su evolución y principales características. Los libros ilustrados infantiles, reconocidos por la diversidad de formatos y materiales, superan la función de simple soporte de lectura al combinar comunicación visual y verbal para enriquecer la experiencia lectora. Mediante diagramaciones diferenciadas, materiales variados y técnicas de impresión innovadoras, estas obras fomentan la interacción y el compromiso con la lectura. Su diseño se desarrolla en consonancia con la narrativa, generando una cohesión entre forma y contenido que atrae tanto a los pequeños lectores como a los adultos responsables de la compra. La interfaz experimental de los libros-juguete amplía las posibilidades de integración entre contenido y forma, reforzando el papel del diseño editorial en la creación de obras interativas y atractivas. Así, el artículo presenta el libro-juguete desde la perspectiva del diseño, considerando las relaciones entre texto, imagen e historia de este soporte.*

Palabras clave *Libro-Juguete, Libro Ilustrado, Libro-Objeto Infantil, Diseño Editorial.*

Introduction

The illustrated children's book is known for its diverse formats, materials, and constructions. It delights not only the intended reader, children, but also adults, who are the ones who make the purchase decision. Its illustrative and tactile nature attracts interest in this medium, often our first contact with visual and alphabetic reading.

Nikolajeva and Scott (2011) comment that this unique aspect of illustrated books is based on the combination of two distinct sets of visual and verbal communication signs, such as image and text. The children's illustrated book, in its various categories and textual genres, in addition to enchanting, questions the standard book with varied relations (or lack thereof) between image and text in children's books; such resources are used with different communicative intentions.

These characteristics are reflected in the book's layout. Authors such as Linden (2011) also add the possibilities of double-page spreads, in which the content is reproduced across the entire page. Nikolajeva and Scott (2011) also visually present in their book some layout possibilities with double pages and a hierarchy of reading images and texts, which by Western standards occur from left to right. For them, several images on the same double page stimulate the apprehension of a temporal and often casual relation during reading. This means that by presenting a character performing an action on one page and the continuation of that action on the other, a sequential association can be established.

In addition to layout, the illustrated book allows for the transition of materials, such as the use of acetate, fabric, and polymers, and consequently, printing techniques, such as hot stamping. The exchange of materials, formats, and folds, added to the possibilities of visual communication already demonstrated in the illustrated book and the text x image x layout relation, results in what may be the ultimate experimentation in this medium, the toy book, which will be explored in depth in this article.

This type of book transitions between the children's illustrated book and the object book, being considered part of both. For Paula et al. (2023), the illustrated book allows for the storage of different textual genres, such as short stories, chronicles, poems, or even non-literary genres, such as alphabet books, number books, and portfolios.

Interactive children's books, or simply toy books, then emerge as the ultimate extension of the unique characteristics of children's books, classified by Paula et al. (2023) as:

More than a playful proposition, the editorial format of the book-object presents the originality of a "different" medium, in the sense of being "outside the norm" of what is understood as a book, original, and unique. This aspect guarantees not only easy reader engagement but also adds another noteworthy interpretative clue, given its inventiveness. (Paula et al., 2023, p. 158)

This object is characterized by being inseparable from its format and/or materials, ensuring participatory reading by the child, and is directly related to the forms of interaction with the reading object. Paula et al. (2023) further add that the book itself already allows for interactions. However, in the toy book, the set of images, the material, and/or the format are related to the way the reader will develop their reading.

In this sense, learning more about toy books is important for researchers and designers interested in illustrated children's books, object books, and the graphic presentations that such artifacts possess. Given the complexity of this medium, this article aims to present the toy book from a brief conceptual and historical perspective, relating it to design through the construction processes that compose this medium.

This paper will discuss the concept of the toy book, considering the views of different authors on the subject and presenting ways to identify them. Following this, the relation between text and image that this medium can possess will be discussed in greater depth, based on the illustrated book. Finally, a brief historical overview of the toy book's place in international and Brazilian literature will be presented. The ideas of authors such as Schmidt (2017), Linden (2011), Paula et al. (2023), Paiva (2010 and 2013), Romani (2011), and Nikolajeva and Scott (2011), scholars of illustrated books and toy books, will be used. In this way, it is hoped to broaden the understanding of this medium in Brazilian design research.

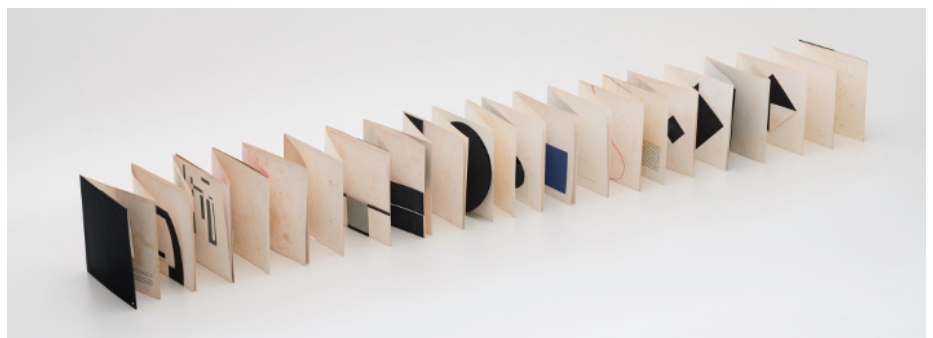
Toy book, conceptualization

Having understood the imagistic and textual possibilities of the illustrated book, this text seeks to conceptualize the toy book from the perspective of different authors. Paiva (2013), in his thesis, argues that the contemporary toy book is understood as a long process that invokes the artist's book, the object-book, and the adult experimental book: essential precursors for understanding the contemporary toy book.

The book-object, characterized by graphic and visual experimentation (Figure 1), directly impacts the presentation of the toy book, the latter being widely accepted by its target audience and the publishing market, often differing from its origins due to its industrial reproduction character, while still maintaining experimental possibilities.

Figure 1. Book-object "Livro Obra" Lygia Clark, 1983.

Source: Lygia Clark Portal. <https://portal.lygiaclark.org.br/acervo/164/livro-obra>. Accessed on May 6, 2026.



Romani (2011) argues that the toy book can be understood as the link between two universes: the cultural and the entertainment, being a form of cultural presentation for the child, allowing them to learn about its elements while interacting with the object in front of them.

Paula et al. (2023, p. 165) emphasize that the toy book can be considered a modality of the object-book; however, not every object-book is necessarily a toy book, since there are object-books whose architecture, theme, and genre privilege a poetic artistic-aesthetic perspective to the detriment of a merely playful perspective.

While Linden (2011), when classifying children's books, places the toy book as a hybrid between a book and a toy, which usually presents elements associated with the book and may contain other three-dimensional elements (plush, plastic figures, etc.). The author separates the toy book into categories such as:

- **Pop-up book:** "type of support that, through the double page, accommodates means of interaction such as hiding places, flaps, inserts, or unfoldings in three dimensions." (Linden 2011, p. 25);
- **Interactive book:** "often referred to as activity books, they serve as a support for activities: painting, construction, cutting." (Linden 2011, p. 25).

Paiva (2010) adds some categories:

- **Digital books or e-book:** books presented digitally and aimed at children, where the use of interactive features such as videos and hyperlinks is common;
- **Artist books:** as previously mentioned, are typically handcrafted and unique;
- **Animated books or flip-books:** which, when flipped through, reveal a sequence of images, creating an animation.

Despite their distinct categories, the authors of this article agree that toy books, interactive books, artist books, flip-books, and some types of e-books share the characteristic of participatory reading for children through their interactions: new layouts, sound effects, functions, lightness, and strangeness (Paiva, 2010). Therefore, reading allows the child to interact directly with the narrative, which can lead to intersections between themes.

The reader's participation during the reading process is also necessary in the book studied, in a way adapted to the audience. Some clues can be used when identifying this object. Paiva (2013, p. 110) classifies them as:

- **Format:** various cut-out designs are also valued. Similarities to everyday objects familiar to children are also emphasized: bags, small suitcases, and stuffed animals;
- **Folds:** this includes productions that are eye-catching, such as jump, blossom, or pop-up designs, through the creation of complex 3D assem-

blies and editions with moving tracks and rotations of isolated or interspersed parts that depart from traditional production methods (flat printed sheets);

- **Dimension:** books with staggered planes and backgrounds, such as the “Step Inside” books, which simulate falls or image backgrounds in an optical illusion of interspersed accordion folds, as well as prints that optically highlight volume, relief, and depth through special finishes, provide the reader with a playful presentation and recognition of projective reading planes;
- **Movement:** this invites handling, observing the effects, a lively engagement with the content, a departure from the static, and the opportunity for visual surprise;
- **Staged scene:** following this visual game, the reader can use visual clues to discover something surprising in the story’s setting, from the scene’s entrance to a final scene;
- **Interactivity:** this is a striking characteristic that 21st-century books do not easily abandon. This is because the new medium for cultural transmission (the children’s book) has gained enthusiastic followers eager for handling and independence in approaching the playful object that is the toy book;
- **Content:** in toy books, the content tends to move away from predominantly informative, didactic, religious, or moralistic formats. Verbal, visual, and sensory texts usually maintain, as an editorial strategy, unity with the format and object value. In general, when aimed at younger children who cannot yet read or are in the initial learning phase, they feature short texts or emphasize key words, avoiding dense and lengthy texts.

All these resources are used individually or together to capture the reader’s interest. It is worth noting that, despite the endless possibilities that the toy book allows, the designer must use the interaction attributes in a way that considers the user who will interact with this object. This is because the interaction presented in the text must relate to the proposed narrative to generate reader interest, encourage continued reading, and even promote repeat reading later on.

The image and text in the children’s picture book

The presentation of images has permeated different periods of technological limitation. For a long time, image and text production were in separate processes, which restricted the low-cost mass production of colored figures, for example. From productions such as photocomposition and offset printing, the graphic possibilities of using this resource in books have grown exponentially.

Today, it is possible to present the image on the “prime” page, common in children’s and young adult books and some other books, by

occupying the entire double page of a scene to highlight it. Other forms of production also expand scene presentations. In the accordion fold, for example, it is possible for the scene to extend between the folds, forming a single, continuous image (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Manaus, Irena Freitas, 2019
- Example of a book with an accordion fold.

Source: https://www.amazon.com.br/Manaus-Freitas-Irena/dp/8564155273/ref=sr_1_9. Accessed on May 6, 2026.



In illustrated books, unlike in other book categories, images function as an essential part of shaping the narrative's meaning and can have different levels of relation with the text. In this context, Linden (2011) comments that the layout in this type of medium crucially determines the presentation of text and images. According to the author, the text can present three forms of relation with the images:

- **Redundancy relation:** when the text does not provide meaning that complements the image, offering little or no contribution beyond what is already presented in the images;
- **Collaborative relation:** each element, text and image, builds upon each other's information, filling in any gaps so that two different messages generate a shared understanding;
- **Disjunction relation:** texts and images can follow parallel or contradictory narratives.

Nikolajeva and Scott (2011) name the collaboration relation as "reinforcement" while disjunction is called "counterpoint". However, the counterpoint relation can be represented in various ways, which they classify as:

- Counterpoint of address;
- Counterpoint in style;
- Counterpoint in genre or modality;
- Counterpoint by juxtaposition;
- Counterpoint in perspective or point of view;
- Counterpoint in characterization;
- Counterpoint in metacritical nature;
- Counterpoint in space and time.

In toy books, these relations between text and image can also exist. Reading can manifest itself in different ways, including imagistic and tactile forms (Figure 3). This type of medium often does not require linear reading, expanding the possibilities of interpretation, opening the way for other readings (Schmidt, 2017), and the relation between the reader and the book as an object.

Figure 3. Book with tactile sensory interactions. Ssss Roar Nhac, Ciranda Cultural, 2023.

Source: <https://www.cirandacultural.com.br/produto/livro-toque-e-sinta-ssss-roar-nhac-74564>. Accessed on May 6, 2026.



In terms of images, they can appear in different forms in the book, with distinct visual techniques and materializations. Linden (2011) lists some possibilities for framing them:

- **Isolated images:** used for independent images that do not interact with each other;
- **Sequential images:** with a sequence of interconnected images, presented in a manner similar to the language of comic books;
- **Associated images:** hybrids between isolated and sequential elements linked at least by a plastic or semantic quality.

Domiciano (2008) further adds that illustrations rich in details (realistic or not) contribute to the intellectual development of children. Symbolic and non-discursive illustrations, on the other hand, contribute to developing the reader's imagination, while a realistic illustration that is simply faithful to the linear text may discourage the reader, since the illustration does not need to explain the text.

In toy books, these characteristics can be merged again with the materiality of the object; images can be superimposed, generating sequences, as in the case of layered books, such as the book "What's in the Box?" (2021) by Isabel Otter and Joaquin Camp, or The Slant Book (Newell, 2008), in which, associatively, the images relate to the format of the support (Figure 4), with the compositional playfulness of the toy book perhaps being the maximum way to explore the relation between image and form in the illustrated book.

Figure 4. Respectively: The Slant Book in its Portuguese edition, “O Livro Inclinado”, Newell, 2008 and “What’s in the Box?” Isabel Otter e Joaquim Camp, 2021.

Source: <https://www.cirandacultural.com.br/produto/livro-o-livro-inclinado-71026> and <https://www.amazon.com/Whats-Box-Monster-Isabel-Otter/dp/1838911839>. Accessed on May 6, 2026.



A brief history of the toy book

The conventional contemporary book has undergone significant transformations throughout history, expanding its possibilities for production, narratives, and formats as new concerns and technological advances have emerged. This medium, which can be considered one of the greatest means of recording human thoughts in its most well-known format today (the codex), is characterized by its construction in notebooks assembled and sewn together, protected by a binding (Chartier, 1998).

Before its contemporary form, this object had distinct characteristic formats for record-keeping purposes; in Mesopotamia, there were materials equivalent to those that fit the modern definition described in the previous paragraph, through numbered clay tablets, with a number and title engraved on each tablet, for recording commercial activities (Paiva, 2010).

Later, the well-known papyrus scrolls began to be used in ancient Egypt and by civilizations of the Middle East, used for literary purposes and legal documents, the oldest of which, found in Thebes, dates from 2563-2424 BC. Among its characteristics, its fragility and writing in *volumen* stand out, that is, in sequences rolled on wooden sticks filled on only one side of the material.

In the 2nd century BC, parchment, with its malleability and reusability, became the primary form of recording what was known as a book. Unlike papyrus, which was of plant origin, parchment was made from animal skin, usually goats. It allowed for the validation of the codex format and enabled a greater amount of content on a smaller number of pages, as well as writing on both sides of the page.

In Europe, parchment was the primary medium for content throughout the Middle Ages. During this period, a large portion of the texts were religious and reproduced manually in monasteries. Even then, detailed and sophisticated hand-drawn illustrations were introduced, along with the well-known “capital letters”, used to begin a subject or page, specially created by an illustrator of the time. The book, however, was initially conceived to hold text, not images (Linden, 2011).

The use of parchment as a basic writing material continued for approximately 600 years until paper was introduced to Arab trade, initia-

ting European paper production in Italy in 1276 and expanding its production technologies to the present day.

In the context of image and printing techniques, Paiva (2010) argues that the oldest books composed using woodcuts date back to 1451; however, only in 1561 is there a record of the first German work illustrated in wood. Around the same time, in the 1450s, Gutenberg brought to the West what would be one of the greatest literary revolutions: the invention of typography¹ and the movable type printing press.

This revolution consolidated the mass production of books and literary materials into what we know today. However, it also shaped, during this period up to the beginning of the 17th century, the separation between text and image: printing required typographic characters on one side and copper engravings on the other, necessitating different presses, two workshops, two professions, and two types of skills (Chartier, 1998).

Following this line of reasoning until the end of the 18th century, woodcut remained the only technique that allowed the printing of illustrations and texts on the same page together, but with reduced readability due to the imprecise lines of the technique. With lithography, created by Aloysius Senefelder in 1796, it became possible to draw directly on stone, making the reproduction of images more versatile.

Before the year 1700, there were no books specifically written for children. Some young people, usually from noble and wealthy families, were fortunate enough to read and enjoy the books they were allowed to take from their parents' shelves. Others from the same noble class, who could not read, heard these stories told by tutors and nannies (Dansa, 2009).

On the other hand, popular stories from oral tradition used to reach children regardless of their financial condition. Colomer (2021) highlights that such folk tales are the literary productions that have most influenced children's literature. A factor that also influenced the emergence of children's literature was the idea of "childhood" as a stage different from "adulthood". For Colomer (2021, p. 154), "The idea of a childhood with its own formative interests and needs to be led, therefore, to the creation of books specifically aimed at this age group."

In 1744, John Newbery opened the first children's bookstore in London, where he himself began to edit and write inexpensive illustrated stories for children. (Colomer, 2021). Also in that year, the first work truly aimed at children was published, a collection of nursery rhymes published by Mary Cooper in 1744, and a second collection, Mother Goose Melody, dates from 1760. (Domiciano, 2006, p.5).

At the end of the 18th century, what can be considered the first movable book, a precursor to the pop-up book, which has three-dimensional elements, was *Harlequinades*, published by Robert Sayer (1770) in London. It had a "lift-the-flaps" format, which allowed for different sequences for the main story and was a great success among young people of the period, as shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5. The Harlequinades Book (1770), had folds that revealed images.

Source: <https://blogs.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/theconveyor/harlequinades/>. Accessed on May 6, 2026.



In the 19th century, publications such as the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm and chapbooks, inexpensive printed works of popular literature, began to gain prominence, even though they were not specifically intended for children. Also in the 19th century, books like Lewis Carroll's "Alice in Wonderland" (1865), among others from the period, began to focus directly on children. It is noteworthy that until then, the use of images in books was limited, with words predominating. However, there were objects that challenged this logic, such as the famous "doll books" that began to gain popularity at the beginning of the 19th century.

These books consisted of seven hand-cut figures in different colored outfits and a single head with a long tag around its neck. The head could then be inserted into a paper pocket on the back of each figure. A popular title in this format is 'The Story of Little Fanny Exemplified in a Series of Figures' (Stella & Rose Books, 2014).

In 1821, William Grimaldi published The Toilet (Figure 6), a book with interactive elements activated by lifting flaps. The book quickly sold out, requiring a reprint. In 1860, the London publisher Dean and Son began to take an interest in producing toy books, declaring itself the oldest company to continuously dedicate itself to the production of children's books. Between 1860 and 1900, they produced around 50 titles.

Figure 6. The Toilet Book, William Grimaldi, 1821.

Source: <https://emopalencia.com/de-splegables/historia.htm>. Accessed on May 6, 2026.



In London, these books, then called movable books, were very popular at the end of the 19th century, and in Germany, the country that produced them, mainly in the Bavarian region, where the printing quality was unsurpassed at the time. The main publisher of this genre of interactive children's books was the German Ernest Nister (1842-1909). The basic premise of his children's books was to create a reading movement by sliding after an interactive activation. These books also featured magical graphic appeals, transforming one image into another through interactive circular movement performed by the child or mediator. (Paiva, 2013, p. 203) (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Ernest Nister, Six moving pictures, 1890.

Source: Image taken from a screenshot of Paiva's doctoral thesis, 2013 p. 204.



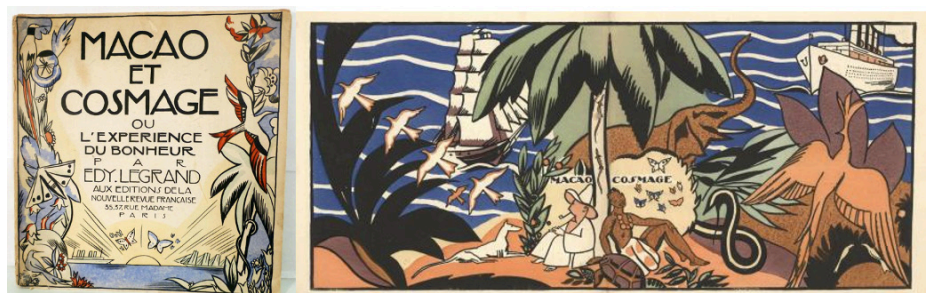
In the 20th century, influenced by avant-garde movements such as Surrealism and Dadaism, modern books began to incorporate colors and different layouts, with the use of double pages driving the development and experimentation of books in terms of sound and graphics, challenging what was considered a book until then, and discussing issues such as the content and form of this object through artists' books.

These influences explored methods of visual production beyond what was conventional in art and in books as objects. These artists and publishers created narratives that manifested themselves in a wide variety of applications.

One of the great milestones of the period is Edy-Legrand's book published in 1919, *Macao et Cosmage*, which features a predominance of colored images over text, already using framed illustrations that occupied the double page (Figure 8). Even at the beginning of the 20th century, it was already possible to find layouts that mixed text and image. Themes from the children's universe also began to be portrayed in illustrated children's books, as developed by Maurice Sendak in the book *Where the Wild Things Are* in 1963.

Figure 8. The Macao et Cosmage book, Edy-Legrand, 1919.

Source: Image created from a screenshot of Cordeiro's Final Course Project, 2022 p. 17.



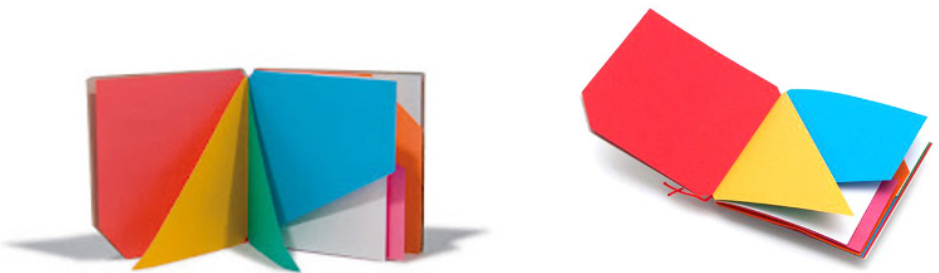
During this period, active reading, which means, reading that encourages the reader's participation and interaction with the book for the narrative to proceed, became more common. Between 1965 and 1980, small publishers began to promote new types of books, such as photographic books, picture books, non-narrative books, and object books. These new formats, strengthened by the Neo-Concrete manifesto, expanded the visual poetics of books and their artistic character, transforming the way children read up to that point.

These new layouts, along with improvements in printing and production techniques, such as screen printing, photocomposition, and offset printing, brought a new perspective to children's books, allowing for the creation of playful and visual narratives that did not depend exclusively on text. Romani (2011) emphasizes that playful design tools are what differentiate the traditional book from the toy book.

A significant example of production that tested the boundary between book and object is the work of Bruno Munari. The Italian designer used design methodologies and thinking in the creation of the work "Illegible Book" (1984), in which, through experimentation with papers, shapes, and sequences of visual language, he sought to test the sensoriality of the book and its ability to convey a "narrative" without text, using only materials such as papers of different colors and weights (Figure 9).

Figure 9. The Illegible Book, Bruno Munari, 1984.

Source: https://ophicinapolygraphica.com/portfolio/bruno_munari_2/. Accessed on May 6, 2026.



Munari observed that books up to that point were produced in the following way: "Only in the occurrence of special editions was a different paper chosen, even then to give more importance to the text, which was always the object of the book; the book itself was never considered as an object of communication (excluding the text)." (Munari, 2002, p. 212).

For Domiciano (2008), her proposal was:

To explore the possibility of using the book as a visual language, experimenting with the communicational, visual, and tactile potential of the means of book production. The pre-book proposal goes beyond the simply illustrated book without text. It goes beyond the use of images, since children have become accustomed to seeing images and texts printed on papers with little variety and conventional bindings. It transcends the image and brings to the surface the materiality of the book as an object. This is the point that makes the pre-book a unique experience. (Domiciano, 2008, p. 150)

The designer (Munari) was a pioneer in using different materials and formats to compose books, with a considerable and entertaining output. He liked to challenge the concept of a book and produced a varied number of children's books and artists' books, always including sensoriality as an important aspect, as in the production of the "Pre-books" (or *Prelibri*), a collection of twelve small books, titled "book" on both the front and back covers, which conveys the idea that there is no right way to start reading. Furthermore, each of these books explores a different sense, using diverse materials, bindings, and colors (Figure 10). From this perspective, it is possible to visualize the book as a whole, including the object itself, as an element to be tested in its expressiveness and the reader's senses.

Figure 10. Pre-books, Bruno Munari, 1980.

Source: <https://www.amazon.com.br/I-Prelibri-Bruno-Munari/dp/8887942668> and <https://ar.pinterest.com/atraves-delavida/bruno-munari/>. Accessed on May 6, 2026.



According to Paiva (2013), Munari's inventive books invite cognitive participation. Like a walk or adventure, they are an invitation for children to appreciate formats, thematic paths, and ways of presenting the text.

At the end of the 20th century, in 1996, another alphabet book by Kveta Pacovská highlighted the evolving graphic possibilities in relation to its predecessors. In it, material resources and three-dimensionality are brought to the world of letters, which are the visual, tactile, and character elements of the book. Romani (2011, p. 72) comments that the theme of the alphabet is important in the formation of new readers and that it is usually recurrent; Kveta Pacovská, in *Alphabet*, therefore works with letters as a mechanism of visual narrative.

In the 21st century, with new technological advances, it has been possible to reduce the cost of producing toy books. The methods of interaction with this object, such as some presented so far, continue to be used, with the addition of new formats and folds, sound and olfactory resources, digital interactions, and especially tactile elements, which are now also part of this medium.

Toy books in Brazil

In Brazil, toy book publications are still considered recent, although similar works, such as the sensory book by the artist Lygia Clark, have been

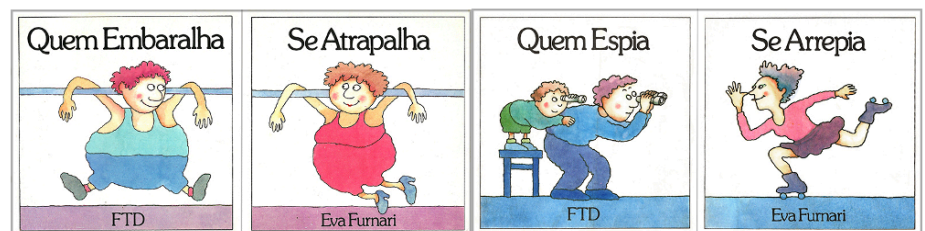
present since the 1960s. Publications aimed at children began to appear with the term “toy book” in children’s literature in the 1980s. The Monteiro Lobato Library, the oldest children’s library in Brazil, already included them in the copies of “Bibliography of Children’s Literature in Portuguese” (1985), in which eight publications appeared in the reviews of this material. Paiva (2013) lists them: “*Brinque pensando*” (Play Thinking); “*Que bicho é esse?*” (What Animal Is This?); “*O livro do som*” (The Sound Book); “*Faça a face*” (Make a Face); “*Livro do tato*” (The Touch Book); “*Pra colar*” (To Glue); and “*Os envelopes mágicos do Plim-Plim*” (Plim-Plim’s Magic Envelopes).

During this same period, three publications by Eva Furnari (1986) from the publisher FTD also stand out: “*Quem cochicha o rabo espicha*” (Furnari, 1986); “*Quem embaralha se atrapalha*” (Furnari, 1986); and “*Quem espia se arrepia*” (Furnari, 1986), marked by wordplay and imagery (Figure 11). These books do not have an official translation or published edition in English. Because they are classics of Brazilian children’s literature focused on rhymes and nursery rhymes from the culture, they have not been marketed internationally. Therefore, according to Paula et al. (2023), this collection differed from previous ones by:

They possess a novelty of “French doors”, a graphic resource in which two covers close onto a single back cover in landscape format, one opening to the left and the other to the right, allowing the reader to randomly make bizarre combinations between the visual elements inscribed on both pages. This proposes comical and unusual image games that compose the visual scenes of each book in the trilogy. (Paula et al., 2023, p. 167).

Figure 11. Respectively: *Quem embaralha se atrapalha* and *Quem espia se arrepia*, Furnari, 1986.

Source: <http://www.evafurnari.com.br/pt/os-livros/page/5/>. Accessed on May 6, 2026.



The 1990s stand out for the more frequent publication of children’s book-objects, highlighting the differences between the terms “toy book” (Interactive Book) and “book-toy” (Toy with a Book). During this period, the graphic designs of these books brought new possibilities for valuing materiality, encouraging reader interaction with the object through devices such as:

Textured paintings and works that are pleasant to the touch, on fabric. There are works that value graphic design, the finishing touches articulating text and illustrations, and the drawings edited for direct manipulation, which incite the curiosity of children and young people, such as

maps, diaries, bags, etc. It is commented that the great appeal is not only in the text but in the proposal of the book as a whole, valued especially by the graphic aspect that foresees the reader's participation both in the manipulation of objects printed in the text and in the insertion into games invented by the protagonists [...] Some toy books have fold-outs that pop out when turning the pages, present simple and charming stories, beautiful illustrations, and surprises at every turn of the page, provoking the joy of their readers. (Paiva, 2013, pp. 178 and 179).

However, during that period, a large portion of interactive publications were translations, due to the material requirements of the objects, which often had their graphic and editorial production imported due to a lack of technical resources in the country. It is worth noting that this configuration still exists today, although on a smaller scale.

In the 21st century, the focus is on interactions “explicitly geared towards reading and play, refined and sophisticated in editorial finishing (printing, folding, three-dimensional pop-ups, overlays)” (Paiva, 2013, p. 180). The child reader is invited to interact at different moments of reading, providing a more active reading experience during the narrative. There are sound, visual, and even olfactory resources; there is an expansion in the use of folds; and the accordion and compositional format become more common with various combinations created by the reader. During this period, the affective and playful relation of toy books aimed at the child's first contact with writing is also relevant, and these can be explored by those who are not yet literate, with appropriate mediation (Paiva, 2013).

The books in the “Aromas do Mundo” (scents of the world) collection (2012) from the publisher Publifolhinha (Figure 12) stimulate the child's sense of smell, allowing them to draw parallels between their personal experiences and those presented in the books, covering a variety of themes, from gardens to fruits.

Figure 12. Aromas do Mundo, Orianne Lallemant, 2012.

Source: <https://a.co/d/04WSs4ru>. Accessed on May 6, 2026.



In this context, the children's book-object goes beyond the conventional, offering hybrid interactive possibilities between material, format, image, and reader, all working together to give meaning to the narrative.

The reader plays a leading role in these mediums; without them, the very meaning of the narrative may not exist.

Final considerations

This article aimed to present the toy book from a brief historical and conceptual perspective, relating it to design through the construction processes that make up the book's support.

For the development of the research, authors who have already studied the object of study from different perspectives were used, whether with the central focus on the illustrated book, such as Linden (2011) and Nikolajeva and Scott (2010), or through studies of the toy book itself, such as Paiva (2010 and 2013), Paula et al. (2023), Romani (2011), and Schmidt (2017).

Thus, the toy book was initially presented briefly. It was noted that, being a medium with different origins and interactive possibilities, it also has different interpretations, sometimes considered a branch of the book-object and artist's book, other times a classification of illustrated books, and others as an independent classification.

Subsequently, the functions of image and text in children's picture books were discussed in order to situate them within the context of study. Interactive children's books, in this context, share similar characteristics with picture books, making it possible to address the essential role of images in relation to text and their various forms of representation.

Next, a historical overview of the book was presented, showing how it evolved into its conventional format. The context of the illustrated children's book was presented, highlighting some important steps in its development, such as the appearance of images, double pages, and color. Finally, toy books were included, starting from historical moments such as movable books in the 19th century and artists' books in the 20th century. This section allowed for an understanding of the emergence of the toy book from various moments in the history of the book, contributing to the multimodality of the toy book and its complex aspects of interaction.

Finally, the authors discussed the emergence of interactive illustrated books in Brazil, which occurred in the 20th century, especially through the importation of titles for children's books. In this sense, in addition to the historical context, issues concerning this object in Brazil, its limitations, and future prospects were discussed. Despite its recent arrival in Brazil, the relevance and presence of toy books in the Brazilian children's publishing market were highlighted.

The toy book interface is experimental and comprehensive; its conceptualization, as well as the illustrated book, permeates the very contemporary notion of a book, where medium and content intertwine. In this sense, design can enable new intersections between content and form. The content is contemplated in an imagistic and textual way, while the form is

linked to its content in a coherent and cohesive manner, contributing to the interest of the reader and the buyer of the content (adults).

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Notes

1. Creation of symbols and visible symbols related to orthographic (letters) and para-orthographic characters (numbers, punctuation marks etc.), and their use for reproduction purposes. (Farias, 2004).

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