

by Vivien Santana Hughes

# GAMES

How to survive a Saturday morning without cartoons

Getting kids to appreciate art is a work in progress; throw in a little mystery and you've increased the entertainment quotient. **In The Picture** (ages 6 and older) takes you from the information desk to the galleries in a quest to find the missing art work. The paintings—inspired by six masters, including Degas, Matisse and van Gogh—were done by children in workshops conducted by the game's creator, Intempo Toys. Players round the board and collect clues, which are actually small sections of the six paintings. If you land in a gallery, you'll stay put until you can answer a multiple choice art question (optional for non-readers). The first to collect three clues from the same work of art has solved the mystery and races back to the painting gallery to win. A variation lets you and the kids create the clues (blank cards included) to six masters' art reproductions. From Intempo Toys, \$21, (800) 326-TOYS.



# KIDS



Travel back about 570 million years or so and where do you end up? The Cambrian period, which is also where you begin **Dinosaurs and Things** (ages 4 and older, two levels of play). The intricately illustrated game board is edged with puzzle pieces depicting prehistoric creatures from the tiny Trilobite to the towering Tyrannosaurus rex. Round the board with the roll of a colored die and strive to reach the finish with help ("develop lungs, swim forward three spaces") or by fighting obstacles ("Carnosaur attack, limp back three spaces"). On the way, players get to put their puzzle pieces back in place, but more advanced players progress by answering dinosaur trivia questions. From Aristoplay, \$22, (800) 634-7738.



A math drill doesn't sound like much fun, unless you happen to be playing **Rescue From Planet Zero** (ages 6 and older). This is a standard board game with one parent-pleasing difference: While your child rolls the dice and collects game cards on an imaginative and colorful playing field, she is challenged by addition, subtraction, multiplication and division tables that insert into a Planet Zero rocketship holder. This added dimension gives your child an opportunity to put elementary-school-learned skills to work by challenging her to help the alien fly back to his planet. From Discovery Toys, \$21.98, (800) 426-4777.

# PLAY

**S**low and steady wins the race, but so does the fastest snail in **Snail's Pace Race** (ages 3 to 7). This classic board game—the essence of simplicity—is a must for preschoolers (no reading or number skills are required). A roll of the dice determines which of the colorful wooden snails progresses across the game board to the finish. Kids get to move any of the playing pieces. Since the snails and not the player determine the winner, this cooperative game is great for children who hate to lose. By Ravensburger, \$18.95, (201) 831-1400.



**T**he ABCs are the first step to reading and **A B Seas** (ages 4 to 6) is a fun way for kids to learn them. Drop your magnetic fishing pole into the sea and pull out a colorful, letter-sporting creature. If the letter doesn't match the ones on your board, you have to throw it back. The first to fill in all the letters wins. Variations include a cooperative play version, where you match up anyone's board, and a simple word game. From DiscoveryToys, \$16.98, (800) 426-4777.



**F**orget Boardwalk and Park Place, **Our Town** (ages 4 to 8) lets you personalize the game board with your own neighborhood's landmarks including school, movie theater, playground and favorite stores. Blank spaces allow you to write in whatever you want your child to learn, like family phone numbers and addresses, math problems or even foreign language words. The youngest players simply round the track to get home, while readers can also follow the game cards, which make them race ahead or stay behind. The board wipes off easily to add new challenges. From Aristoplay, \$20, (800) 634-7738.



**M**ow a lawn and your child earns \$1.50. Buy a snack and the kid is out 45 cents. Basic survival skills in a mercenary world, and now your future financial whiz has **Presto Change-0** (ages 6 and older) to sharpen his money-handling proficiency. This board game gives tycoons in training some practical experience in making change. Realistic coins and bills accompany some real-life experiences on the board. Allowances, babysitting and going to the movies demand some dollar-wise diligence and here's a fun way to get it. The first player to save \$10 wins. From Educational Insights, \$24.95, (800) 933-3277.

**I**t's a battle against the tide, not each other, in the cooperative game **Sand Castles** (ages 5 and older). With a toss of the die, waves lap closer to your castles or you accumulate pieces (sand piles, pails or shovels) needed to build three sand castles. The game is over when the castles are successfully erected ... or washed away by the waves. Players practice strategy as they decide which of three waves to advance, and when and where they should build walls and castles. Young builders soon discover that it's crucial to work together, sharing pieces and strategies, or the waves will quickly wash the castles out to sea. While geared toward children 5 and older, with minimal assistance the game can easily be mastered by 4 year olds. From Animal Town, \$17.50, (800) 445-8642.

