

I Never Could Understand the Point of Jigsaw Puzzles and Complicated Lego Kits

Shôn Ellerton, August 27, 2026

Maybe it's just me, but I'm flummoxed as to why jigsaw puzzles and complicated one-time-build Lego kits are so popular.



I think almost every kid loves to build things from other things. Taking aside the digital distractions kids are hooked on, kids inherently have it in their psyche to make things and be creative.

However, let's not dismiss the digital world entirely.

My son showed me the amazing world of Minecraft, a veritable unlimited universe of giant Lego blocks which you can share with other builders and denizens, some friendly, some foe. Moreover, Minecraft has captivated many adults as well, at least, for those that have time on their hands. It's an impossible world where physics doesn't make sense, but that's where the fun is. An adventure in building anything you want, anywhere, anytime, in the virtual world.

There's heaps of discussion, much of it embedded deeply in the world of social media, purporting that kids are not getting hands-on enough with putting actual physical bits of material to make things.

I agree with some of these sentiments, based on the philosophy that putting actual things together may be more useful from a practical point of view and with the additional benefit that it gets kids off screens. On the other hand, I was surprised to learn that kids have picked up on so many aspects of building things in the world of Minecraft, particularly what kinds of materials exist in the world. From

granite, to jade, to carbon, to hardwood, there are so many materials to choose from. Also, kids can see and experience how others build things. I've seen quite a lot of interesting architectural designs in Minecraft from traditional log cabins to sleek Art Deco buildings.

In my young days, I had Lego to play with and thoroughly enjoyed it, but it had its own set of problems. It was limited to compression strength, much like traditional masonry. In other words, you couldn't make structures under tensile loads because, if you did, the Lego would just pull apart. My late father, from a generation before, quipped that it was nothing like the good 'ole days of Meccano, in which you had actual strips of steel, bolts and plates to make any variety of mechanical machines. So essentially, Lego was for masonry architecture and Meccano was for mechanical machines.

Another problem with all these toys that you can build things with, is that it's actual physical clutter, much of it getting lost in the house, getting underfoot, or simply in stasis in storage taking up valuable space.

What do you with all this stuff?

Another problem is the shift from creativity to instruction following.

Lego, for example, used to come with basic blocks which you can build anything using your imagination, but Lego is usually sold with kits in mind. For example, building a Ferrari car, a Chinook helicopter, or some very complex piece of machinery. So, it's not so much about creativity anymore, but following instructions from the provided booklet. Sure, it might help kids learn how to assemble Ikea furniture, but it's hardly a recipe for creativity. And heaven forbid, don't lose any pieces! *Basic* Lego, however, is easy to take apart, had a sensible number of pieces, none of which needed a microscope to see the smallest piece, and could be reassembled to an unlimited number of creative designs.

However, the biggest problem with these sorts of toys, particularly Lego, is that it's often overpriced and unaffordable. I mean, *seriously*, unaffordable. I've seen smallish kits sell towards the \$100 mark which is ludicrous for set of plastic pieces, which, to be honest, has *absolutely no functional value*. Usually, the only people who can afford this stuff are adults who have money to spend, which, of course, inflates demand and raises the price for everyone else. Kind of like those adults without kids who frequent theme parks like Disneyland.

I've always loved to build things, but they have to have, at least, some functional value, like being able to move, or do something like pick up radio. Remember those crystal radio kits?

As a young kid, after watching Clint Eastwood in *Where Eagles Dare*, I was inspired to make little cable cars by tying household string from the upper balcony of the house to a peg in the garden below and simulate action figurines trying to attack each other from little cardboard boxes attached to the string. And I had one of those LGB train sets which you can lay out in the garden and simulate an actual freight train with clods of earth in the open-air wagons going from one of the garden to the other.

I never saw the point in putting a piece of Lego together to make some sort of iconic machine like a Spitfire plane or a Ducati sports bike. You put it together, and, then what? You can't do *anything* with it except put it in a display case.

Seriously, if you want to have anything remotely resembling a miniature version of this, you get *actual* model kits, like some of those Airfix kits you can buy and glue together. Not only do they look good, but you learn what they really look like and appreciate them for what they are in real life. Because what is the point of the Lego version? It looks crap and what do you do? Pull it apart and start again? I'm sorry, I *never ever* understood this mindset.

Following on from all this, is the strange world of jigsaw puzzles.

I know a few people who are *really* into them but why? I honestly can't understand what all the fuss is, but saying that, they're really popular. Some out there will spend hundreds, if not thousands, of dollars collecting highly expensive 1000-plus piece puzzles, most of them stored in boxes ready to be put together.

My son had one of portraying the Atlas of the World, and, it was perhaps the only puzzle I enjoyed putting together with him, but only because I have a deep fascination with geography. But this is the dilemma. After it's put together, what then? What on earth do you do with a completed jigsaw puzzle? Hang it on the wall? I don't think so. No. It gets pulled apart and goes back in the box. A normal National Geographic atlas that sometimes comes with a National Geographic magazine looks far better and far more informative. And on the same lines, a decent photograph of Mount McKinley by Ansel Adams is going to look a damned sight better than a jigsaw puzzle of it mounted on the wall.

And another issue of jigsaw puzzles is that they need oodles of space, which many people simply do not have.

So what's the point of jigsaw puzzles? Beats me!

So, going back to the world of digital building, like Minecraft, for example, many of these things can be built in a world that doesn't require an endless cheque book nor additional sheds to store all the bits and pieces.

It *is* important to learn how to build and fix things which are *genuinely* useful.

I learnt much of this from my own father who taught me how to make things of value and functional worth. But honestly, I struggle with the idea of the concept of, say, following an instruction book of putting Lego together to make a shitty-looking version of something that actually exists or had once existed, only to gather dust in the back of the cabinet.

Finally, it's worth giving some praise to the digital world which has enabled our latest generation to build an endless world with an endless supply of building material to create some of the most creative designs.

Had that been available when I was kid, I would have taken to it without a moment's hesitation.