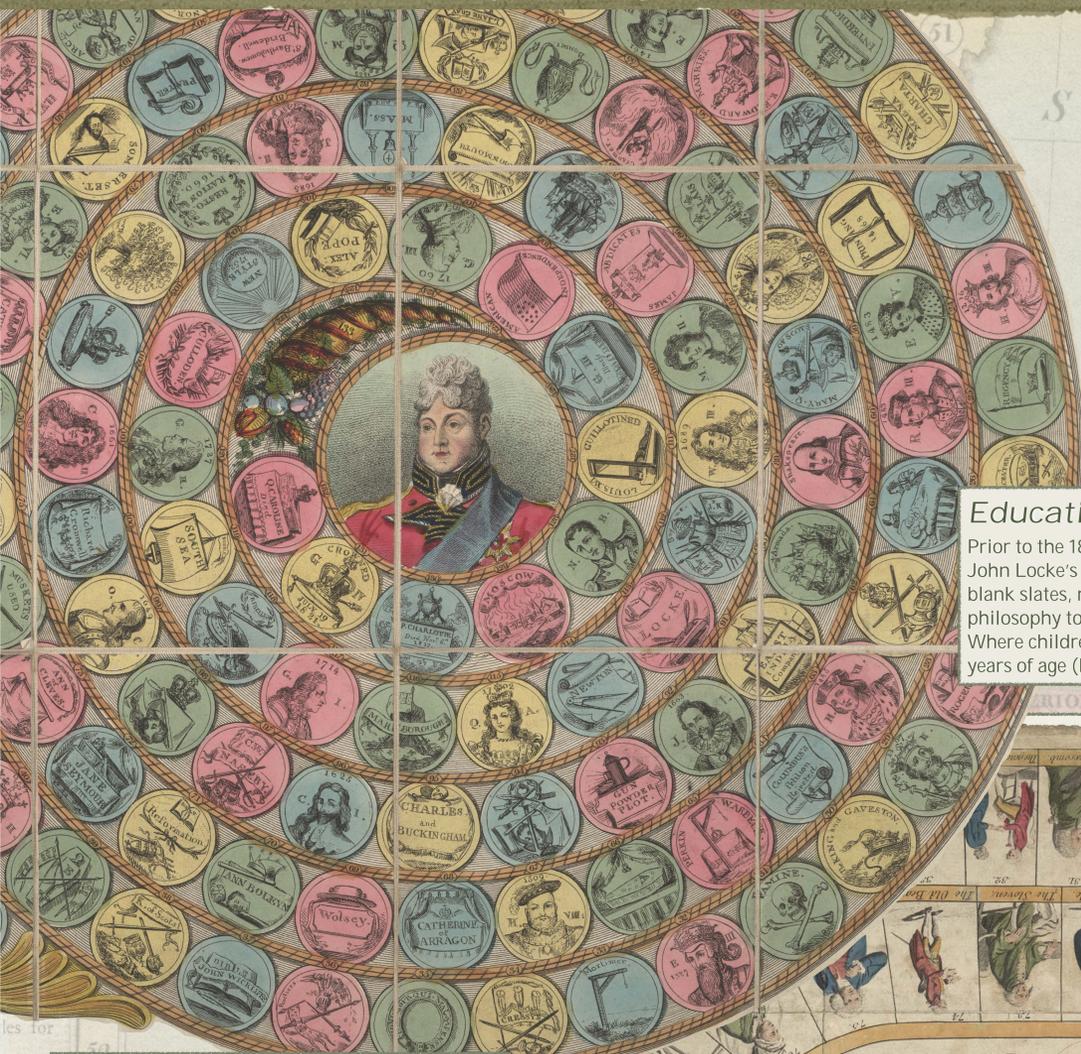


Figure 2. Harris and Son, 1824, *Historical Pastime: A New Game of the History of England, Board, 495 x 490 mm*, John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, England.



The Game of Life: Play and Enculturation in the Georgian Home

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 March 14, 2022
 This research is supported by the Jamie Cassels Undergraduate Research Award, University of Victoria
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The games on this poster encouraged early enculturation into the Enlightenment ideologies that governed English politics and society, and trained children in the performance of masculinities that emerged directly from a wider nation building effort through their visual messaging and rules of play. The games were designed to accompany textbooks and encourage learning through play and active participation.

Educating the Child

Prior to the 18th century, popular belief held that English children were born full of sin and consequently they were harshly disciplined by their parents and guardians (Plumb 1975, 65). Indeed, until the publication of John Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), children were viewed and treated as small adults. Groundbreaking in its philosophy, Locke's work posited that babies were not inherently sinful, but rather blank slates, ready to be moulded by their environment and educated through their natural inclination for invention and play (Shefrin 1999, 253). Shortly thereafter, numerous scholars and educationalists, expanded this philosophy to push for a greater prioritization of the home as a centre for early childhood education. Where children of the 17th century would be sent from their homes at infancy, the boys of upper-middle class and elite families were increasingly kept at home, often not leaving the care of their parents until they reached 8 years of age (French and Rothery 2008, 411). At this time, they would be sent to school having already received a thorough education in morality and national heritage, thanks in large part to didactic household games.

Mothers at Home

These didactic games were vital educational tools that allowed mothers to fulfill a very public obligation through the moral instruction and entertainment of their sons at home (Wei 2020, 160). While both boys and girls played these games (Dove 2016, 3), they primarily model and encourage the performance of masculine behaviours. Women only appear as historical figures or in a supporting role, either swooning in into the arms of a gentleman or marrying him. As new ideologies of childhood developed and early-childhood education moved into the home, so to did maternal expectations. Within a century, mothers found themselves not only vested with the responsibility of educating of their sons, but also with the development of their moral character.

The *New Game of Human Life* (fig. 3), introduces players to a series of moral archetypes as they race to get to the final square: The Immortal Man. Through a series of rewards and penalties, boys learn what will be expected of them as gentlemen and as British citizens. For example, landing on square 7 - The Studious Boy, is rewarded through the receipt of a stake and by proceeding to square 42 - The Orator. In contrast, he who lands on "The Drunkard at 63 shall pay two stakes, and go back to the Child at 2." As children experience victories and disappointments in the safety of their homes, they learn which behaviours will and will not be acceptable as they grow into adults.



Figure 1. *New Game of Human Life*, July 1790, Paper, 465 x 677 mm, John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, England.

Masculinity and Nationalism

Masculine ideals in the latter part of the 18th century were deeply tied to developing notions of British citizenship and national identity. As members of the landed gentry, and future landowners, the masculinity of the boys of upper middle-class and elite households would be assessed based on their readiness to uphold the responsibilities of citizenship and ensure that fair and rational governance of the land was maintained (French and Rothery 2008, 403). As gentlemen, they were expected exercise their moral superiority by practicing discipline, self-restraint and good judgment (405).

We have seen these qualities clearly displayed in *The New Game of Human Life*, but they also appear in *Historical Pastime: A New Game of the History of England* (fig. 2). This game did not just teach British history - knowledge of which was essential becoming an informed, involved citizen (McCormack 2019, 16), but it was also taught players how to feel about particular events and rulers. Upon landing on a square featuring the execution of Charles I, players would read out loud a description of his reign and learn about the "consequences of his tyrannical proceedings" (Gribling 2020, 203). The game also encourages children to build connections between historical events (206); upon landing on "Ann Boleyn," players advance to "Elizabeth I." By combining various methods of learning and of testing knowledge, this game trains its players to think about how their country's past is connected to their present, and take pride in a collective history.

The construction of a national identity was not simply ideological; Britain's many wars, particularly with France, required the rallying of a large civil militia (McCormack 2007, 483). Games teaching children about the lands they occupied and the history that preceded them should therefore be seen in context of a national propaganda campaign to rally troops. Through play, younger sons (who would not inherit landownership), were taught a sense of ownership over their national heritage and encouraged to defend, protect, and expand their sovereignty.

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Figure 3. Carington Bowles, *Bowles's British geographical amusement or Game of geography*, in a most compleat and elegant tour thro' England, Wales, and the adjoining parts of Scotland & Ireland, Board, 490 x 655 mm, John Johnson Collection of Printed Ephemera, Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, England.