



## Our Children: Keepers of the Bears

By Bill Breitsprecher

Every fall, I conduct a survey with my Kindergarten students to determine how many bears are in the community. Participation is voluntary – it's a way to have fun with counting. Young children are enthusiastic about learning numbers.

More than half the children choose to participate, returning surveys, tallying all the different types of bears at home - stuffed bears, ceramic bears, bear dolls, bear blankets, bear bedding, and maybe even REAL bears.

These students, usually with the help of mom, dad, or an older brother/sister, report that they have remarkable numbers of bears at home. Of course, this isn't about how many bears each student has - its about having fun and sharing number skills.

Counting With Tallies

A good way for children to start learning number skills is with tallies - creating a line to represent each item in a set. Tallies create groupings of 5. This allows us to easily sum and compare counts



It also introduces students to "skip counting" in this case, by 5's:

5, 10, 15, 20...

Recognizing these patterns in numbers forms the basis of addition - when we add 5 to 5, we get 10. Add another 5 to our total, and we get 15.

This prepares students to think about multiplication and division. If we have 3 groups of 5, then 5 times 3 equals 15. If a child isn't sure, they can always count each line in the tally. Division is just the opposite - if we see 15 tallies in groups of 5, we see that they are in 3 groups. 15 divided by 5 equals 3.

Helping children use a representational system to think of numbers is important - later, they will see how we use symbols to represent the same counts. For many young learners, the key to mastering abstract concepts is to start with similar ideas in more concrete formats.

Kids naturally like counting games and learning numbers. Tallies are a fun way to help children count and get ready to work with numbers. Show a child how to count with tallies and he or she will find many things to count - when you're a kid, thinking about numbers is FUN!

Let's work together and continue finding ways to nurture children's natural love for numbers. Math is the "gateway to higher education." Let's find ways to keep math exciting.

# For the Young and Young at Heart

## Children Love Their Teddy Bears

An enduring, traditional form of stuffed animal, Teddy Bears comfort children. The name Teddy Bear comes from one of Theodore Roosevelt's hunting trips. There were several other hunters competing, and most of them had already shot something. A few friends of Roosevelt who were hunting with hounds treed an American Black Bear after a long and exhausting chase and suggested Roosevelt shoot it.

He refused to shoot it himself, deeming this unsportsmanlike, but instructed that the treed bear be killed to put it out of its misery, and it became the topic of a political cartoon. A small town toy shop owner saw the cartoon, and asked the president if she could manufacture stuffed bears named as "Teddy's Bears". He approved, and the name has stuck ever since.

Commercially made, mass produced teddy bears are predominantly made as toys for children. These bears have safety joints for attaching arms legs and heads. They must have securely fastened eyes that do not pose a choking hazard for small children and must meet other rigid standard of construction in order to be marketed to children in the United States and in the European Union.

The "fur" from which these charming creatures are made is as varied and interesting as the Teddy



Bears themselves. Today, most have synthetic fur. Specialty or collector bears may have natural fibers.

Mohair, the fur shorn or combed from a breed of long-haired goats, is woven into cloth, dyed and trimmed, produces a fascinating choice for any artist's palette. Alpaca Teddy Bears are made from the pelt of an alpaca because the fiber is too soft to weave. Children don't really care what type of fur a Teddy Bear has as long as it is soft and cuddly.

The world's first Teddy Bear Museum was set up in Petersfield, Hampshire (England) in 1984. In 1990 a similar foundation was set up in Naples, Florida. This was closed in 2005, and the bears sold by auction. Bear books are popular in children's libraries. Ask any librarian - children love their bears!

## Great Bear Books For Kids!

