



Kronika Events

Launch of the LEGO Pop-Up Book

1 November 2018

DOI: XXXXXX



The LEGO Pop-Up Book
Iskakalica od LEGO kockica

In November 2018, LEGO® released a building set called Pop-Up Book. Since most readers of *Libri & Liberi* are doubtless familiar with the pop-up book, but probably less so with the transfer of this story-telling medium into a toy, we thought this product launch would be of interest to L&L readers.

First some background. LEGO has been around since 1932 when it was founded in Billund, Denmark, as a company producing toys consisting mainly of interlocking plastic bricks. Many generations of children have played with LEGO since then. It is generally thought that its target users are children from 5 to 12 years of age. But fascination with LEGO spans generations and there are many who remain hooked well into adulthood and beyond. These are referred to as AFOLs, or Adult Fans of LEGO. Some consider that there is a period when children set aside their LEGO toys to devote themselves to study, dating, or similar temptations, and this period is known as the Dark Ages, an indeterminate period of other activity before enthusiasm is reignited.

The LEGO community can roughly be divided into builders and collectors. The builder builds without instructions, while the collector is mainly interested in collecting official sets. In truth, many are both builders and collectors at the same time.



Fig. 1. Title and authors
Sl. 1. Naziv i autori

Finally, we come to LEGO Ideas. This is a platform run by the Group to allow fans to submit designs and vote on submissions. If a design attracts 10,000 votes within a set period, LEGO will review it and might produce it as an official set. The Pop-Up Book is a result of this process.



Fig. 2. Grandma's cottage
Sl. 2. Bakina koliba

The person with the idea to transform the book format to the brick medium was AFOL Grant Davis who joined up with Jason Allemann who is well known for his kinetic sculptures. Alleman has a degree in Engineering and enjoys building models that have an interesting motion. In other words, the ideal partner for Davis to put his idea into effect. As illustrated in Figure 1, Alleman and Davis have achieved glorious notoriety by having their names printed on tiles to sit below the title on the front cover of the book.

The official Pop-Up Book set comes with pieces to build two widely known tales, “Little Red Riding Hood” and “Jack and the Beanstalk”. The first includes the famous scene of grandma’s forest cottage with its opening door, bed and kitchen area. Figures 2 and 3 show different recreations of this famous story.

The original design was polished for official release by LEGO designer Alan Talbott and graphic designer Crystal Marie. Some of the things that differentiate designers from fan builders may lie less in the skill level, but more in the things that fans do not have to think about, such as how children react to certain colours and how the final model is represented on the box and ultimately on the shelf. The colours in Figures 2 and 3 are striking, and particularly impressive are the brightness and shape of the little girl’s hood and the detail of grandma’s nightshirt worn by the wolf.

The mechanical aspect of the final model is practically unchanged from Davis and Alleman’s original design. It is a simple mechanism using a combination of system hinge plates and Technic axles – a common combination of two LEGO systems in today’s sets used for any play function.



Fig. 3. Little Red Riding Hood faces the wolf
Sl. 3. Crvenkapica se suočava s vukom



Fig. 4. Jack and the Beanstalk
Sl. 4. Janko i čarobni grah

The tales' stage models are fixed with just a Technic pin at each end of the book covers making the stages easily interchangeable between "Little Red Riding Hood" and the second tale that comes with the set, "Jack and the Beanstalk".

Figure 4 shows the giant's castle in the clouds, with Jack's village nestling below. The set's diorama overcomes the issue of scale by using the usual minifigure for the giant so he is in-scale with an otherwise micro-scale diorama, while a nano-figure is used for Jack, who is thus tiny compared with his opposite number. Scale consistency is one of those things likely to bother adult fans, while children tend to have an easier time dealing with such trivialities.

Of course, imagination can be set free to create many other types of tales. There are endless sources of fairy tales, folk tales, legends and other narratives that can be recreated in a similar way. In reality, you do not need the Pop-Up Book for this since any LEGO set tells a story. But the beauty lies in the constraints imposed in building the story in the set frame of restricted dimensions and with a limited number of mechanical technicalities that can be exploited.

However, there is a certain discrepancy between the LEGO Pop-Up Book and the age of the children who would be able to build their own stories in this way. Children are usually interested in fairy and other tales at a very young age, but this set has been recommended for children 12+, in other words, in their pre-teenage phase, when they discard all things that they deem "childish". A LEGO-experienced child might be able to build sets like this at a younger age, but usually only by following the instructions, and in this case might not be able to construct their own stories within the constraints of the book. We believe that, for



Fig. 5. “Out of the box”
Sl. 5. Izvan knjige: izvan okvira

younger children, it would be the task of the parent, older sibling, or teacher to help them construct the book, and then let the child come “out of the box” and magically spread the tale outside the covers (see Figure 5). This would also provide an opportunity for interaction where several children role-play the characters and change the story in any way they wish, using their imagination, since, unlike the traditional pop-up book, the parts can be taken out and moved around. In the world of IT and video games which attract youngsters today, this kind of interactive play might entice them away from screens, which, as useful as they might be, sometimes take up too much of their time, and draw them back to books and the tales captured therein.

There are many parallels that spring to mind between the LEGO Pop-Up Book and the conventional book. Just as stories for the LEGO Pop-Up Book first have to be created within a particular framework, so a written narrative has to conform to its own conventions and restrictions. Both can be opened to reveal a tale that can be interpreted, reinterpreted, extracted, adapted, recoloured, or entirely rebuilt. We believe this overlap between the tactile fun of the LEGO Pop-Up Book and the storehouse of inspiration and creativity of the real thing is an event worth sharing with everyone interested in storytelling, children’s literature, and its multimodal and interactive aspects.¹

Mark Davies and Sven Franić
Photographs: Sven Franić

¹ LEGO® is a trademark of the LEGO Group of companies which does not sponsor, authorize or endorse this article. This report draws on a blog by Sven Franić published on 27 October 2018 in New Elementary <<https://www.newelementary.com/>>.