

Nesting Dolls

by Marie E. Kingdon

Have you ever seen a nesting or stacking doll? A nesting doll is brightly painted, made of wood, and opens into two parts - a top and a bottom. Do you know why they are called "nesting" dolls? When you open the first doll, there's another doll nested inside. Sometimes there are two or three dolls inside. Sometimes there are five or even ten or more. Guess how many are in the largest nesting doll we know about in the world? Would you believe, seventy-two! The largest doll in that set is three feet tall.

Some of the first nesting dolls were made in China a very, very long time ago - some say even a thousand years. Today nesting dolls are made in Poland, China, the Netherlands, India, and even the United States of America. But the best and the prettiest are made in Russia, where they are called "Matryoshkas" [maht-ree-OSH-kahs]. This comes from a common name for women in Russian country villages, "Mastryona," or village mother. Nesting, or Matryoshka, dolls are often given as gifts to new babies in Russia. Some nesting dolls have a whole family inside: father, mother, sister, and brother. Some Matryoshkas open and have ten solid dolls, all the same size, inside. These are called "counting Matryoshkas" because they help Russian children learn to count.

Matryoshka dolls made in Russia come from regions. just as different products come from different states in America. Nesting, or Matryoshka, dolls are hand-painted and are dressed in costumes from the region where they are made. Some wear aprons and kerchiefs or scarves. Some hold flowers or baskets. The most common are brightly painted in reds and yellows and have coats of lacquer to protect them. Other dolls are painted in greens. blues. pastels. and even gold metallic.

Nesting dolls are pretty, and they are great for play. Some children even have collections of different nesting dolls. These dolls can be fun for everyone. Tell your friends what you have learned about Matryoshkas. Have fun looking at and playing with these interesting, unique, wooden dolls.