

DUMUNC XLI



Crisis: Operation Save Playtime

Chairs: Manahil Nauman & Emmy Bray

February 20th - 22nd

DUMUNC XLI: Operation Save Playtime

Letter from the Chair

Dear Esteemed Delegates,

Hey! My name's Manahil, and I'm a freshman here at Duke. I'll be your head chair. I'm on the pre-med track, majoring in Biology with minors in Medical Sociology and Art History. Ask me anything about life in college, Duke, high school, One Direction, or literally anything (I am a very big talker.) On campus, I'm a part of a plethora of pre-med clubs, including Remote Area Medical, and also sing in our choir!

I hope you guys have so much fun with this committee. We're super excited to see where you guys take this topic. Don't worry if this is your first conference or your last one; we have an amazing staff who is ready to make your weekend run smoothly. I love to hear loud voices and funny speeches in the committee room, but don't underestimate the power of a creative arc.

Over the span of three days, I hope you fully immerse yourself in this toy world, exploring how influence, relevance, and competition can shape a rapidly changing environment. You'll encounter themes of ethics, business, community, and power. You'll learn to use your creativity and strategy skills to make sure you don't fade into the background. You'll debate how tradition is shaped by new technology, is it out with the old and in with the new? I recommend taking risks and watching your back, playtime can get messy... I can't wait to meet you all and see the work you've put in!

Manahil Nauman - Chair

mn327@duke.edu

Class of 2029

DUMUNC XLI: Operation Save Playtime

Overview

Playtime used to be simple... you get a toy, you play with it. Kids' imaginations thrived as they fought with action figures or raced cars. But now all the laughter from the playroom is gone, and in its place is a slight buzzing. This digital age has made our beloved children turn away from their toys and towards their screens. How can we, as toys, combat this new age? Can you teach an old toy new tricks? It is now our job to reclaim our place in the playroom and defeat these pixels. Or is it...

For generations, toys were a way for children to express themselves and develop. They honed their critical thinking skills, imagination, and problem-solving skills. Toys became cultural icons, some having clothing or books made to expand their influence. As the world begins to advance technology, more children are given smartphones as opposed to toys as entertainment. Online multiplayer games are taking the place of playdates while algorithms cater towards children, luring them in for longer. Digital gaming characters and platforms argue that they offer creativity, connection, and education in new forms. Traditional toys counter that screens isolate children, reduce imagination, and threaten emotional development.

DUMUNC XLI: Operation Save Playtime

As profits decline for toy manufacturers and the cultural relevance of classic characters diminishes, tensions rise. The question is no longer if playtime is changing, but who will control its future.

Committee

Delegates will embody sentient characters, both classic toys and digital entertainment figures, each with their own personalities, priorities, and unique approaches to play. In this committee, power is measured differently than in traditional diplomatic settings. Influence comes not from armies or votes, but from popularity, cultural relevance, narrative control, and the ability to capture children's attention. Success requires strategic thinking, bold initiative, and clever negotiation. Delegates are expected to balance alliances, rivalries, and shifting loyalties while pursuing objectives both public and secret.

Conflict, collaboration, and chaos are all expected and even rewarded. Some characters may work together to form temporary alliances, while others will act unilaterally to maximize personal gain. Delegates should anticipate sudden crises, unexpected challenges, and rapidly shifting circumstances.

This committee also emphasizes roleplay and engagement. The personalities and backstories of each character are integral to strategy. A

DUMUNC XLI: Operation Save Playtime

delegate's creativity, humor, and commitment to their character can be as powerful as any speech. While traditional rules of procedure exist, the environment encourages improvisation, imaginative solutions, and inventive ways to influence outcomes.

The recess bell is about to ring. What will you do?



DUMUNC XLI: Operation Save Playtime

Current Situation

The committee convenes under unusual circumstances.

Representatives of both physical toys and digital entertainment characters have been gathered, some voluntarily, others reluctantly. A once giggle-filled, joyous daycare has instead become a meeting ground for anxiety, resentment, and competition. The toys are aware that what happens here may determine whether they continue to exist in children's lives at all.

Across the daycare, the signs are impossible to ignore. Shelves once emptied daily now sit untouched. Blocks remain stacked exactly as they were the night before. Dolls lie neatly arranged, never disturbed. Meanwhile, tablets are passed out more frequently, calming children instantly and keeping them occupied for long stretches of time. Staff members, overwhelmed by limited resources and large class sizes, increasingly rely on screens as a convenient solution. Parents, balancing work and home responsibilities, often encourage this shift, sometimes knowingly, sometimes out of necessity. iPad kids can be crazy.

Recent industry reports indicate a record low in engagement with physical toys among children ages 4 and up. Some analysts predict that traditional toys could lose mainstream relevance within the next decade if

DUMUNC XLI: Operation Save Playtime

current trends continue. Once-iconic brands are downsizing, rebranding, or desperately integrating technology in an attempt to stay afloat. Many toys fear that they are no longer companions but clutter.

Yet the digital characters celebrating this rise are far from secure themselves. Tablets, apps, and gaming platforms now face growing backlash from parents, educators, psychologists, and governments. Concerns about screen addiction, shortened attention spans, social isolation, data collection, and long-term developmental harm are rising. Some countries are discussing age restrictions, screen-time limits, or stricter regulations on digital content aimed at children. In certain school systems, screens are already being scaled back in favor of “screen-free learning.” “Tech Tuesdays” are being introduced to limit technology time to once a week. What does this mean for our online friends?

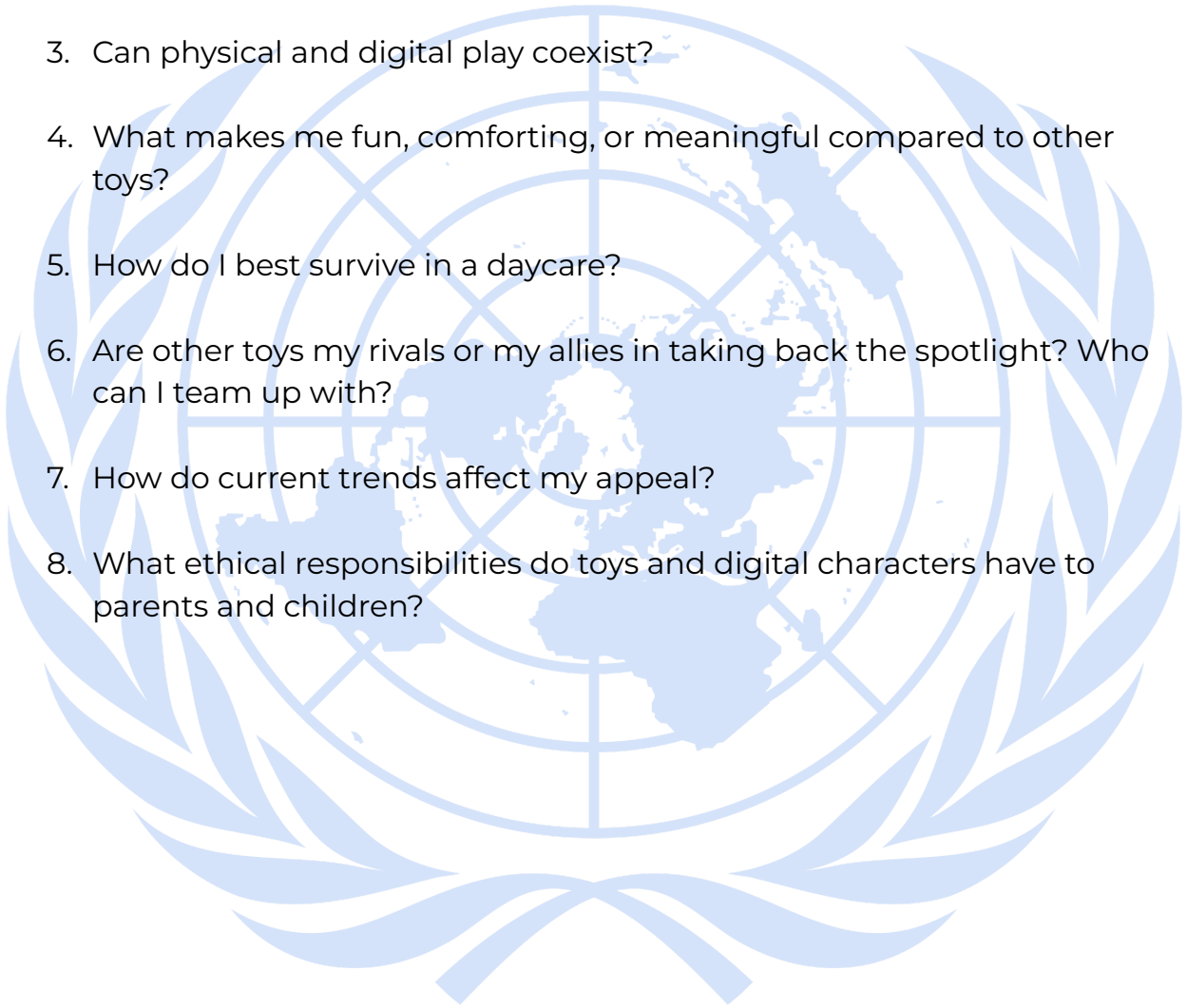
Every character in this room understands one truth: attention equals survival. Those who fail to capture it will fade into history. Those who capture too much may invite regulation, backlash, or sabotage.

The toy bin is open. The children will return soon.

What happens next is up to you.

DUMUNC XLI: Operation Save Playtime

Guiding Questions

1. Why are kids choosing iPads over toys during recess? What do I have that screens don't?
 2. Should I resist technology, adapt to it, or team up with it to stay relevant?
 3. Can physical and digital play coexist?
 4. What makes me fun, comforting, or meaningful compared to other toys?
 5. How do I best survive in a daycare?
 6. Are other toys my rivals or my allies in taking back the spotlight? Who can I team up with?
 7. How do current trends affect my appeal?
 8. What ethical responsibilities do toys and digital characters have to parents and children?
- 

DUMUNC XLI: Operation Save Playtime

Delegate Roles

1. Barbara Beauty

Barbara's been the "it girl" in the daycare for years, helping young girls unlock their inner fashionista. Recently, she's been overshadowed by all the new hair and beauty games, but don't assume she's sweet because of her cute appearance, she'll do anything to get back into the spotlight.

2. Brick Legoson

A timeless toy, Brick has been a quiet powerhouse for decades now, helping children unlock new levels of their creativity. However, nowadays, games like Tetris have taken away from his appeal. He seems to be getting a lot of love from teenagers and millennials, so he's not too worried about losing relevance...right?

3. Theodore Bearmingham

Ted's been around for kids all throughout their lives. He's reliable and understanding. From being born to getting married, Theodore's always had his kids back. Nothing can truly replace the feeling of a cozy hug from Ted, but nowadays, he seems to have lost his touch.

4. Rue Bixcube

Rue's outraged by the new introduction of screentime. Do families not value logic and problem-solving anymore?! Rue's never been all that popular with the littles. She's been spending her days sitting at office desks, disheveled and confused. Her logic skills are out of this world, but some suspect she's a little scrambled in the head.

5. Ford Wheely

Now a collector's item, Ford's a pretty common toy in every little boy's toybox. You'd think his limited edition title would make him all the rage, but kids these days prefer to play car soccer on their PCs. A lot of toys think he's a bit pompous and hard to work with. He thinks they're just jealous that they aren't as classic as him.

DUMUNC XLI: Operation Save Playtime

6. Lincoln Logsworth

Like a father figure of many toys, Lincoln has been around for ages. He's seen all the new toy trends come and go while he admired from the sidelines. A bit more on the old-fashioned side, Lincoln worries that traditional play is being threatened. Parents think he's great, but kids think he's boring. Lincoln says that simplicity is best and that wooden toys have a timelessness that video games could never get.

7. Candy Crushson

Candy's had a pretty great run. She's wildly popular with older people, but hopes that she can expand to try and bring her fun to kids, too. Highly addictive, she's colorful, funny, and oh so sweet...usually. She's excited for this new age of play. Maybe she can show everyone just how sweet she can be.

8. Steven Craftmine

An absolute powerhouse, Steven has been ruling the play scene for about a decade. He feels like he's in a tight spot, though, as his roots are in the digital world, while he has his own physical toy brand, too. He gets a lot of praise for allowing children to build with NO bounds, unlike with wooden and plastic blocks. He's also a big environmentalist, thinking plastic toys are clutter and pollution.

9. Rich Pennybags

A star in the boardgame world, Rich is an amazing businessman. Known for his position in the hit game Monopoly, Rich isn't too worried about this new age of play, but the businessman in him is intrigued. He's comfortable in his position because he knows he'll always exist in the family night realm. He thinks all these other toys are too emotional: playtime is an industry.

10. Furbert Fredrickson

Slightly feared, Ferbert remembers his glory days as "Furby." After being labeled demonic and creepy, Furby had to change his name and start anew, with resentment for all toys festering within him. He feels abandoned by the toy community and is bitter. He believes that all toys should stick together...suffer together....

DUMUNC XLI: Operation Save Playtime

11. Mario Hopperson

A beloved digital character for years, Mario has accomplished something not many toys can: being both digital and physical. His widespread support has led him to be a central figure in the play world, but don't think he's rude or cocky, he's Mario!

12. Pok Mongo

Pok challenged the idea that video games mean staying indoors all day. All the craze in the 2010s, Pok launched his new game Pokémon Go and showed toys the first threat that digital games posed. Traditional toys seem intimidated by him, while digital characters think his time in the spotlight is long gone. Will he choose a side or teeter on the edge?

13. General Joseph

With harsh discipline and a commanding voice, General Joe remembers the days when children played in dirt with sticks, the way it ought to be. He was all the rage back in his day, but ever since more complex action figures came out, he's been forgotten about. He thinks there's something fishy going on with these new digital characters.

14. Baby Beanie

Once treated like a priceless prize kept in a glass case, Baby longs for the days when she was all the rage. Now that her value has dropped over the years, she struggles with her identity. Is she a collectible? A plush? A loser? She gets emotional thinking about how plain she is compared to all the new toys with lights and sounds. She fears she must act fast before she gets completely forgotten about.

15. Doug Dogherty

Still a favorite, Doug helps mold children's minds. Creative and quiet, Doug has never really felt all that threatened in the toy world, except for the slime crisis of 2015. Doug tends to serve as a mediator who's good at making others see eye to eye. He believes that toys and screens can co-exist because eventually kids will want something hands-on...right?

DUMUNC XLI: Operation Save Playtime

16. Percival Bananasworth

A newly rising star, Percival, also called Peely, is at the center of the Fortnite craze. Although he's a little clueless and doesn't quite understand why he's so beloved, he's happy to be included. He doesn't think deeply about long-term consequences. Peely believes fun should be bright, fast, and silly. His ignorance makes him unexpectedly dangerous.

17. Rob Bloxberg

Rob is all for this new digital age of gaming as he thinks that it allows children to connect with one another and explore. He has a tendency to take up a major section of children's screentime, but hey, they're technically playing with friends. He prides himself on his flexibility as he promotes horror, cooking, building, fighting, and other kinds of games. He thinks that old toys need to get a grip and go digital.

18. Gus Amon

Gus is doubt and distrust reincarnated. He believes that his position in the viral game Among Us helps teach kids the hard truths about life: trust no one. Nobody truly knows what's up his sleeve and worries about what will happen when the lights are low. Children found him so exciting and loved being able to play along with friends, but slowly, he's losing relevance.

19. Dash Roadwood

He believes play doesn't need depth, just momentum. Kids tap without thinking, and he loves it. Parents barely notice him. Dash thinks slowing down is the real danger. There isn't really anything all that novel about his position in the game Subway Surfers, but he didn't mind. He thinks these old timer toys need to remember kids want fun, not life lessons.

20. Bridget Spinner

Bridget gets a little offended when being referred to as a toy. She believes she is a tool. Initially introduced as a focus tool for children, Bridget quickly pulled everyone's attention. She believes everything's short-term and why worry, but deep down she knows new sensory "toys" will soon take over her role. Hopefully, things don't spin out of control.

DUMUNC XLI: Operation Save Playtime

21. Labu Buman

No one truly understands the origin story of Labu. He's just now becoming a household name and must decide in these early stages of his popularity how to proceed. He lacks the legacy of older toys and fears being forgotten before being loved. Kids find him intriguing but unfamiliar. Luca is willing to take risks others avoid. Survival matters more than tradition.

22. Magnolia Montessori

Dr. Montessori is calm, confident, and entirely unbothered. Her children rarely touch screens, guided instead by structure and purpose. She believes her philosophy protects her from this crisis. Other toys envy her stability. She may be safe...for now. Might she too join the dark side?

23. Slither Jr

A slimy guy, Slither has been around for what seems like ages now. He had a failed attempt at trying to branch into the physical toy industry with things like keychains and blind bags, but no one really cared. He does his job well, but at times he gets bored.

24. Nerfel Blasterbottom

Nerfel thrives on energy, competition, and controlled chaos. He represents physical movement and social play, even if it sometimes gets a little too loud for adults. Kids love his excitement, but parents worry about safety and mess. Nerfel sees video games as stealing the thrill of action without the effort. He believes play should be active, not passive.

25. Etch E. McSketch

Etch has been around forever, quietly encouraging patience and precision. He believes creativity should take time and that mistakes are part of the process, just shake and start again. Kids often get frustrated with him and move on to easier digital art apps. Parents admire his simplicity and screen-free design. Etch worries that children no longer know how to sit with difficulty. He's been pretty irrelevant for a while, but we never know what this new era will bring.

DUMUNC XLI: Operation Save Playtime

Possible Resources

- Your imagination!
- [The Children and Screens Guide for Early Child Development and Media Use: Infants and Children Ages 0-5](#)
- [Why Toys Are Better Than Screens for Child Development](#)
- [Toys vs Touchscreens: What's Better for Child Development](#)
- [Effects of Excessive Screen Time on Child Development: An Updated Review and Strategies for Management](#)
- [Screen time: The good, the healthy and the mind-numbing](#)
- [Are some types of screen time better than others?](#)
- [7 Top Toy Industry Trends \(2024 & 2025\)](#)
- [Toys and Games Market Size, Share & Trends Analysis Report by Product \(Preschool Toys, Dolls\), by Application \(0-8 Years, 15 Years & Above\), by Distribution Channel \(Offline, Online\), by Region, and Segment Forecasts, 2022-2030](#)