

## Citiblocs: New Kid on the Block(s) -- Guest Blogger Wendy Smolen



When I think of blocks, I have two favorite types: [LEGOs](#) and those beautifully shaped wooden [HABA](#) blocks that let kids build the US Capital or the Coliseum or a Mayan Temple. Both sets invite structured or open-ended play and inspire creativity, imagination, experimentation, and even a little bit of math and physics. I recently played with a new product called [Citiblocs](#). They come in just one simple shape: 14 5/8" x 15/16" x 5/16".

Think: squared off, super fat tongue depressors made of ecologically-sound New Zealand pine. I tested the box of 100 (sets range from 52 pieces to 300). Each box comes with an insert of finished projects and ideas. However, there are no LEGO-like step-by-step instructions. Basically, you're left to your own devices. This is the ultimate open-ended toy. I dumped all 100 pieces on the floor. The good news: I could make anything I wanted. The caveat: It was a little hard to resist falling back on the classic log cabin that I always made with Popsicle sticks. My teenage son, a physics geek, delved right in and built an elaborate structurally sound tower. My young niece made a 3-D butterfly. Inspired (awed?) by their creativity, I attempted an Empire State Building. It was harder than I thought to make even levels and straight walls. Unlike LEGO or even Popsicle sticks, there's no glue or teeth to hold the blocks together. It's balance or bust. For a young kid, the knocking down is as much fun as the building up, so this shouldn't be a problem. For a "builder" like my son, balancing is the fun part of the challenge. For me, I gave up perfection at level six, knocked my building down, laughed, and started all over again. -- *Wendy Smolen*

*Guest Blogger Wendy Smolen is co-founder of Sandbox Summit®. She has been professionally evaluating toys for over 15 years. Her three children have literally gone from crib to college proving (or dis-proving!) her theories on play.*