

19th Century Toys & Games

Jacob's Ladder

Jacob's Ladders are considered a block toy. The toy consists of a series of tumbling blocks that are made to look like a person descending from a ladder.

Though legend has it that one of these toys was discovered in King Tut's tomb, the record of items excavated does not include a description of a toy such as this. The first documented description of a Jacob's Ladder dates to the 1880s in a journal called *Scientific American*. The name of the toy comes from a Bible story in which Jacob saw a ladder that led from heaven to earth.



Try It!

These flat wooden blocks are connected by a series of ribbons. When held correctly, it looks as if one block is tumbling down beneath it.

The best way to do this is by holding the top block on your ladder on its sides between your thumb and middle finger with the ribbons of the block facing outward. Bend the block down by bending your wrist so that the ribbons turn toward the ribbon on the next block to it. Continue twisting your wrist until the block falls and the entire ladder will cascade downward. Continue this cascading by twisting your wrist back in the other direction. As the blocks cascade you can rotate your wrist back and forth so the ladders continues its movement.

Shapes can also be made with the blocks in the form of a chair, table, star, and animals by moving the Jacob's Ladder with two hands.

*Jacob's Ladders are available online.

See <https://www.woodcraftarts.com/jacob.htm> for instructions on making your own.

Materials Needed

- Purchased toy

Details adapted from the Historic Communities: Old-Time Toys

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and <https://lockhaven.edu/~dsimanek/TTT-rings/rings.htm>