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Natania Barron, Kathy Ceceri, Corrina Lawson, Jenny Bristol : Geek Mom: Projects, Tips, and Adventures for Moms and Their 21st-Century Families before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Geek Mom: Projects, Tips, and Adventures for Moms and Their 21st-Century Families:

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Its fast becoming a geek world out there, and all moms need to show off their tech smarts and superhero-like skills in

order to keep their savvy kids entertained and engaged. *Geek Mom: Projects, Tips, and Adventures for Moms and Their 21st-Century Families* explores the many fun and interesting ways that digital-age parents and kids can get their geek on together. Imaginative ideas for all ages and budgets include thrifty Halloween costumes, homemade lava lamps, hobbit feasts, and magical role-playing games. There are even projects for moms to try when they have a few precious moments alone. With six sections spanning everything from home-science experiments to superheroes, this comprehensive handbook from the editors of Wired.com's popular GeekMom blog is packed with ideas guaranteed to inspire a love of learning and discovery. Along the way, parents will also find important tips on topics such as determining safe online communities for children, organizing a home learning center, and encouraging girls to love science. Being geeky is all about exploring the world with endless curiosity. *Geek Mom* is your invitation to introducing the same sense of wonder and imagination to the next generation.

"Geek Mom offers far more than a chance for Mama to simply get her nerd on. It is full of projects and advice, home-science experiments and superheroes, games and tips. And even if you've never cracked a Sci-Fi book or seen an episode of *Battlestar Gallactica*, if you're a creative, clever, thoughtful parent, you'll dig this book." --BabiesGottaHaveIt.com "No matter where you flip to in the book, you're bound to pick up a useful tidbit to fill up a snowy Sunday afternoon or a cool fact to wow your children. Best of all, the content is short and snappy. Topics are just the right length for that bedtime bite before you pass out at the end of a long day." --San Juan Parent "Written by the editors of Wired's Geek Mom blog, this book offers a wide range of activities for geeky families: role-playing games, cooking, costume-making, science projects, and crafts." --Mark Frauenfelder, author of *Made by Hand*, editor of *Make* magazine, and founder of BoingBoing.net "Every mom needs a copy of *Geek Mom*. Whether you're open about your geekiness or still in the closet, you'll love it!" --ImNotTheNanny.com "There are ... projects that involve electronics, explosions and computers, so don't go thinking that being from moms makes the projects less cool in any way." --ALibraryMama blog

About the Author Natania Barron, Kathy Ceceri, Corrina Lawson, and Jenny Williams are the cofounders of *GeekMom.com*, a website where women can celebrate their geeky interests and discuss issues important to mothers of geeky kids. *GeekMom's* loyal followers--men and women, parents and others--flock to hear them talk at conventions around the country. *GeekMom* has more than twenty regular and occasional writers from across the United States, Canada, and Europe.

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Chapter 1 Secret Identities Introduction to Imagination

My first memory of pretending to be a superhero is as a toddler when I grabbed one of my old baby blankets and fashioned it into a cape. I still remember how powerful I felt and how much fun it was. Geeky moms are in a unique position to introduce the next generation to wonder. Although superheroes are often thought of as a male bastion, it's usually mothers who first introduce their children to the concept. Mothers are generally the ones who stress out over Halloween costumes or the right books to read or the right shows to watch, and geeky mothers are the ones who pass down their love of stuff such as *Star Wars*, steampunk, fantasy, and science fiction. We were often the first to introduce children to impossible stories that fire the imagination. The first time we show our children all the various versions of *Star Trek* and realize they love it as much as we do, it's a shared bond. The first time they come running to us about a book they just read that they love that we also loved as a child, such as *The Chronicles of Narnia*, we feel their joy. This chapter is about recapturing that feeling of exhilaration for ourselves and our children. Some of the projects are complicated, many are less so, but they are all designed with laughter and fun in mind and with an eye to providing that special thrill that pretending brings to everyone.

Why Superheroes Matter especially to children

It's a striking and compelling image: the ordinary-looking person sees someone around him or her in trouble and springs into action, revealing a hidden hero. That image goes directly to our collective desire to matter, to make a difference, to be a hero. Adults are still drawn to the idea, but those who truly take it to heart are children. Children are mostly powerless in the world. Everything around them is adult sized. They generally have no say in where they live or even where they're going on any given day. Their life is regimented. No wonder they're drawn to the fantasy of possessing incredible power under the surface. But if superheroes were simply about power, they wouldn't speak to kids so strongly. I asked my youngest son, age eleven, what superheroes do. He said, They stand for justice, they fight evil guys, and sometimes they help with things like natural disasters and do stuff ordinary people can't do. He didn't say they have cool powers or they beat up bad guys or even they have great adventures. Instead, what he has absorbed most about superheroes is that they stand for what's right, for justice, for the best parts of humanity. And that's why superheroes are wonderful role models for children. Not only do kids learn that they can be powerful and they can make a difference, but they also learn the proper use of that power. Justice is a concept that is so very hard to teach. It's not quite fairness, as kids learn early that life is not always fair. Rather, justice is about balancing the scales and trying to do the right thing, perhaps even in a bad situation. It's about being a good moral person. This is why it's so important for superheroes to be men and women and why it's also essential for these heroes to come from as many racial and ethnic groups as possible. It's hard to adopt a superhero as a role model if he or she doesn't speak to your experience, if the hero doesn't look or act or come from the same place as you. I was five years old when I first watched the Adam West *Batman* show in reruns. *Batman* was an ironic show that focused mainly on jokes, but it was also about the good guys trying to do the right thing. I laughed and had fun watching it, but I didn't

fall in love with it until the debut of Batgirl, which hit me like a lightning bolt. Meek librarian Barbara Gordons wall swiveled to reveal a costume and a motorcycle. In a split second, she was transformed into a hero who could fight the villains just as well sometimes better than the male crime fighters. I never, ever wanted so badly to be a superhero as on that day. Over the years, I've absorbed other heroes beyond Batman and his supporting cast. Superman, of course, Black Canary, Green Arrow, the Justice League, the Legion of Super-Heroes, Captain America, Iron Man, the Avengers, the X-Men, and the Fantastic Four. I learned values from all their superhero stories. Values about self-sacrifice, about morality, about the way people should treat each other. The very first issue of the Legion of Super-Heroes that I ever purchased featured a reanimated soldier from the previous war intent on continuing to fight until his side achieved victory. The Legion failed to stop him in a fight and all appeared lost until the heroes looked into the soldiers background. He had originally died saving his platoon from a grenade. Once they knew this, the Legionnaires stopped the soldier by dressing as his superior officers and telling him he'd done his job well. The strange energy that had animated the soldier faded and he died knowing he'd done his job well and saved his comrades. The Legionnaires had powers, and they were fierce fighters. But they solved the problem with intelligence and compassion instead of battle. That's what made them heroes, and that's the lesson I learned as a child. In a story featuring Batman, the Dark Knight returned to the alley where his parents had been murdered. He had to prevent criminals from menacing an elderly woman who had once comforted the young, orphaned Bruce Wayne on the night his parents were killed. Young Bruce had suffered, but the grown-up Bruce was now a hero who could protect others. As someone who lost her father at a young age, I took to heart the lesson that even someone who suffered a terrible loss could go on to accomplish great things. I also took away a lasting role model for who I wanted to be like: Lois Lane. I couldn't grow up to be a superhero, but I could do what Lois Lane did. I could be a reporter. I could fight for truth as much as Superman ever did. I'm not alone. I've spoken to many female journalists over the years and a large number point to Lois Lane as their initial inspiration. One of the very best parts of being a mother has been introducing my own children to the superheroes I loved as a child. They have had the same reaction. They love superheroes. As you can see from my sons quote earlier, they know exactly what superheroes represent: standing up for yourself, might in the service of right, and being good to each other. An episode of Batman: The Brave and the Bold on Cartoon Network portrayed the sacrifice of the Doom Patrol a band of ostracized loners for a small number of people they didn't know. In one of the most poignant moments of Grant Morrisons All-Star Superman, Superman prevents a teenage girl from committing suicide. Superman knows he himself is dying from being poisoned by Lex Luthor, but he talks the girl out of jumping off a building, saying there's always a chance that life will get better. Adults sometimes see superheroes and concentrate on the super part. And the costumes and the powers are a lot of fun. But kids know better. They know the hero part is far more important. They know that they can't really be superheroes when they grow up, as much as they wish they could, but they will know how to be a hero. Create Your Own Secret Lair When I was growing up, my favorite places were the hidden ones where I could let my imagination run wild. It doesn't take special skill to create one either, just time and an old-fashioned cardboard box. Step 1: Finding the Materials Appropriate-sized cardboard boxes can be found in any number of places, but I've found appliance stores are the best sources. A refrigerator box is perfect because it's the largest and roomiest, but others will do, especially if the children are younger and smaller. Several boxes can even be placed together if the kids want to expand their lair to several rooms. To decorate the secret lair, I recommend a big box of Crayola crayons. If the cardboard surface has been treated, try colored markers or various types of materials. At least one eager child. A large cardboard box. A box of crayons and colored markers. A sharp pair of scissors or a utility knife. Glitter glue (optional). Stencils (optional). Items to decorate the interior (highly individual). Step 1: Finding the Materials Appropriate-sized cardboard boxes can be found in any number of places, but I've found appliance stores are the best sources. A refrigerator box is perfect because it's the largest and roomiest, but others will do, especially if the children are younger and smaller. Several boxes can even be placed together if the kids want to expand their lair to several rooms. To decorate the secret lair, I recommend a big box of Crayola crayons. If the cardboard surface has been treated, try colored markers or various types of paint. Watercolors for children will work, but oil-based paints will run less, last longer, and produce more vivid images. Use a pair of scissors or a utility knife to cut the doorways and windows into the cardboard. Please keep these, especially the knife, out of the range of small children. Step 2: Creating the Lair First, consult the future owner of the lair. He or she should set the tone. With my kids, my main job was to act as referee if there was a disagreement and to do any tasks above their age level, such as wielding the utility knife. I have to say I didn't always do the last to their satisfaction. I received complaints if the doorways and windows were crooked. A ruler and a level are a good investment to prevent these types of comments. Cut out the doorways and windows before any decorations or artwork are added. After the doors and windows are done, give the children's ideas free rein. They can draw and color freehand or use stencils or rulers for neatness. Items can also be drawn on paper and then glued to the house. Glitter glue is always fun, too. But with my kids, what they wanted most was to draw or paint their own pictures onto the lair without interference. If the kids are stumped for ideas, try suggestions such as a hidden cave, like the Batcave, the hidden rooms that appear in Hogwarts, Supermans Fortress of Solitude, a Hobbit hole, or just ask them to think of their own version of a magic room. Remember, it doesn't have to look like a work of art when complete. It just has to feel to the child like it is his or her very own special place. Step 3: Move Right In! After

the exterior is done, the interior can be filled with all a child's special stuff. For my kids, this meant blankets, flashlights, various toy kitchen implements, and their favorite stuffed animals. They also wanted to sleep inside their secret lair, so that meant a sleeping bag as well. For that reason, making the secret lair in their bedroom saves moving the creation. Alternatively, it can be a special naptime place elsewhere in the house. The only downside is that the cardboard box will fall apart at some point. That's okay, another one can always be built. Remember to take lots of photos of it, however, so the kids will remember. Test Your Superpowers with these party ideas! All kids (and many adults!) wish they had superpowers. Here are some quick and easy tests of strength and agility that anyone can try at home. Save them for your superhero's next get-together or party, or even a quiet afternoon. These activities are great indoors or out!

I. Kids of Steel: Build a Tower for Your Superhero to Break Down

Materials: Anything light and stackable, as many as possible, including: Plastic drinking cups (sold in large sleeves of 100/300) Clean, recycled cardboard milk cartons Empty cereal boxes (taped closed) Pieces of pink foam insulation (an adult can cut it into blocks and spray-paint it in stony colors)

Step 1: Build It Up, Knock It Down Building a wall from cups, cartons, or boxes is ridiculously easy. Just leave a small gap between each block as you build the first row. When you get to the second row, center each block over the gap. This technique works for straight, curved walls, and even towers. When my younger son was four, he dressed up in his Superman suit and had his dad build a tower of cups around him as high as his eyebrows to burst through. Pow!

For a party, enlist the group to build the walls as well as demolish them. With enough cups or boxes, kids can spend an entire afternoon just creating and destroying walls.

Step 2: Clean Up and Salvage When the kids are done building, cleanup is quick and easy. Your building materials may not survive more than one or two uses, though. If you want to save them for another superhero session, go through as you pack up to check for broken blocks to repair or recycle.

II. The Human Fly: Use Camera Tricks to Climb Tall Buildings

Materials: Flat surface that can double as the side of a building, or a roll of paper plus drawing materials Still or video camera 1 or more superheroes, appropriately dressed

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III. Alter the Forces of the Atmosphere: Create a Mini Tornado in a Bottle

Materials: Two clean, empty soda bottles, with caps Duct tape Scissors Water Food coloring, glitter, other decorations

Step 1: Prepare the Bottles Controlling a force of nature like a tornado is a superpower that takes great responsibility. In the right hands, however, it is both entertaining and educational. This tornado is made visible by submersing it in a bottle of water. Flip the bottle over and it spills down into the connected bottle but it can't escape (if you make sure the connection is waterproof!). First, fill one of the bottles two-thirds full of water. Add some drops of food coloring and glitter, confetti, or other small decorations for maximum magical effect. Then cover the opening of both bottles with duct tape so that nothing leaks out. Use the scissor to poke a small hole, about the diameter of a pencil, in the same spot on each piece of tape. Then take the empty bottle, turn it upside down on top of the water-filled bottle so the holes align, and use more duct tape to connect the two bottles firmly. The water should flow from one bottle to the other without spilling.

Step 2: Summon the Tornado To make the tornado appear, turn the bottles upside down so the water is on top. Hold the bottom bottle in one spot and swirl the top bottle around. The swishing of the water releases the tornado, which spirals down slowly into the lower bottle. To see it again, just turn the whole thing over and do it another time. And marvel at the power of nature!