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## ***PLAY TAKES CENTER STAGE AT ASTRA'S 2018 MARKETPLACE & ACADEMY***

***ATTENDEES CAN ACCESS FIVE HOURS OF HANDS-ON PLAY, PLUS PLAY  
EDUCATION, CERTIFICATION, AND PLAY SESSION TRAINING***

**Chicago, Illinois** (April 16, 2018)– The American Specialty Toy Retailing Association (ASTRA) announced today that independent toy retailers, sales representatives, and manufacturers registered for [ASTRA's Marketplace & Academy](#) will have more than five hours over the course of the event to play with new-to-market games and kits. In addition, they may earn the Certified Play Expert (CPE) credential during a conveniently-scheduled pre-conference session, learn about play theory, master the role of play in healthy child development, and participate in a mock play class filled with sensory exploration, art, story time, and music on which they can model play activities in their stores.

“What differentiates ASTRA stores from online sellers and big box stores is that independent retailers know games and kits and other toys inside out, and they are passionate about the importance of healthy play,” notes Kimberly Mosley, President of ASTRA. “Since play expertise can give ASTRA stores such a meaningful competitive edge, we encourage members to take advantage of *all* the ways this year's Marketplace & Academy can help independents learn how to ‘own’ play in their markets. It will all be one-stop, easy-to-access learning in New Orleans.”

Play-related activities and education options at Marketplace & Academy 2018 include:

- Certified Play Expert (CPE) Workshop
- Kits Session
- Game Night
- Play Through the Ages!
- Theorists, Thought Leaders & Thinking Behind the Value of Play
- The Power of Play: An Interactive Experience
- Certified Play Experts Present: Become a Community Resource Center
- Safe Play: Human Factors' Impact on Toy Safety

[ASTRA's Marketplace & Academy](#) will be held June 10-13, 2018 in New Orleans, LA, with pre-conference sessions beginning June 8<sup>th</sup>. Visit [www.marketplaceandacademy.org](http://www.marketplaceandacademy.org) for more information or to register.

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### **About the American Specialty Toy Retailing Association (ASTRA)**

Founded in 1992, the American Specialty Toy Retailing Association (ASTRA) is an international not-for-profit trade organization that serves more than 1,800 independent retailers, manufacturers and sales representatives in the specialty toy industry. ASTRA is a community of dedicated professionals committed to providing children with healthy, quality play materials that have high play value and are designed with a focus on what the child can do, rather than what the toy can do. ASTRA members are leaders who, through their businesses, make a positive impact on the economy and culture of the communities they serve. For more information, visit [www.astratoy.org/](http://www.astratoy.org/).

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