

VISUAL STRATEGY GUIDE





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ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book explores the future of Gymboree through a comprehensive brand strategy that combines playful vision, imaginative thinking, and thoughtful planning. It brings together research, positioning, insights and storytelling to define how the brand can evolve, connect with modern families, and continue helping them grow through the power of play. This guide is a conceptual exploration and not an official Gymboree publication.

COLOPHON

- **Written, designed, and produced** by Catherine Dwelley
- **Typeset** in Neulis Sans and Fields
- **Design and layout** in Adobe InDesign with supporting work in Illustrator and Photoshop
- **Image sources** include photography, licensed assets, and AI-generated imagery edited for clarity and consistency



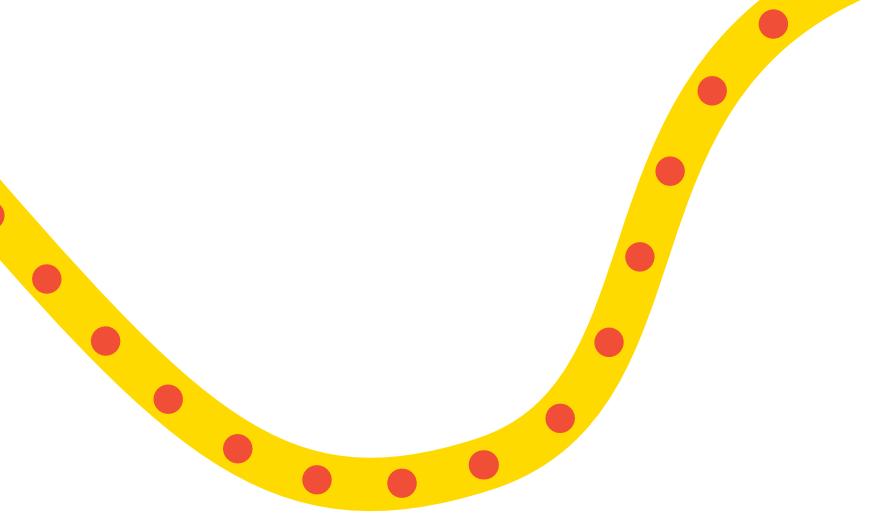
FIFTY
YEARS
AND
GROWING



WHO WE ARE

Gymboree didn't begin as a corporate blueprint, but a deeply personal search for connection.

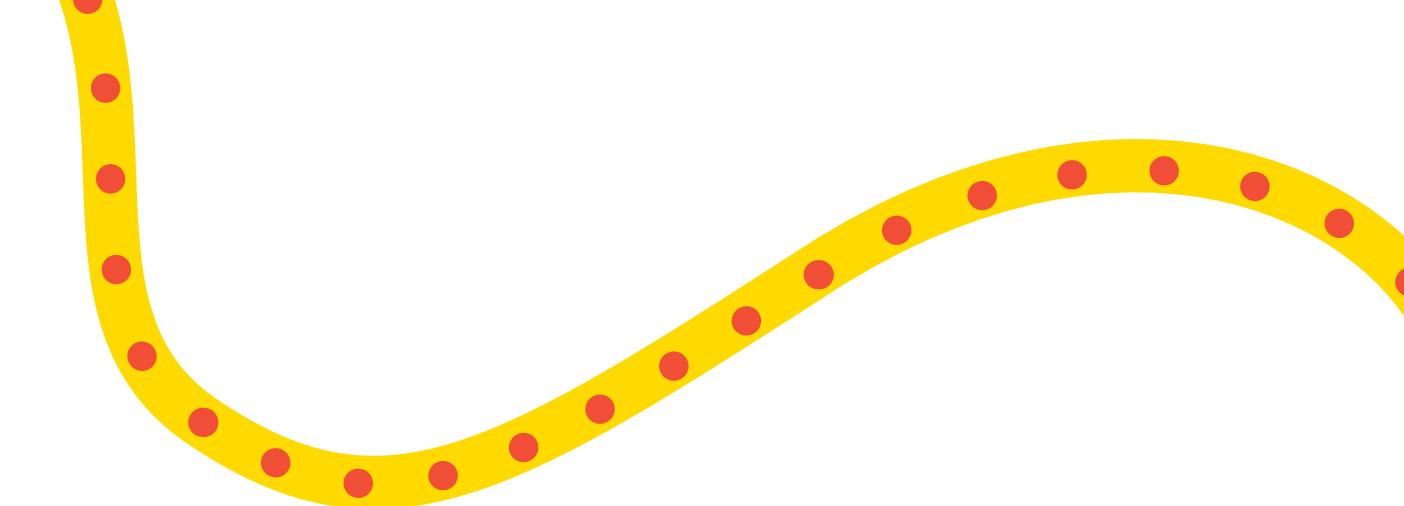
Gymboree's founder, Joan Barnes, often described her journey as a classic entrepreneurial story: a "lonely, isolated mom" who had moved cross-country to San Francisco in the early 1970s, barefoot and broke in a Volkswagen camper, looking for community. In 1973, one of the lowest U.S. birth years on record, the cultural conversation centered on DINKs, double income, no kids, leaving Barnes feeling out of step with the mainstream. A dancer at the time, she stumbled into children's programming at the Jewish Community Center, and from what she admitted were her own "selfish needs," **she set out to create the kind of space she longed for: a play-group where kids could explore and parents could connect.**



Drawing inspiration from consciousness raising groups she had attended back East, Barnes wanted something more joyful than gripe sessions about domestic life.

She envisioned a place where families could gather under the guise of fun for the children, while at the same time parents found much needed camaraderie. This seed of an idea grew into the first Gymboree Play and Music classes in 1976. Barnes created bright, colorful environments filled with padded structures, props, music, and also movement activities that encouraged exploration. It was one of the very first programs to emphasize parent and child participation, helping kids develop coordination, confidence, and self-expression. At the same time, it was also creating a community of support for their families. Parents quickly embraced the model, and Gymboree expanded through franchising opportunities across the United States and internationally by the 1980s.





Growth

As they gained recognition, Gymboree looked for ways to extend its vision beyond the playroom. **In 1986, the company entered the world of retail with its first children's clothing stores.** The clothing reflected the same values as the classes: playful, colorful, durable, and designed for kids who were on the move. Parents who loved the Gymboree experience found in the clothing a natural extension of the brand—comfortable, high-quality apparel that captured the spirit of childhood. What began as a way to serve the families already in Gymboree classes quickly developed a momentum of its own, propelling Gymboree into shopping malls nationwide. **This shift marked a turning point where they evolved from being an experiential, education focused company into what was later to become a retail powerhouse.**

The visibility of its clothing stores amplified brand awareness, but it also complicated Gymboree's identity. Both the experiential and retail arms supported one another, but they demanded different strategies, resources, and leadership. The company's DNA also began to stretch between their original mission, which was all about enriching childhood through play and parent connection, and also the growing demands of a newly competitive retail environment.

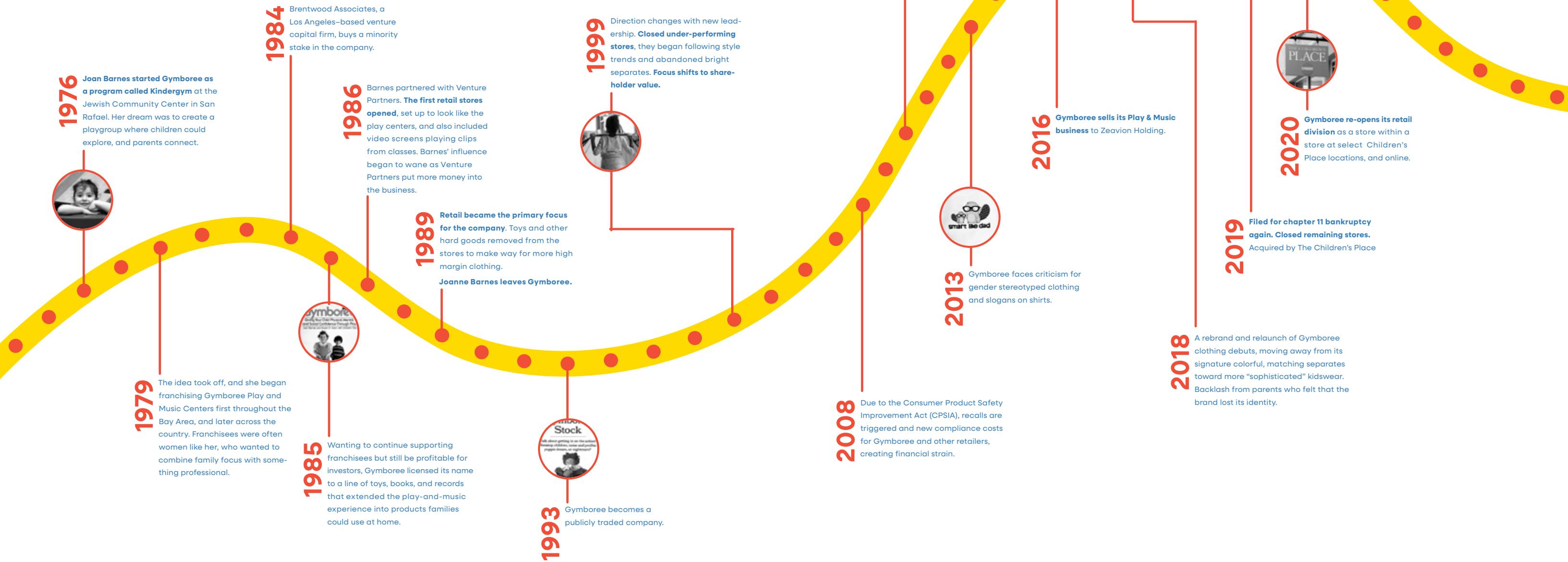
The Future

For decades, Gymboree managed to embody both sides of this identity: a place where families gathered to play and learn together, and a brand that dressed children in clothes that mirrored that playful, energetic spirit. Though the later years would bring challenges, expansions, and reinventions, the heart of Gymboree has always reflected Barnes's first original vision: **to celebrate play as the essential work of being a child, and to help parents find the joy, support, and connection they need along the way.**

OUR HISTORY

FIFTY YEARS

OF PLAY



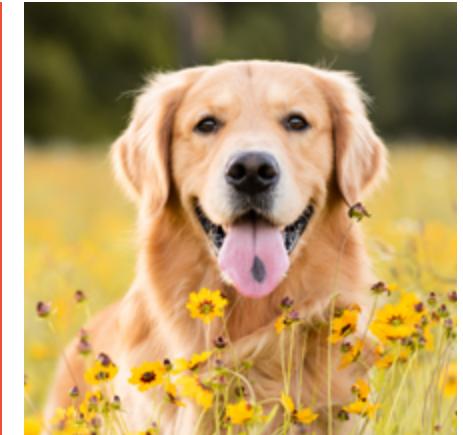


PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

See how Gymboree's brand has been perceived in the past, how it resonates today, and where it's headed—this section offers a visual snapshot of its evolving identity.

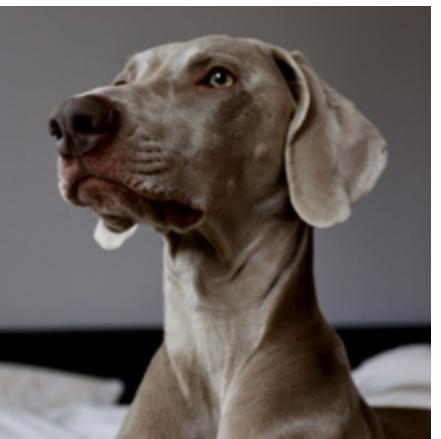
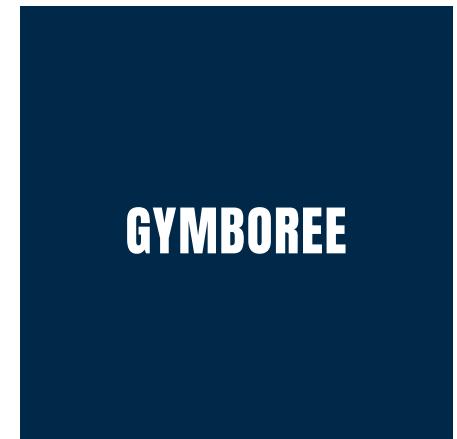
PAST

Gymboree began with a simple idea, play with purpose, shaping early perceptions as a nurturing, developmental space for children and parents.



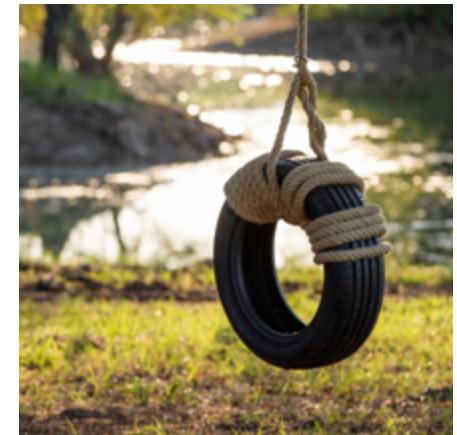
PRESENT

Gymboree's focus has shifted from growth, parental bonding, and community to two separate directions, retail children's fashion and school uniforms on one side, and programs preparing kids for school on the other.



FUTURE

Gymboree has the opportunity to redefine itself, reconnect with families, and also inspire new generations through modern expressions of play and growth.





THE NEW GYMBOREE

The new Gymboree will evolve beyond play and music classes for young children to help foster holistic growth and connections for the whole family through the magic of play.

Our new clothing, products, and services will help busy families support their physical, cognitive, and emotional growth all with a playful mindset.

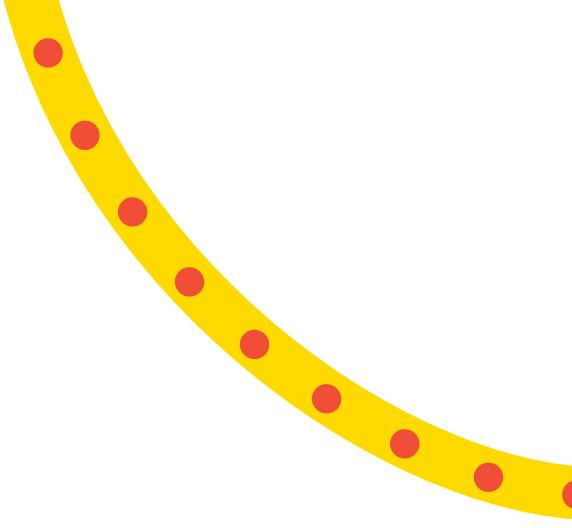
Gymboree will grow beyond brick and mortar locations to help spark playfulness and promote personal growth on your own time, wherever you are. We believe that play is better together, so we'll offer opportunities for family and friends to gather and build communities and thrive.

FOSTER
GROWTH
THROUGH
PLAY.



OUR MISSION

WE SPARK HOLISTIC
GROWTH THROUGH THE
MAGIC OF PLAY—TO HELP
FAMILIES THRIVE, SO THEY
CAN LIVE HAPPIER, MORE
BALANCED LIVES.



KEYWORDS

MAGIC WORDS

At Gymboree, these magic words, or keywords, are part of our playbook. They're words that capture the spirit of who we are, and they guide how we design, talk, and bring our brand to life.

Community

In an interview with *Divine Living Magazine* Joan Barnes said "I felt very lonely and isolated and wanted to solve that problem for myself. So I started a children's play program called *Kindergym* (which later became *Gymboree*.) When it opened, all of the other women like me who had chosen to have families came out of the woodwork also looking for a like-minded community of people."

Holistic Growth

Gymboree states in their *Play-osophy* that their curriculum is based around three key requirements for early childhood development: social/emotional, cognitive, and physical. In other words, whole person development.¹

Discover

A class description for *Play and Music Explorers* reads "Our play floor comes to life with trips to the grocery store, eating pizza, finding animals, and even bugs! We'll use creativity and imagination in all activities. Throw a pretend party, imagine a wild trip to outer space, or pretend to be an ant in a bug's world, and we'll transform our playscape into a whole new world!"²

1. www.gymboreeclasses.com/en/why-us/

2. www.gymboreeclasses.com/en/class-descriptions/explorers.html

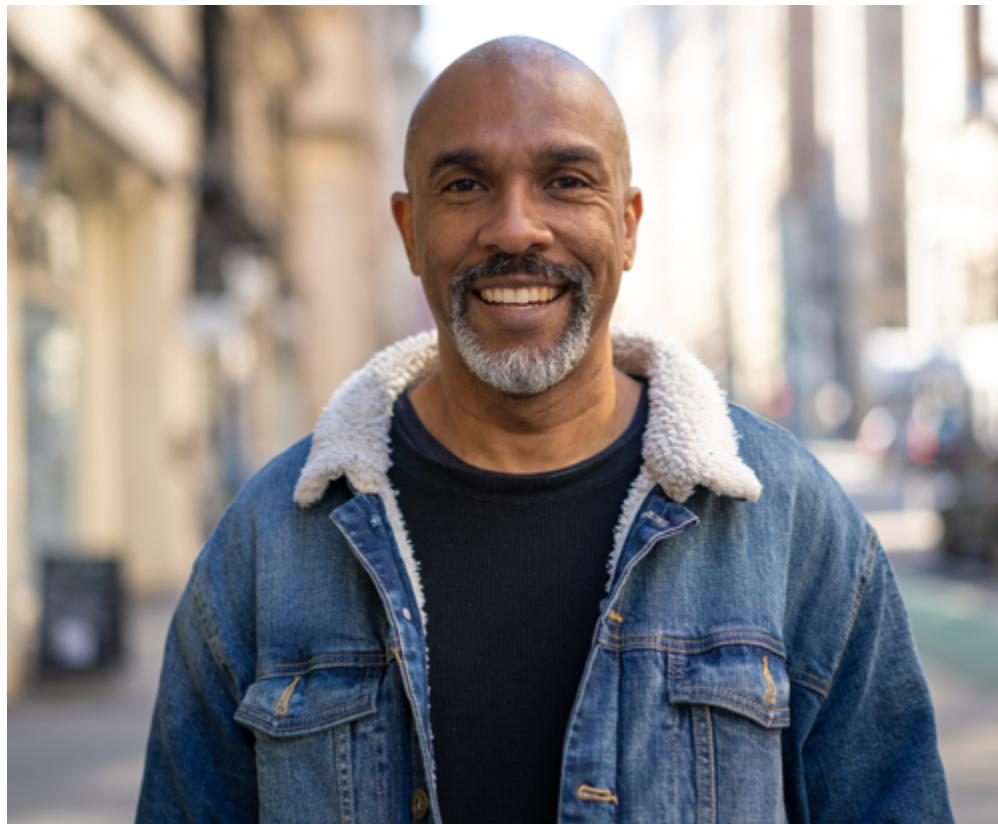


OUR AUDIENCE

A persona is a semi-fictional profile representing a brand's ideal customer, blending data as well as imagination. Personas help to humanize target audiences, clarifying their needs, motivations, and goals in the process. Personas guide design, messaging, and strategy, ensuring that brands are able to stay authentic, customer centered, and connected—building trust and standing out in a crowded marketplace.

CHRISTOPHER WILSON

WEEKEND DAD



Age 44

Location Salem, Oregon

Occupation Truck Driver

Growth Mindset

- Christopher works long hours—coming home late at night and leaving very early in the morning. His kids complain that he's a weekend dad because they only ever see him on Saturday and Sunday. **Because** he wants to be there for his kids, he's now making time to play Mario Kart with them after dinner.
- Instead of zoning out on his phone after the kids go to bed, Chris puts on a yoga video and tries out some flows—**so that** he doesn't get sucked into doomscrolling.

Play Based Learner

- Jake, Chris's son, got the role of Romeo in the school play. Chris is helping him learn his lines by playing the role of Juliet—and getting really into it—**so that** Jake can learn his lines and make some fun memories in the process.
- In order to go on the class camping trip, Charlie has to pass a test identifying native trees. **Because** they're struggling, Chris takes them on a hike to see them in person.

Desire for Bonding

- Last Saturday he took his partner and the kids fishing for the first time **because** he wanted a chance to bond with his family. It was a learning experience for everyone, especially cleaning and cooking the fish!
- Chris's dad taught him to build furniture as a teen. **Because** he believes woodworking is a good skill to have, he's decided to teach his kiddo Charlie how to build a bookcase for their manga collection.

“Turns out I make a pretty damn convincing Juliet! Who would have known that helping Jake with his lines would be this fun? to be honest, I'm learning as much as they are, and that's the best part.”

ROSA HERNANDEZ

WORLD'S BEST GRANDMA



Age 70

Location Menlo Park, California

Occupation Retired

Growth Mindset

- Rose's routine hadn't changed in years. **Because** she felt her life had stagnated, she signed up to be a model for a life drawing class.
- She'd always had a difficult relationship with her daughter, and just started weekly therapy sessions **because** she wants to change her mindset.

Play Based Learner

- Rose isn't motivated by book-learning, so instead of taking a class to learn French, she downloaded a language app and practices with the woman who runs the French bakery down the street, **because** she wants to travel to France.
- Rose loves to learn by doing, so she buys her grandchildren toys that allow them to create something—like build, paint, or program—**so that** they'll have a love of learning too.

Desire for Bonding

- Rose bought BTS tickets from a reseller on Facebook **because** she wants to spend more time with her oldest granddaughter. The seats were terrible, but the both had fun.
- Rose has never been a good cook, but **because** she loves bonding with her grandkids, she decided to try making meals together. Her grandson said "I didn't know a pork chop could bounce, I'm impressed!"

"The best thing about being a grandma isn't getting it perfect, it's all about laughing over failed food, and being present while my grandkids discover the world. If we're laughing, we're learning, and that's all I want."

CHARLOTTE BLUME

STAY AT HOME PROFESSOR



Age 34

Location Laredo, Texas

Occupation Stay at Home Mom

Growth Mindset

- After her mother died, Char decided to get out in the world and **because** she wanted to try something new. She drove all the way to Austin to go skydiving and it's something she'll never forget!
- Charlotte quit her job as a nurse two years ago **because** she wanted to home school her kids full time. Even though the first few months were rocky, she's glad she stuck with it.

Play Based Learner

- Charlotte always wanted to teach her kids herself, partly **because** school was so boring when she was little. She thinks learning should be fun.
- Last weekend the toilet started running, so Charlotte found a YouTube tutorial video **so that** she could fix it herself.

Desire for Bonding

- Charlotte scours Facebook for fun learning games other moms have tried, **because** she wants to create fun memories with her children.
- Being a stay at home mom can be really hard sometimes. **Because** of this, she's glad she has the local mom's group for support.

“Some days I’m making lesson plans, and on other days I’m fixing things around the house. That’s the beauty of it. My kids get to see me try, fail, and figure it out, and we end up laughing and learning a lot together.”

RAHUL SINGH

BIG BROTHER



Age 13

Location Cincinnati, Ohio

Occupation Middle School Student

Growth Mindset

- Rahul's stepmom is having a baby, and he's going to be a big brother for the first time. **Because** of this he's a little scared, but secretly *really* excited.
- After his best friend moved away, Rahul started to write in a journal **because** he just wanted to get his feelings out there.

Play Based Learner

- Rahul recently got his first job caring for a neighbor's dog. He's doing a really good job **so that** his parents will let him get one of his own.
- Over the summer, Rahul took apart an old radio in the garage **because** he wanted to see how it worked. He had a hard time putting it back together, but he figured it out!

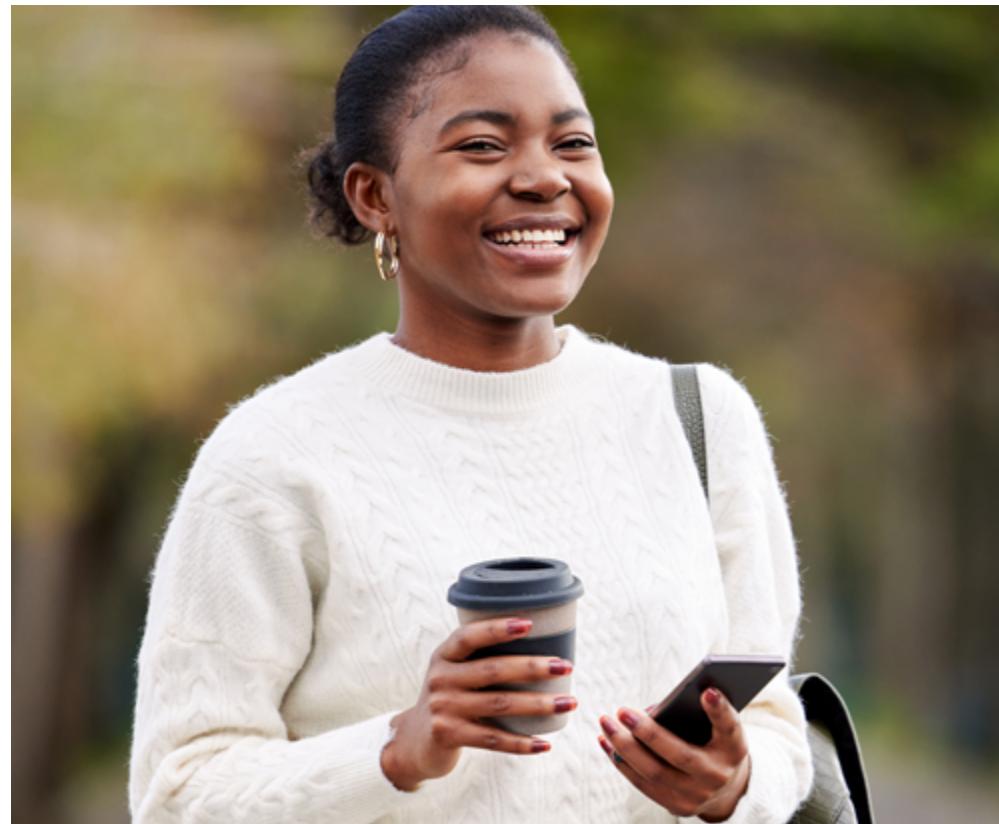
Desire for Bonding

- Rahul's parents finally caved and bought him an iPhone because he said he wanted to learn photography. He actually uses it as an excuse **because** he wants to hang out with his dad and take nature hikes every weekend.
- Every April Fools Day Rahul plays a prank on his dad **because** his reaction makes the whole family laugh. This time, he's going to cover all of the food in the fridge with googly eyes.

"I don't really know what all I'm gonna do as a big brother. Can I teach them stuff? It's all kinda scary, but also pretty awesome. I just want them to think I'm cool."

IMANI DAVIS

NOT-BORED BARISTA



Age 18

Location Lakewood, Colorado

Occupation Barista

Growth Mindset

- Imani originally moved to Lakewood to go to art school, but quickly realized it wasn't for her **because** it was too much work and she's just not that artsy of a person.
- Instead, she's been working at her local Starbucks for a year, and doesn't have any plans to find another job **because** why would she turn down free coffee!

Play Based Learner

- Imani lives by her to-do list **because** she prefers a highly structured day with no surprises.
- She spaces out watching cooking videos on YouTube **because** it's easier than actually learning how to cook.

Desire for Bonding

- Imani is glad to have a place to herself because she had no space of her own at her crowded family home on the east coast.
- Imani isn't really interested in talking to her family or making any close friends **because** she doesn't want to be involved in anyone else's personal drama.

“Why should I stress out over finding a new job when they pay me in free coffee? Like, my to-do list and I are already in a committed relationship, and it involves zero drama.”

ARNEL LIM

CONFIDENT SKEPTIC



Age 57

Location Seattle, Washington

Occupation Contractor

Growth Mindset

- Dakila has it all figured out. He got married, payed off his business, and isn't wasting time with kids. **Because** of this, he's happy with the life he built.
- He feels annoyed when he sees the neighbor mowing with his electric mower, **because** everyone knows there's no contest between gas and electric.

Play Based Learner

- Dakila's co-worker invited him and his wife to their wedding. He is thinking about skipping it **because** he doesn't want anyone to see him dance, and doesn't really want to learn anyway.
- Dakila isn't all that interested in YouTube, **because** he already knows how to do everything he actually wants to do.

Desire for Bonding

- When Dakila told his parents he was starting his own company, they told him he should have done better in school and he could have found a job. **Because** of this, he avoids talking to them.
- He's not really interested in making friends either, **because** he doesn't want to be beholden to anyone. He just doesn't have the time.

"I built the life I wanted. I'm married, debt-free, and no kids to slow me down. I don't need or want to change anything."



BRANDS IN OUR SPACE

Exploring competitors is like peeking behind the curtain—you get to see what's working, what's missing, and where opportunities sparkle. It also helps sharpen strategy by learning from others' wins and missteps, all while making it even clearer what sets our brand apart.

CURRENT COMPETITORS

Gymboree is known for experiential classes for parents and children focusing on holistic growth and learning through play.



The Little Gym

Gymnastics programs to help children learn and grow through play. Focus on physical development while growing socially, emotionally, and intellectually. Includes parent-child classes.



My Gym

Their mission is to love and nurture children through meaningful play, with the intention of supporting self-esteem and confidence.



Music Together

Early childhood music and movement classes bring families together in a community forward and supportive environment.



Kinderdance

Kinderdance blends dance, music, and creative movement with early learning concepts. Programs foster physical coordination, self-expression, and cognitive development for young children in a fun environment.



Childtime

Childtime offers early childhood education programs with a nurturing approach that prepares children for school while supporting physical, social, and cognitive development.



Children's Learning Adventure

Early childhood education and enrichment programs, combining academics, play, and creativity in state-of-the-art facilities that promote curiosity, growth, and social-emotional development.



Kindermusik

Music and movement programs and kits for young children and families, nurturing cognitive, emotional, and physical development through playful, parent-child bonding experiences.



Bright Horizons

Delivers high-quality education and childcare, discovery driven learning supports children's cognitive, emotional, and social growth.



Romp N' Roll

Gym, art, and music classes designed for young children and their parents, nurturing creativity, confidence, and physical development through play.



Zumbini

Zumbini combines music, dance, and play for children ages 0-4, engaging parents and kids together to build movement, bonding, and joy.

ADJACENT COMPETITORS

Gymboree's adjacent competitors emphasize play-based learning as well, but with a greater focus on independent discovery and self-guided play.



Babyfirst

Educational media for infants and toddlers, engaging families with interactive TV, apps, and games supporting cognitive, emotional, and sensory development.



ABCMouse

Digital learning platform for early learners, blending interactive lessons, games, and stories to build foundational academic and cognitive skills.



Storypod

Storypod offers screen-free audio storytelling, music, and movement kits with interactive characters, fostering literacy, imagination, and emotional growth through family experiences.



Melissa & Doug

Imaginative, open-ended toys designed to encourage creativity, cognitive skills, as well as social-emotional learning for young kids



Baby Einstein

Baby Einstein offers multimedia products that promote sensory exploration, early cognitive development, and parent-child bonding through music, visuals, and play.



Lovevery

Montessori-inspired toys and guides, supporting developmental milestones while fostering parent-child bonding through purposeful, stage-based play.



Highlights for Children

Magazines, puzzles, and stories that nurture literacy, creativity, empathy, and family learning through joyful, educational activities.



Big Life Journal

A guided growth mindset journal for kids, teens, and adults.



OutSchool

Online play based learning classes for kids and teens. Provides a range of live classes from academic to those that are just for fun.

ASPIRATIONAL COMPETITORS

These competitors emphasize family bonding and holistic growth, using parent involvement, play, experiences, and activity kits to support development through varied methods.

TINKERGARTEN

Tinkergarten

Empowers parents to offer outdoor, play-based learning experiences, helping children develop curiosity, creativity, and resilience through nature exploration with families.



The Lego Foundation

Creativity and problem-solving through hands-on building, encouraging family play that develops imagination, collaboration, and lifelong curiosity.

headspace



Headspace for Kids

Introduces mindfulness, meditation, and breathing exercises designed for children, supporting emotional regulation, calm, and resilience while encouraging families to build mindful habits together.



National Institute for Play

National Institute for Play promotes research and education on play's role in physical, emotional, and cognitive growth across all ages.

SESAME WORKSHOP



Sesame Workshop

Sesame Workshop blends entertainment and education, addressing cognitive and social learning with warmth. Beloved characters teach resilience, empathy, literacy, and problem-solving, reaching families worldwide.



Kinedu

Kinedu app supports early childhood development with expert-designed activities, milestones, and resources, guiding parents to nurture cognitive, physical, and emotional growth.



Parent Lab

Parent Lab provides science-based parenting tools, courses, and resources that support family wellbeing, helping parents nurture children's emotional, cognitive, and social development.



BabySparks

Parental empowerment app with daily activity ideas to encourage developmental milestones (motor, cognitive, sensory, social), designed for parent-child interaction.

BRAND ATTRIBUTES

Gymboree

Holistic
Uplifting
Harmony
Camaraderie
Thrive

Positive

Physical Play
Bonding
Confidence
Development
Experiential

Neutral

Education
Purposeful
Learning
Experts
Interactive

Negative

Static
Siloed
Competitive
Childcare
Impersonal



GROWING FORWARD...

As we look ahead, this strategy sets the foundation for a refreshed and more resonant future for Gymboree—one rooted in joyful growth, connection, and the power of play. By clarifying who we are and how we show up for families, we open the door to new ideas, partnerships, and also experiences that help families learn, explore, and thrive together. This guide marks the beginning of what's possible, ensuring we move forward with clarity, confidence, and a spark of playful imagination.

SOURCES

Photos

7 Fernando Campos Villafaina **10** *Emily* by Joe Shlabotnik, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0; Gymboree; Gymboree Stock, NYT Sunday; Valmedia, stock.adobe.com; momsrising.org; sheilaf2002, stock.adobe.com; JHVEPhoto, stock.adobe.com **12, 46**
Monkey Business, stock.adobe.com **15** Iryna Bondariuk, stock.adobe.com; sarifah, stock.adobe.com; NoLimitStudio, stock.adobe.com; Manuel, stock.adobe.com; Tanya, stock.adobe.com; oksix, stock.adobe.com; Jelena, stock.adobe.com; Design_Poster, stock.adobe.com **17** CatNap Studio, stock.adobe.com; ImageFlow, stock.adobe.com; nanskyblack, stock.adobe.com; Skrypko levgen; Evrymmnt, stock.adobe.com; Natasha Lebedinskaya; YasumiHouse, stock.adobe.com; Marina, stock.adobe.com **19** Victoria, stock.adobe.com; MARNEN, stock.adobe.com; Ananda, stock.adobe.com; Frances Coridolfi; Leigh Prather; Olesia Bilkei; Ellis, stock.adobe.com; Yeasin, stock.adobe.com **23** Kittichai, stock.adobe.com; **28** Jenko Ataman **30** blvdone, stock.adobe.com; **32** Vesna, stock.adobe.com **34** Xavier Magaña Guerra; **36** paltu, stock.adobe.com **38** Michael Cunningham **40** Mdv Edwards, stock.adobe.com **58** Daxiao Productions, stock.adobe.com

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