

Go outside and play' Zuckerberg tells daughter

Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg has welcomed his second child into the world with a simple wish: that she takes time "to smell all the flowers". Should we all spend more time playing?

In 2015, when Mark Zuckerberg and Priscilla Chan's first daughter, Max, was born, they wrote her a letter in which they promised to create "a world better than ours today". They announced the **Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative**, and pledged \$45 billion worth of Facebook shares to help it achieve this.



The letter to their second daughter, August, was much shorter. "Childhood is magical," they told her. "Don't spend it worrying too much about the future." They advised her: "Go outside and play... take time to smell all the flowers."

Although both letters are full of love, they strike a very different tone. "August might feel a bit slighted by her distinctly lighter welcome," wrote Jenny Anderson in *Quartz*. "But let's face it: Her prescription for life sounds a whole lot more fun."

For the author Steven Johnson, it might even be more important. In his most recent book, *Wonderland*, he argues that history is not just about wars, elections, and sweeping industrial change. It is also about play.

"Because play is often about breaking rules and experimenting... it turns out to be the seedbed for many innovations," he says.

He argues that history is filled with such examples. The artificial intelligence robots we see today began as amusing "automatons" displayed in London during the 18th century. Elsewhere in the city, women's desire for **soft fabrics** was inspiring global trade networks, and men's taste for **coffee** was shaping everything from journalism to the insurance industry.

Game on

Johnson is right, say more playful souls. The best ideas don't come from serious study and lofty intellectualism. They come from being curious, letting your imagination wander, and mucking around without worrying about making mistakes. The advice given to August is not just useful to children — we should all take life a little less seriously.

We live in a serious world, respond others. Frivolity is a nice luxury, but we achieve most of our goals through a mix of hard work and determination. Zuckerberg and Chan's letter to Max in 2015 acknowledged this: "We have a moral responsibility to all children in the next generation," they told her. Those children's lives will not be improved by play alone.



WORD WATCH



ACTIVITIES

1. In *Wonderland*, Johnson defines play like Brian Eno defines culture: as "all the things we don't *have* to do." Write your own definition of "play" in a single sentence.

Soft fabrics – Calico is a cotton fabric that was light to wear, and softer than wool. It could also be printed to make patterned dresses. It was imported to Europe from India, and was so popular in England in the 17th and 18th centuries that the trade was briefly banned to protect local weavers.

Online game – Facemash, which Zuckerberg invented before Facebook in 2003, invited his fellow Harvard students to rate the attractiveness of their peers.