

Kendama fever.

"Practice makes perfect" is a saying that I've heard ever since (1) I was a little girl. To become good at something, you must practice. We all know that. Those of us who are naturally disciplined are quite happy with that saying. Those of us who are not find it annoying. Academics, hobbies, sports, and languages all require loads of (2) practice. Tonnes of practice (3). Here, a recent fashion has appeared that needs a lot of practice. It is the hobby of playing with a Kendama. A Kendama is a Japanese, wooden toy that has three cups of different sizes, a spike, and a ball attached by a string. Children of all ages are begging (4) their parents to buy them. They play with them individually or in groups before and after school. And of course, they compete. The idea, is to flip (5) the ball up so it can land in one of the cups, on the spike, or even balance between the spike and a cup. There are, apparently, 101 tricks that you can master with practice. It's refreshing (6) to see children using a wooden toy, for a change. I'm so used (7) to seeing them with digital, plastic toys that have screens and internet connections, that it is quite surprising to see them play with something that is non electronic, and quite basic. All the creativity comes from themselves, not the toy. We have two, so far, in our house. "Mum, I know a kid who has 32 of them," said my son Cass, as he flipped up the ball of his Kendama with skill. "Why on earth does he want so many?" I asked. The conclusion was that this boy likes collecting, and has too much money. So, the competitions have started at my house. I haven't got involved (8) yet, and I'm not sure if I will, because my children are already way ahead (9) of me. There are formal competitions in Japan, where the skill level is extremely high. I'm expecting to see a lot of practicing here, and I'm quite happy for the kids to do so, as long as it's away from the television and other breakable (10) objects. So, for a while, instead of watching something on a screen, we can have live entertainment in our living room, and see who is the latest Kendama king or queen.

1. 'Ever since' is used on a daily basis in many situations in English.
 - a. Ever since he crashed the car, he hasn't wanted to drive.
 - b. He got promoted, and ever since (then) hasn't spoken to us.
 - c. Ever since he had the operation, he has had more energy and has been able to work.
2. 'Loads of...' is an informal way of saying 'lots of'.
 - a. There were loads of people at the school meeting.
 - b. I couldn't believe how much spaghetti she ate, loads of the stuff!
 - c. You'll need loads of practice to be able to play that piece of music.
3. 'Tonnes of..' is more or less the same as 'loads of', but with a sense of even more.
 - a. Did you say that he owns four hotels? Well, he must have tonnes of money!
 - b. I have tonnes of bills to pay today.
4. 'To beg' is often used figuratively instead of 'to ask for'
 - a. My daughter begged me to buy her a Hello Kitty jacket, even though she already has one.
 - b. I hope I get a raise, but I'm not going to beg for one.
5. 'To flip' describes how, with your wrist, or with your fingers, you can throw something up into the air quickly.
 - a. He read the note and then flipped it to me.
 - b. I'll flip a coin. If it lands on 'heads' I win; if it lands on 'tails' you win.

6. 'Refreshing' can be used to describe a cool drink or cool food, or it can be used to mean 'a nice change'.
- a. Cold watermelon is so refreshing on a hot day!
 - b. His speech was refreshing; it wasn't the usual boring nonsense.
7. 'To be used to ...' is a daily expression that is worth learning. When you are familiar with something, or have had a habit of doing something, then you are 'used to it'.
- a. She was used to getting up very early to milk the goats.
 - b. I have to give myself insulin injections, but I'm used to it.
 - c. We are used to the noise of the construction work; even my baby can sleep through it.
8. 'To get involved' means to take part, to become informed, or to become mixed up in something unpleasant/ dangerous. It can also mean to have a romantic relationship with someone.
- a. I became involved in the movement for the rights of girls to be educated.
 - b. Don't get involved in their argument! They'll upset you!
 - c. She became involved with the main actor, but their relationship didn't last long.
9. 'To be way ahead of...' is an American phrase that is also used in England. It means to know more, or to have gained more skill than someone else.
- a. He's way ahead of me when it comes to computers. He's had tonnes of practice, and I've had very little.
 - b. That company is way ahead of its competitors.
 - c. I'm way ahead of the class because I have already read the book.
10. 'Breakable' is easily understood. It refers to an object that can break.
- a. All of those antiques are breakable; please don't let your dog in there!
 - b. The package said breakable, so the mail man carried it carefully.

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