Children's TECHNOLOGY Review ™

™ **www.childrenstech.com**

Confirm Your In-App Purchase
Do you want to buy one Trunk of Stars for $99.99?
Cancel   Buy

▼ Average rating for all versions: ★★★☆☆ 85 Ratings
★★★★★ 14
★★★★ 13
★★★ 10
★★ 16
★ 32

Dust

- **Why children's IM can FAIL**
- **7 Symptoms of a TRAIN WRECK**
- **Apps that trick kids and take your $**
- **There's no place like the home button**

Children's TECHNOLOGY Review™

After a disaster like a train wreck, it's not uncommon for a flood of experts to arrive to try to figure out what went wrong. But rarely do we step back from a children's interactive media disaster, as measured in terms of irrate parents, damaged corporate image, crying children, or bad ratings, and ask "why?"

26 Reviews

5 star:	(2)
4 star:	(8)
3 star:	(0)
2 star:	(4)
1 star:	(12)

In this month's CTR, we're going to take a closer look at children's interactive "dust" as part of the talk I'll be giving at INPlay http://bit.ly/6jVbBw. This includes seven factors that lower ratings (page 5), the Top Ten Excuses for Bad Ratings (page 6), a closer look at Apple's HOME key (also on page 6) and a proposed Code of Ethics for the Publishers of Children's Interactive Media (page 7). Also on page seven, I write a pretend letter from the creators of Tap Zoo, which is currently one of the top grossing apps in the iTunes App Store.

Comment on the NAEYC/Fred Roger's Center Position Statement on Technology and Young Children

In spring 2010 the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media (Fred Rogers Center) began working on a revision of the NAEYC 1996 position statement. Called "Technology and Young Children—Ages 3 to 8." The document is important for helping us all better understand how to exploit the power of technology for the growth and development of children, while minimizing the downsides. The new position statement, Technology in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8, when finalized, will be issued jointly by NAEYC and the Fred Rogers Center. **Now is the time to review the latest draft and provide comments.** The goal is to publish the revised position statement in fall 2011. by May 31, 2011, to TechandYC@naeyc.org.

May is a great time to build a treehouse

What could be more low tech than a treehouse? That's why it is fun to go online to learn to learn about how to build one. Don't miss this month's LittleClickers, where we explore such things as how to find the perfect tree, and how to make a treehouse that will be around in ten years. See page 4, or visit http://www.littleclickers.com.

The CTR Subscriber Portal is live!

We've done it! The Children's Software Finder has been replaced by the new CTR Subscriber Portal, where you can search back issues and 13,000 archived reviews. Subscribers, if you are having trouble logging in, please let us know! Thanks to Don and Tony for all their help in making this huge step for us. Have a free look by visiting http://childrenstech.com/ctr/ctr-login.php by entering the word "appcamp" for both screen name and password.

Welcome to the CTR Subscriber Portal

To find a review, select "Find" above. To download an issue in PDF form, ...

| Jan 11 | Feb 11 | Mar 11 | Apr 11 |

Directory Grouped by age

All Ages
Wordseek, www.hgappstore.com, 17

Babies & Toddlers
Big Grips Frame for iPad, www.big-grips.com, 15
Fun n Learn Toddler Phone, https://sites.google.com/site/toddler-trainingphone/, 9
MonkeyThinks, www.incandescent-core.com, 17

Preschool & Kindergarten
ABC Wildlife, www.peapodlabs.com, 8
Five Little Monkeys Sitting in a Tree, www.oceanhousemedia.com, 9
Sesame Street: Ready, Set, Grover!, www.warnerbros.com, 17
iLearnWith The Mighty Jungle: Animals! HD 1.0, www.tribalnova.com, 10
Monster at the End of This Book, The, www.callaway.com, 11
SmackTalk (App) 1.3, 12
Tacky and the Winter Games, www.oceanhousemedia.com, 13
Toca Tea Party, http://tocaboca.com/, 14

Early Elementary
Being Benny, http://purplesneakers.com, 15
Bubbling Math for iPad, www.tappytaps.com, 8
Farmer Pete, http://jumpingworldstudios.com, 16
It's Tyrannosaurus Rex!, www.oceanhousemedia.com, 10

The non-profit Mediatech Foundation is where we test and archive review copies of software. Visit **http://www.mediatech.org** *for more information.*

Tap Zoo, www.pocketgems.com, 13
Three Pandas, The, www.seeherestudios.com, 13
Word Wall HD, Punflay, 14

Upper Elementary
Carnival Games: Monkey See, Monkey Do, www.2kgames.com/2kplay/, 9
LEGO Battles: Ninjago, www.warnerbros.com, 11, 16
LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars, www.lucasarts.com, 16
My Word! Reader: Are Bees Smart, or What?, www.wrinkledpants.com, 12
Ridge Racer, www.namcobandaigames.com, 17
Stack the Countries, http://dan-russell-pinson.com/, 12

Middle School
Be Confident in Who You Are: A Middle School Confidential Graphic Novel, www.freespirit.com, 15
Deskplorers, The, www.bulkypix.com, 16
LunchLine, http://playsciencelab.com

Go Online and Learn About Treehouses

Want to build a treehouse this summer? Here are some handy links!

1. I'd like to start simple. Any Suggestions? Visit eHow http://bit.ly/mk7ED0 where you can find instructions for building a very basic treehouse, including instructions for making a rope ladder http://bit.ly/3KWQvG. You might also get some ideas at Treehouse Guides http://bit.ly/1ZygfA or this month's YouTube Playlist, with 14 treehouse related videos http://bit.ly/kRIZeJ.

2. Is it OK to drive a nail into a tree?
No. Remember that a tree is a living thing, and nails could cause an infection or fall out. It is better to us a long, single bolt that goes all the way through the tree, according to the Treehouse Workshop, http://bit.ly/mx5B.

3. What's the biggest treehouse ever made?
If you do a search on "treehouse ideas" you can find all sorts of crazy treehouses, including one that is 10 stories tall! Located in Tennessee, it was built by a landscape architect. You can learn more at Treehugger http://bit.ly/ckGeJT.

A simple plan at Treehouse Guides. Below, the world's largest treehouse.

Stuff you'll need

1. Parent's permission.
2. A tree and a ladder.
3. A plan.
4. A hammer and nails, or cordless drill and outdoor screws and nails.
5. Portable Saw with safety goggles.
6. Treated 2x6x8 boards and posts, plus a lot of scrap lumber and exterior plywood sheets.

CAUTION! Before you start, find out who owns the tree! If you don't have permission, you might have to tear down your project. Also make sure to tell your parents what you are doing.

LittleClickers YouTube Playlist: Treehouses
http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=3C073442012DE8DA
This month's YouTube playlist contains a selection of videos based on topics in this column.

Treehouse Time-Lapse

Tree House in a week

How to Build a Treehouse-DIY

Zip to our treehouse

treehouse

Terrific Tree House Designs

Pirate Ship Treehouse

See this page online, at http://www.LittleClickers.com/lctreehouse511.html

Why Children's Interactive Media Can

FAIL

Carolyn Handler Miller's Seven Kisses of Death

A parent reviewer recently vented on Amazon.com: "Buy this product if you like the sound of crying children!" The review went on to recommend that you "take the $40 you were considering spending on this game and throw it in the trash, tell your 3-year-old that Santa Claus died and Christmas is canceled. You'll get the same result (crying toddler, minus 40 bucks) and save a few keystrokes."

Nobody wants to read reviews like this (especially the publisher!), but when you look at the comments in public forums, you can see that it happens with regular frequency, especially when young children are involved. Here's an attempt to describe some of the most common reasons things fail with children's interactive media.

1. Bugs Perhaps it is due to the large number of novice programmers flooding the app store, but a glance at the comments next to the 1 star ratings reveals comments like "it keeps freezing" or "there's no sound." When kids are involved, nothing makes things go sour faster than a crying or frustrated child, especially when work is lost. This can warp the accuracy of the ratings, because a well-designed product with the best possible content and interactive design can't be rated properly if the hardware isn't working. Developers who release a half-baked product for whatever reason, risk the wrath of irate one-star reviews with a comment like "wouldn't work."
The lesson for publishers? Reality test with end users, and don't release your cake before it is baked. Once your app is live, get ready to stay up late and fix any glitches.

> crashes every time ★☆☆☆☆   Report a Concern ›
> by missre523 - Version 2.0 - Apr 28, 2011
>
> i really wanted this book for my kids, but it crashes on the first page every time,and wont let me see any other pages. 4 dollars wasted. How disappointing.

2. Blurred Control The best children's interactive media products make you feel powerful and in control. The worst clutter the screen with graphics that don't do anything, or ebook pages that flip accidentally. **The lesson for publishers? Remember that if you put something on the screen that looks interesting, a child is going to want to touch it. If it doesn't do anything, you risk decreasing their feelings of control, and increasing the chance that you'll get "Homed."**

3. Too Much Talking Seasoned teachers know this universal truth about kids— "words don't work." So why do some designers start an experience with a mini-lecture that can't be skipped? "TV writer's disease," is what researcher Erik Strommen calls it. He told me that this happens when "the dialogue was written as if for TV, not for interactive media, so it's longwinded and not very focused or directive." When I pointed out this problem to one designer during a product demo, he justified making a child wait because he felt that they'd want to, especially because "it was so good." He then told me "We paid dearly for that Robin Williams narration, and children are going to listen to every word."
The lesson for publishers? Be cognizant of "motivation inertia" when deciding whether or not to let a child skip or not skip the narration. Timing is everything. If the child feels trapped, bored, or being talked at, the chances increase she'll hit the ESCAPE key or HOME.

4. Not Enough Stuff In these days of the free or 99¢ app, it's quite common to see bite-sized activities in iTunes. However, a glance at the app store comments indicates that people will gripe if they feel the app is too light, or doesn't do enough, even if it's free! How can this be? One explanation is that kids are getting increasingly picky about their limited screen time, as the number of "free" options increase. Consider that a child gets a total of 6.3 million minutes of childhood, from birth to 12 years of age. This might sound like a lot, but nearly half of this time is spent sleeping. When you subtract the time needed for things like school and eating, there's a mere 150,000 min-

If you search YouTube on "Seven Kisses of Death" you can watch Carolyn Handler Miller— who once worked with Captain Kangaroo and Carmen Sandiego — describe her seven kisses of death, or reasons many interactive products fail.

1. Kids love anything sweet
2. Give 'em what's good for 'em
3. You've just got to amuse them
4. Alway play it safe!
5. All kids are created equal
6. Explain everything
7. Make sure all the characters are wholesome!

Miller's common message is one of respecting children. She goes on to offer ten "anti-death" recommendations.

1. Devise a way to hook your players
2. Inject meaningful tension
3. Offer genuine substance
4. Create characters who are multifaceted and dynamic
5. Create a system of rewards
6. Make products easy to understand and use
7. Make products that are adjustable to the child's abilities
8. Apply liberal doses of humor
9. Build in meaningful interactivity
10. Respect your audience!

You can watch Miller http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7l-q1NrluY

utes per year remaining (note that the graph to the right considers 12 years). And a lot of that is used for things like music lessons, soccer try outs and so on. **Lesson for designers: If you want a slice of a child's time you have to earn it by being on par with your competition, and that competition can include things like Pokémon, YouTube and Facebook.**

Childhood Minutes, from 0 to 12

5. Bad Graphics and Sound

The three little pigs understood that the quality of a house was related to the quality of the materials. The building materials for children's interactive products roughly fall into three piles: sounds, images and interactivity. The sound is more important than you might think. Living Books inventor Mark Schlichting reminds designers that "good sound can make bad graphics work; but not the other way around." Choosing images that work with the sounds that don't clutter the interactive space is an essential part of the magic. To get a sense of the wide range in quality, search on "Three Little Pigs" in the app store, and download a few versions. Now pretend you're a child. Which do you prefer? **Lessons for designers — Don't skimp on the audio, and make sure your product is slightly better that your competition, through the eyes of a child.**

Disney Epic Mickey

238 Reviews

5 star:	(81)
4 star:	(71)
3 star:	(35)
2 star:	(20)
1 star:	(31)

6. Famous Characters

Another route to a train wreck (or "tw") is to build up a child's expectations with famous characters. Multiply the effect with a huge marketing budget (m), and then serve it up in a quickly created stew of design (bd). Because licensed characters require layers of approval, it can tie the hands of the designer. Want examples? They're easy to find. Disney's **Epic Mickey** wasn't so epic and Mattel's **Barbie Girl Device** required figuring out Windows. An interactive media product can successfully extend a franchise, but only if empowers the child in some way. One example that worked is Disney Publishing's **Toy Story 2 Read-Along** because children can record the narration. **Lessons for designers? If you're working with Elmo, Thomas the Tank, Dora, Barbie or anything Disney, your product must rise to a higher standard.**
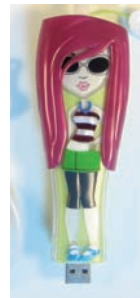
$$(m^2 \times fc) + bd = tw$$

m arketing + fc (famous characters) + bd (bad design) = tw (train wreck)

7. Evil

happens when a developer either forgets they are working with young children, or they purposefully look the other way in order to make as much money as possible or generate page views. **Tap Zoo** by Pocket Gems pairs cute animals with in-app sales, defined on the next page. Ask yourself "what is the motivation behind the product?" and "does the child walk away from the experience with something that is worth the price?" **Lessons for designers. Making money is important, as long as you treat every child as if he or she were your own.**

Top Ten Excuses for Bad Ratings

1. Grumpy people! (referring to customers). They aren't smart enough for our game.
2. Our focus group (my nephews) liked it.
3. But our designer has a Ph.D.
4. We support the whole child with scaffolding and epistemologically correct instructions that insures that NO CHILD WILL FAIL! That's why you can't skip the instructions.
5. Barbie/Mickey/Dora doesn't walk/talk/act like that.
6. Nintendo made us do it that way (or Apple, Sony, Microsoft...).
7. Version 2.1 or 2.1.1 will fix those problems.
8. They need to upgrade their _____ (fill in name of device or peripheral).
9. We paid for that Robin Williams narration. Those kids will listen to every word.
10. It's a beta.

There's No Place Like
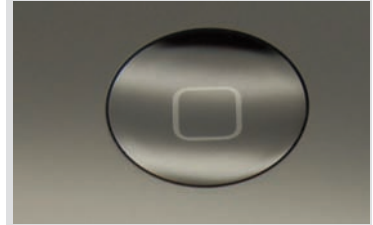
HOME

Apple's HOME button can be a child's best friend, and it's an important element in the magic of the iPad.

The concept behind the HOME button is reversibility — the ability to get out of whatever you get into. Children are experts at figuring this out.

In the olden days, computers used the ESCAPE key and on Windows computers it was CONTROL-ALT-DELETE. Apple has now further simplied the concept so that one button is constant on every iOS device. For children, it has become a powerful force in the interactive relationship created by any app, and it explains why young children have become app browsers.

The indentation provides a tactile constant—like a lighthouse for control— on an otherwise smooth surface.

One press stops a droning narrator mid-sentence. It can replace a confusing screen with clear picture icons with other options. You no longer need to read or wait to change apps, so now a child can browse among apps until they find something they feel meets their needs.

This makes the HOME button the 21st century app "gong," (referring to the 1970's talent show where the judges used a gong to stop a performance. Not enough challenge? HOME. Too hard? HOME. Page not loading? HOME. No surprises? HOME.

For designers, the message is clear. If it doesn't meet a child's expectations, you risk being "HOMED."

Why Tap Zoo is a Morality Fail

A pretend letter from Daniel Terry and Harlan Crystal, who published **Tap Zoo**, currently one of the top Grossing Apps.*

Psssst. Hey you. Wanna make some ca$h? A LOT of cash (like $millions?). Here's what you do, and we promise, no laws or bones will be broken. First, find yourself an innocent slighlty bored 5 to 7 year old kid with an iPad or iPod touch. Now come up with an item that kids can't resist. We've had good luck with cute looking animals— stuff that makes a kid say "awwww!"

Now make a free app with an icon that has kid appeal. That's your lure; design it carefully. It needs to shout "come play with me!" You can copy a game (we used the Zoo Tycoon and FarmVille) and offer up a pair of free gorillas. Make it a snap to download and get started. You need to get the little kids invested and feeling like they own the zoo at the beginning. This is very important. If you want ideas for roping in a child, visit a casino and watch some compulsive gamblers. You can learn how to trick a little kid into wanting to keep playing. For example, every four minutes or so, we deliver a little bit of pretend money, making them think they can buy more animals if they stay with their zoo. It's like a digital M&M, and those little suckers fall for it!

After they are lovey dovey with their gorillas, it's time for the big tease. Show them other peoples zoos, teaming with tigers, penguins, sea turtles, monkeys -- or perhaps even "the Big Castle!" It's mean but it works. You can't have supply unless you have demand, right? Associate the cool stuff with an order form, so those penguin-loving kids start getting on their parents. You see, a six or seven year old kid is too young to understand abstract things like passwords and credit cards. To them, its just part of the "get mom to give me stuff" game that every child is born with. And stop thinking of this kid as a person. She's your mule to get to mommy's bank account. The best part of this whole robbery is that you're going to have Apple driving your getaway car! They keep a cut, but they also cut the checks. Apple is like is your Swiss bank account.

Make sure you use a currency system that sounds fake and harmless. Don't call it "dollars" because that could tip off mom or dad. We use "stars" and one of our competitors, CapCom's The Smurfs' Village, uses "Smurfberries." Another thing you don't want to do is to tell the parents that a simple, functional zoo might cost well over $400, about the cost of a dish washer. Keep these dirty little secrets as hidden and cryptic as possible. Also, sell a lot of starter items for just $.99, to numb them up, so a parent will think, "well, that isn't much, OK, squirt, here's my iTunes password, now keep quiet." Believe me, kids are great at getting that password. We've seen four year olds do it.

The buying part needs to be really thought out carefully. Make it so that when the kid touches the "Buy Stars" you tease 'em with a model zoo, teaming with animals and then deliver them to iTunes as quickly and as frequently as possible. Sure, they'll see the "Do you want to buy one Vial of Stars for $0.99?"warning, and they might hit "cancel" but non-readers have fair chance of hitting "OK." Here's another great trick. Sell stars by the barrel for $99.99! To a kid, a barrel sounds like more fun. Finally, make sure all sales are final. No refunds. How much money can you make? We're over a $million bucks A MONTH! Dude, it's so easy, it's like stealing candy from a baby!

Sincerely,
Daniel Terry and Harlan Crystal, Co-Founders of Pocket Gems (www.pocketgems.com)

Daniel   Harlan

*Note: This is a pretend letter (by Warren Buckleitner) based on existing practices. The photos of Daniel and Harlan are from http://pocketgems.com/about/the-team.php. We appreciate the fact that they didn't attempt to hide their identity, and welcome their response to this letter.

A Code of Ethics for the Publishers of Interactive Media for Children

- I will not sell development, e.g., "smarter, brainy kids," without specific references to valid studies.
- I won't hold a child's past work or experience hostage, as an incentive to renew a subscription or purchase an additional product.
- I'll understand the difference between informing and selling, especially when embedding brand names and/or including in-app sales techniques.
- I won't exploit a tired, flustered parent for my own profit.
- I will identify (with name and affiliation) the authors, writers and developers who created my product.
- I will disclose costs in clear language at the start of the consumer/publisher relationship.
- I'll read and abide by the Consumer Reports WebWatch guidelines.
- If I sponsor a contest that will involve the public school system (e.g., students, teachers, classroom time that is funded by public money) I will not use products with indirect costs (a) require an additional subscription or (b) tease or tempt children with add-on content that costs money after the school year ends. I will also make sure that every child has equal access to the same set of tools and content.
- I will not confuse marketing with educating.
- My product or service will treat every child the way I'd treat my own child or grandchild.

Technology changes quickly. If you want to add a suggestion, send me an email or edit the page directly, and please identify your contributions.

Citation: Buckleitner, W. (2011), A Code of Ethics for the Publishers of Interactive Media for Children, online at http://bit.ly/eo9cui
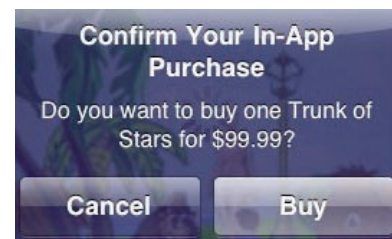
Feature Reviews

Here's an alphabetical listing of new products, along with a full review, ratings and tester feedback. The "Entry Date" refers to the date we first learned of the product.

ABC Wildlife

What if you could turn YouTube into a huge alphabet book? That's the idea behind the ABC series of apps from Peapod Labs -- a well designed touch-based word wall where a single tap leads to a set of 237 continually updated, letter-themed videos. Note that you'll need an active Internet connection to keep the app updated. Don't miss H (Hampster eating popcorn on a piano). Content includes 80 well-screened animal videos (we couldn't find a lemon in the bunch), and several hundred clear photos. For example, H also includes horse, hornet and hippo, each with a video. Source URLS are provided. You can also keep track of the all the animals you have explored. Note, an internet connection is required to play videos in ABC Wildlife. See also ABC Music and ABC Go.

Details: Peapod Labs, www.peapodlabs.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: letter and word recognition, animal facts. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 8/30/2010. [WB]

Ease of Use	9
Educational	10
Entertaining	10
Design Features	9
Good Value	10

96%

Bubbling Math for iPad

Looking for a fast-paced, adaptable, adjustable math facts drill for your iPad? Bubbling Math is a good choice. Children race to touch the right answer to math equations, ranging in difficulty from 2+2 = 4, to division of numbers up to 100, including division by two digit numbers. It is easy to select a new set of problems, say, to zoom in on just one type of math facts, using a task configuration menu. You can also toggle the background music on or off. To keep things interesting, children "fill up" a trophy as they answer problems, and the bubbles move around faster to increase the challenge. Content includes nine graphic levels to unlock, each with different music. A parents screen tracks progress over time, for one player.

Details: Tappy Taps, www.tappytaps.com. Price: $3. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad (15 MB download). Teaches/Purpose: math facts (addition, subtraction, division and multiplication). Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 5/4/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	9
Educational	8
Entertaining	8
Design Features	9
Good Value	10

88%

Carnival Games: Monkey See, Monkey Do

Ease of Use	8
Educational	9
Entertaining	10
Design Features	9
Good Value	9

90%
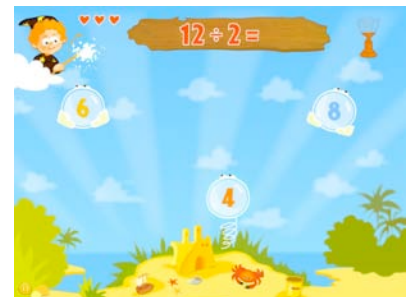
Fun but at times clumsy to control because of the Kinect, this set of 20 carnival inspired games does a good job keeping you moving.

You leap into the air on a Rocket to Mars, catch coins on a roller coaster, twist your body in Crash Test Dummy, avoid tornadoes by pumping your arms as fast as possible in Hot Air Balloon Race, copy a monkey with the Monkey Barker in Monkey See, Monkey Do, and more.

A voice recognition activity allows The Amazing Wodin, a wizard, to advise you of your future. The better you do, the more prizes you can win, including pets and clothing for your avatar. Designed for one or two players. Note that the Kinect sensor is required. All in all, this is one of the better Kinect games with good graphics, sounds and variety. Developed by Cat Daddy Games.

Details: 2K Play, www.2kgames.com/2kplay/. Price: $40. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Xbox Kinect. Teaches/Purpose: gross motor coordination, logic, art, music. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 7/2/2010. [WB]

Five Little Monkeys Sitting in a Tree

Ease of Use	10
Educational	9
Entertaining	8
Design Features	8
Good Value	9

88%

Those silly five little monkeys. Now they've moved into your iPad, with this Oceanhouse Media adaptation of the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt picture book, by Eileen Christelow. Christerlow serves at the narrator.

As with other Oceanhouse Media books, there are three modes -- Read to Me, Read it Myself and Auto Play, and no hidden animations. Instead, the original pictures and words of the story are highlighted, and each story element can be touched to hear it labeled. As a result, this is a very strong early literacy experience that uses the quality of the original story to keep a child's interest.

Options include the ability to turn off the rather busy and potentially annoying background music, as well as a "news" slider, that will turn off Oceanhouse Media promotional messages. There is a link to the publisher home page from the main menu, however that crashed the app on our version 1 iPad.

If you're looking for a quality adaptation of a quality children's book, look no further than the Five Little Monkeys.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, www.oceanhousemedia.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 3-5. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, counting. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 5/4/2011. [WB]

Fun n Learn Toddler Phone

Ease of Use	10
Educational	7
Entertaining	9
Design Features	8
Good Value	7

82%
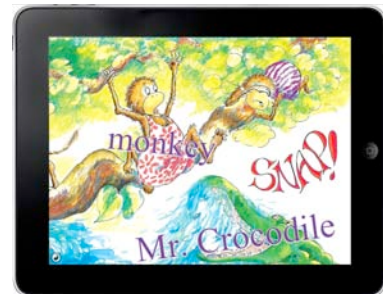
Now you can turn your iPhone into a ... phone, for your toddler. It also runs just fine on an iPod Touch or iPad.

While the design is a bit clunky, you can use it to help a child memorize important phone numbers such as yours or Grandma's. A child can also press an "animals" icon to convert each number key into an animal that makes a sound when touched.

A contact list lets you add custom numbers that are protected from straying fingers with a lock code. When your child enters that correct number, the app makes a special sound, such as a trumpet blast. The app doesn't make real calls, just to be clear; everything is pretend.

Details: Aashima Creations, https://sites.google.com/site/toddlertrainingphone/. Price: $2.50. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: numbers, life skills. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 3/6/2011. [WB]

iLearnWith The Mighty Jungle: Animals! HD 1.0

Ease of Use	9
Educational	8
Entertaining	6
Design Features	6
Good Value	9

76%
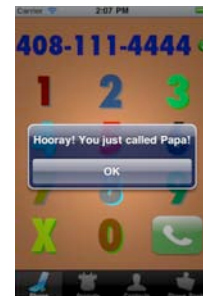
Designed to introduce deductive reasoning using animal attributes, this App give clues such as "lives near water" or "has smooth skin" to help children narrow in on an answer. In the app, the animals are hiding in the jungle and your child has to help Babu the Meerkat find his friends by matching the clues with the animals they have met on their way. Attributes include physical appearance, size, living environment, and eating and sleeping habits.

A child can choose one of three levels at the start. In the easy level, children focus only on outward appearance.

Weaknesses include chatty instructions, which increase in complexity, details and subject covered. In addition, each level adjusts the difficulty based on your child's success rate in the game. The narrator also says "click on the animal" instead of "touch an animal." This is the first iPad app in Tribal Nova's iLearnWith Educational Program, which is a cross curricular game-based learning program that helps prepare children for school.

Details: Tribal Nova, www.tribalnova.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 3-7. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: logic, deductive reasoning, science, animals, classification, sets, attributes. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.8 stars. Entry date: 3/15/2011. [WB]

It's Tyrannosaurus Rex!

Ease of Use	9
Educational	9
Entertaining	8
Design Features	8
Good Value	8

84%

Based on the Palm/Smithsonian book, written by Dawn Bentley and illustrated by wildlife and natural history artist Karen Carr, It's Tyrannosaurus Rex! is a prehistoric adventure for readers in preschool through grade 2. The story takes readers on a fun and educational journey through the Cretaceous period where they are introduced to the idea of how Tyrannosaurus Rex and other ancient creatures roamed the earth.

Strengths include good, accurate content (rare for this subject) that is certainly of interest. The photos and blocks of text are combined with Oceanhouse Media's powerful text magnification system, so you can touch any picture to see it labeled, using the book's print. Weaknesses include an inability to adjust background sounds or jump to a specific page (there is no contents or page navigation feature). Paragraphs of text are narrated, with word-by-word highlighting. It is not possible to touch a word to hear it read aloud, however.

All in all, this is a good language experience, and the book has scientific validity. If you're looking for bells, whistles and perhaps a few growls, however, you're likely to be disappointed.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, www.oceanhousemedia.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: science, language experience, reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 5/3/2011. [WB]

LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars

Ease of Use	9
Educational	9
Entertaining	10
Design Features	10
Good Value	10

96%

ESRB Rating: Everyone 10+, Cartoon Violencem Crude Humor

Great for two players, fun and rather cheesy, LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars fully met the expectations of our testers even if it is at times a bit hard to follow. We tested the XBox 360 and PS3 versions.

This edition follows the same design formula as its two predecessors, as well as many of the other LEGO games. At its heart, it's really a puzzle game. During each level, you control one of a small party of characters. At any point, you can switch which character you control with the press of a button. Different characters have specific attributes, which are needed to solve each puzzle and progress through the game. For example, you may need a Jedi character in order to move a large block into place. Another interesting thing about the game play is that if a character runs out of health, he or she simply jumps back up.

Hard core gamers might find this makes the game too easy, but it's perfect for kids. Instead of the player worrying about staying alive, he or she can focus on solving the puzzles.

Weaknesses to note include a confusing story. While the first two LEGO Star Wars games were based on the Star Wars movies, this one was based on the animated show on Cartoon Network, each level being an episode from the show.

As with any other LEGO game, there isn't any dialogue. All the characters communicate through facial expressions and grunts, so frankly, unless you're familiar with the TV show, it's pretty hard to tell what's going on. Our testers also found that this game seemed to be focusing less on puzzles, and more on slashing up storm troopers. This is fun in its own right, but can get stale.

All in all, LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars is quirky, innovative, and loads of fun, especially when playing with a friend. While it isn't much of a step up from its predecessors, that step was pretty high to begin with, so it still can be enjoyed. If you're a fan of the Clone Wars TV show, you'll find this game worth your allowance.

Details: LucasArts, www.lucasarts.com. Price: $50. Ages: 7-up. Platform: PlayStation 3, Wii, Xbox 360, PSP, Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, socialization. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 2/12/2010. [CWD]

Monster at the End of This Book, The

Ease of Use	9
Educational	8
Entertaining	10
Design Features	9
Good Value	9

90%

Called "Grover Book" in the App Store, this beautifully crafted 12 screen interactive adaptation of the 1971 Golden Book of the same title is sure to make you smile.

Each page contains an animated skit that features Grover (one of the Sesame Street monsters) and his attempts to keep you from turning the page. Why? Because there's a "big scary monster" on the last page. Spoiler: the monster is Grover.

Weaknesses include use of eternally looping sounds (so if your preschooler loses interest, say on page 6, you'll have to hear Grover's anti-page-turning antics which are funny for the first 20 times). In addition, some page illustrations look more interactive than they actually are, inviting touches that lead nowhere.

Strengths include a parenting tips pop-up box, with advice about how to use the illustration to help a child who is afraid of monsters. The print is highlighted as it is read outloud. Other parent features include a "Young Reader" mode that lets you turn on a page turn arrow. Created by Callaway Digital Arts for Sesame Workshop.

Details: Callaway Digital Arts, www.callaway.com. Price: $4. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, dealing with your fear, monsters, language experience. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 5/4/2011. [WB]
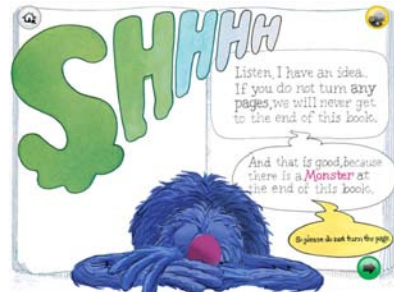
My Word! Reader: Are Bees Smart, or What?

Ideal for children in need of some extra spelling and comprehension practice, My Word! Reader is designed for older readers.

At the heart of the app is a story called "Are Bees Smart" by Selma Wassermann, presented via block paragraphs, with select words highlighted. If you touch one of these words, you can hear it pronounced, and see a tiny animation of the concept.

Content includes six activities that have you spelling words by unscrambling them, matching pictures with words, and so on. The app teaches decoding words, sight vocabulary and phonic skills, and improves comprehension.

Progress is saved. This is the first story in the series and features six learning games.

Details: Wrinkled Pants Software, www.wrinkledpants.com. Price: $4.99. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: spelling, phonics, reading comprehension. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 5/4/2011. [WB]

|		
Ease of Use	8	84%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	8	
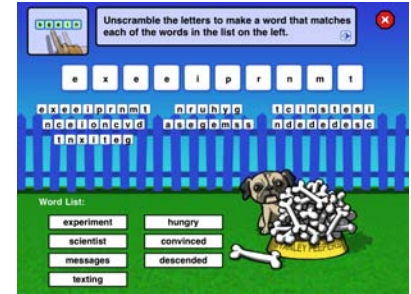
SmackTalk (App) 1.3

See your voice coming out of a Chihuahua with Smack Talk ($1, 2-up), a sound morphing app that turns your iPad into an echo chamber. You say a short phrase, like "have a nice day" and see your voice coming out of an animal, nearly perfectly lip-synced. We've now reviewed three versions, and it just keeps getting better and better. Once your voice is recorded, you can modify the pitch, pacing, and so on. New features include a "Kid Mode" to lock advanced features, the ability to route the audio to the external speakers, better control over the voice "triggers," and a set of sliders to change the pitch. There are now many types of these apps; this is the best we've reviewed, and offers the most features.

Details: Marcus Satellite, . Price: $1.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (microphone is required). Teaches/Purpose: audio, pronounciation, verbal skills. . Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 7/30/2010. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	94%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	10	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	10	
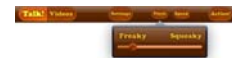
Stack the Countries

Here's a fun twist on an age-old drill that can help you learn the names, locations, major cities and sizes of the world's 192 countries.

Here's how it works. You start by seeing four flashcards, along with a question like "Spanish is the official language of which country." Wrong answers disappear along with an explanation, but correct answers (in this case the Dominican Republic), give the the ability to drop the country onto a platform. The goal is to earn enough countries to build a stack that reaches a high water mark. Because the countries are depicted true to scale, (China is Giant) you learn more than just facts. You also see how complex borders can be, and how much larger some countries are than others.

When you complete a level, you earn a new country that is placed on your personal map. The goal is to win all the countries of the world. Content includes 1,000 questions, 192 flash cards, and an interactive map of the continents. The app can save up to six player profiles.

Details: Dan Russell-Pinson, http://dan-russell-pinson.com/. Price: $1.99. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: geography, countries, country shapes, flags, landmarks and languages. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 2/17/2011. [WB]

|		
Ease of Use	8	88%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	9	

Tacky and the Winter Games

If you've played any of the Oceanhouse Media books, you know how this app functions. The app features Read to Me - words are highlighted as they are read, Read it Myself - read the book in its traditional form, and Auto Play - plays like a movie, automatically reading and turning pages. Other features include: words zoom up and are spoken when pictures are touched, and pages pan and zoom to accentuate the original artwork.

There are no hot spots. From an early reading view, this type of app gets out of the way, and lets a child focus on reading. The interactivity is used to support, and not distract from, the decoding process.

In the story, Tacky and his penguin friends, Goodly, Lovely, Angel, Neatly, and Perfect are training to represent the Nice Icey Land in the Winter Games. When the games begin, Tacky and his friends find unusual ways to compete, like riding Tacky down the hill in the Bobsledless race. Based on the 2005 book by Helen Lester and Lynn Monsinger; published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, www.oceanhousemedia.com. Price: $2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, print decoding, the Olympics, sports, penguins. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 5/3/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	82%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	8	

"Training?" wondered Tacky hopefully.
"As in, choo-choo?"
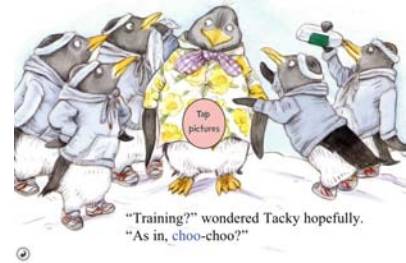
Tap Zoo

Designed to let children build and manage their own zoo on an iPad or iPod Touch, this app combines good design and a child friendly theme with an equally effective ordering system, making it possible for children to buy items for their zoo with real money, providing they have your iTunes password. The app starts by giving you a starter zoo -- a small island with two gorillas. You learn that building your zoo requires coins that are given you in timed doses, or quickly by buying the stars through your iTunes account (for real money).

The money happens as an "In-App" sale, which means you purchase the items from the iTunes app store -- Apple handles the money part-- by deducting automatically from your iTunes account, just like a song or an app. Note that it is possible to turn off the "in-app" sales, and your child must be able to type in your password in order to actually purchase the items. But a child who has your password, and is not aware that there are real costs involved with the game, could run up a large bill unintentionally.

The trouble happens when younger children use apps that use this technique, especially because many items are costly. One item, the Big Castle, costs 1,500,000,000 coins. The actual cost, in real dollars is $1,886,700. Besides buying stars, you can earn money by downloading and installing apps. While the pet simulation is fairly realistic and the themes have child appeal, it is better to stay clear of this zoo.

Details: Pocket Gems, www.pocketgems.com. Price: $free with In App Sales. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: caring for animals, money, economics. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.3 stars. Entry date: 5/8/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	66%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	0	

Three Pandas, The

Inspired by Goldilocks and the Three Bears, this story takes you to a bamboo forest and the home of three panda bears. The goal is to teach you about Pandas, by mixing real facts with the story.

Content includes 60 touchable animations, in 30 pages plus an information page with links about pandas. The music is good but repetitive, and the graphics are photo quality, with well crafted animated sequences.

Features include the ability to toggle between English and Chinese, and features a quality orchestral score, narration and musical sound effects.

Other features include: Read to Me; Read Myself; Auto-play; and the ability to record your own narration, although we found this process to have some bugs. The publisher has a relationship with Pandas International, a U.S.-based nonprofit that works with the China Conservation & Research Centers for the Giant Panda (CCRCGP) in southwestern China.

Details: See Here Studios LLC, www.seeherestudios.com. Price: $3.99. Ages: 2-7. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, pandas, animals. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 5/4/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	82%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	8	

One morning, the three pandas sat down to enjoy their breakfast of bamboo leaf porridge.

Toca Tea Party

Turn your iPad into a top-down view of a tea party complete with slurps and spills, with a real-looking set of tea cups, juice glasses, pastries and so on.

Your child can choose the table cloth, plates and cups to set the table by dragging with their finger. Next they pick their three favorite cookies and cakes, and then get some toys, dolls, or parents to sit around the iPad while they serve the tea or juice. To eat, you tap on a cake to see it disappear -- each tap equals one bite. To drink, you tap on a tea cup. To refill a plate, you drag and drop things around the table until everything is gone.

Content includes nine types of cakes and cookies, new colors for the tableware and fun sounds when their guests eat.

Children can clean up after messy guests who spill, then clear and wash the dishes when done and play all over again. The app features no advertising or in-app purchases. The experience is high in child control, and the sounds add a lot to the play. This is worth consideration.

Details: Toca Boca, http://tocaboca.com/. Price: $2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: classification, role play. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 3/29/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	86%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	9	

Word Wall HD

Reading teachers, take note. Word Wall HD, while buggy in the first version, contains some solid touch-based early reading puzzles.

From a rather confusing main menu, children can touch one of four games or practice with site words or word family groups, by viewing letters and words along with a reference picture and visual cues, to reinforce the association between pictures and words. Each letter and word is phonetically sounded out and repeated to reinforce letter-sound associations. Young readers are prompted to say the words heard repetitively. Content includes 75 sight words and 12 word families with 65 word family words. Activities include assembling a jigsaw puzzle in Jigsaw Words, playing a memory match game in Hide a Word, See and Find, and Bubble Words. For the price (a buck), this is worth the download; assuming the bugs are worked out.

Details: Punflay, . Price: $0.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: early reading skills. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 5/3/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	7	84%
Educational	10	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	8	

Future Releases

This section contains a listing of products in the process of being reviewed, but not yet rated. We also include significant updates of older products.

Be Confident in Who You Are: A Middle School Confidential Graphic Novel

This is a 49 page digital graphic novel based on Book 1 of the Middle School Confidential series by Annie Fox and illustrated by Matt Kindt.

In the comic-strip-style pages, children can follow six teens as they try to figure out what middle school is all about. The stories deal with teen issues, like self-esteem, body image, stress, emotions, friendship issues, peer approval addiction and bullying, and it provides solutions. You can zoom in for frame-by-frame reading, or zoom out again for a page-by-page view, which is a nice touch. The auto-save feature remembers your place in the story and the menu page lets you jump to any of the eight chapters.

Other features include: page swipe or touch page edges for navigation; Meet the Cast pages, the ability to email characters and they'll write back and two reading modes: full page or frame-by-frame. Developed by Electric Eggplant for Free Spirit publishing.

Details: Free Spirit Publishing, www.freespirit.com. Price: $3.99. Ages: 11-14. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, logic. Entry date: 4/12/2011.

Being Benny

This is one of those "if you liked the book, you'll like the app" types of ebooks.

In the story, you join Benny, a bored boy with an active imagination. Each page shows Benny in a different scene, pretending to be a tree, rocket, dinosaur, apple pie, and so on.

Features are limited -- you can touch a sentence to hear it read aloud -- there are no word/sound labels, plus read to me and read it myself modes. The production seems a bit home-spun, but the story idea is interesting.

Details: PurpleSneakers, http://purplesneakers.com. Price: $0.99. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Entry date: 3/28/2011.

Big Grips Frame for iPad

Preschool teachers and children's librarians, take note: The Big Grips Frame ($35, www.biggrips.com) tightly encapsulates your iPad in an inch-thick wrapper of squishy, high density foam, without blocking important ports, controls or sensors.

For a preschooler, the frame makes the rather slippery iPad much more toy-like, especially when used with apps that demand shaking or tilting the screen. The thick edge also protects your iPad when dropped on the floor, and it prevents unintentional bumps on the on/off or volume button. It also looks like it would float rather nicely in a pool; although I didn't test this idea.

The frame fits snugly into the Big Grips Stand ($25), which can hold your iPad in horizontal or vertical position for desktop use.

Available in four colors (green, blue, pink and gray), the non-toxic foam can be washed with soap and water, and it looks like it could hold its own with teething toddler. A slightly thinner iPad 2 version is planned with camera holes.

Details: KEM Ventures, Inc., www.biggrips.com. Price: $35. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPad 2. Teaches/Purpose: an iPad peripheral and frame. Entry date: 3/24/2011.

Deskplorers, The

Complicated but fun, Deskplorers is a collection of zany stories and mini games based around the ideas of trust, helping one another and respect.

Children read the story and look for the objects that characters are seeking to help them on their way. Each story has six chapters, which must be unlocked by finding the right objects scattered throughout the Catalog. The game will be released in five episodes, two of which are available now. Episode Zero: Jump in a Book is free. Episode One: Knights is $1.99. Developed by Happy Blue Fish.

Details: Bulky Pix, www.bulkypix.com. Price: $free. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: logic, memory, fine motor movement, matching, rhythm. Entry date: 4/13/2011.

Farmer Pete

This crudely designed math facts app is based on songs & concepts which Number Fun Ltd has been distributing to primary schools throughout the UK for years. Content includes four games in which you help Farmer Pete tend his sheep.

In Find My Sheep you must help Farmer Pete's sheepdog Hugh find the sheep by tapping where you want him to go, and tapping the search icon if you think he is near a sheep. If he finds a sheep it will run back to the pen and you continue until all the sheep are safe. In Dancing Sheep, there are ten sheep left in the upper field dancing in time to the lyrics of Pete's song and the quicker you tap them when they start the more points you score. You can even score points by tapping the ducks that fly past just to distract you. The third game, Wash My Sheep, has you cleaning the sheep by dragging the right number of sheep who can get washed onto the sheep-o-matic and closing the gate when you've matched the number. If the number is too high or too low they will all escape into the field again and get muddy. And in Feed My Sheep, the sheep need feeding. They are very fussy and some like ice cream and some like jelly. You must tap a sheep, tap the table where you think they'd like to sit, then ring the dinner bell to see if you've got the number bond right. If you are wrong the sheep will bleat their complaints and some will get up from the table. This app has good intentions but suffers from poor design.

Details: Jumping World Studios Ltd., http://jumpingworldstudios.com. Price: $0.99. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad, iPod. Teaches/Purpose: numbers, math. Entry date: 10/27/2010.

LEGO Battles: Ninjago

Based on the LEGO Ninjago toy line, this game lets you build an army and use Ninja fighting skills to overcome sinister Skeleton adversaries. The game features six battle modes in addition to two from the original LEGO Battles game. You can create and upgrade Hero units and deploy troops on missions while using spells to unleash special attacks on enemies. You can play in single-player campaign or challenge a friend in local wireless DS multiplayer battles, fighting as either the Spinjitzu heroes or Skeleton villains or the bonus hidden hero characters to see who will dominate.

Details: Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, Inc., www.warnerbros.com. Price: $30. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Entry date: 4/29/2011.

LunchLine

LunchLine is an iPad app designed to teach kids about their personal nutritional requirements and how to balance their meals to meet those needs. You start by entering your physical characteristics (height, weight) and then must pick food from the LunchLine to fill up your food pyramid. There are about 400 foods in the database, real foods that kids encounter daily including Ramen Noodles, Meatball Subs, Teriyaki Chicken, etc. The closer you get to meeting your nutritional requirements, the better your score.

Details: PlayScience, LLC, http://playsciencelab.com. Price: $1.99. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: healthy eating. Entry date: 4/12/2011.

MonkeyThinks

This free voice recognition app makes your iPad or iPod Touch listen for voice accuracy. It shows you an item, such as a banana, and asks you to say the word outloud. If you get it right, you get another time. There is no menu or escape -- the app just starts. Note that the iPod Touch requires the use of headphones with a microphone. The voice recognition is powered by CMU Pocketsphinx library, and Politepix's OpenEars. More word sets to come in future releases. Created by Incandescent Core, LLC. http://www.incandescentcore. com/monkeythinks/

Details: Incandescent Core, LLC, www.incandescentcore.com. Price: $free. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, 16 MB. Teaches/Purpose: vocabulary. Entry date: 4/12/2011.

Ridge Racer

Testers liked the 3D look of this racing game, for up to four players using Nintendo 3DS Local Play. Content includes classic tracks, American muscle cars and customization options.

The 3D graphics make it look like dirt flies through the screen. Other multi-player features include the ability to use a registered Mii or your own photo during a race.

Details: Namco Bandai Games America Inc., www.namcobandaigames.com. Price: $40. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: racing. Entry date: 3/25/2011.

Sesame Street: Ready, Set, Grover!

Designed to teach "good health habits for life" Sesame Street: Ready, Set, Grover! will be available for Wii and Nintendo DS in summer 2011. In the game, Elmo and Abby jump over obstacles, row a boat, and play "Grover Says," all while learning life lessons on physical activity, good nutrition, personal hygiene, and rest and relaxation.

Extra items in the game box include a controller sock, and a jumbo click stylus "designed for smaller hands." A "Parent's Page" tracks progress and lets you set time limits on play. Up to three player profiles can be set. Created for Sesame Workshop and Warner Bros. by Griptonite Games. See also the poorly designed Sesame Street: Elmo's A-to-Zoo Adventure and Sesame Street: Cookie's Counting Carnival.

Details: Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, Inc., www.warnerbros.com. Price: $call. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Wii, Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: physical education, gross motor, health. Entry date: 5/4/2011.

Wordseek

This is a collection of 20 word search puzzles. Players need to find all 12 words in a grid by stroking the letters to identify the words within the time allowed. When a word is successfully uncovered it is highlighted and you hear a success beep. When the puzzle is completed and all words are found, the clock stops and you get a round of applause. You are then asked if you want to buy more app packs ranging in price from $.99 to $1.99. Developed in partnership with Eye to Eye Media.

Details: HG App Store, www.hgappstore.com. Price: $free. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: . Entry date: 5/3/2011.