Expert Guidance on Children's Interactive Media

Inside:

- The Best Alphabet Book Ever (and Why)
- LittleClickers: Sites and Videos about Ice Cream

TECHNOLOGY Review

• Lessons from Toca Boca

Children's

• 52 Farm Fresh Reviews

apple Control Control

Children's Technology Review October 2011

Vol. 19, No 10, Issue 139

ABC Food*, page 7 Big Buck Hunter Safari, 18 Cars 2 World Grand Prix Read and Race, 7 Cinderella – Nosy Crow Animated Picture Book*, 8 ClickySticky Cars, 8 Club Penguin: Puffle Launch*, 9 Core Reading with Jazzles, 18 corefx Creative, 18 Crayola Creative Studio, 19 Crazy Machines, 9 Disney AppMates, 19 Disney Pooh's Birthday Surprise, 10 Explore With Farmer Jon, 10 Gabrielle's Ghostly Groove 3D, 19 Happy Feet Two – The Videogame*, 10 Harold and the Purple Crayon*, 11 Harry Potter Film Wizardry*, 11 Helicopter Taxi, 11 InnoTab*, 20 Kid-Tough See Yourself Digital Camera*, 12 Kidlandia Kingdoms Online Digital Plavground, 20 Kirby Mass Attack*, 12 Kung Fu High Impact, 20 Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword, 21

Let's Rock Elmo*, 13 Lego Life of George*, 13 Little Critter's Little Red Riding Hood, 14 Little Explorers Firehouse Adventure, 14 Little Reader Deluxe, 21 Mario Kart 7 (3DS), 21 Mercury Hg*, 14 Moments Ago, 22 My First Disney Princess Singing and Storytelling Belle*, 15 Nickelodeon Nicktoons MLB*, 15 Pac-Man & Galaga Dimensions, 22 Querty Town, 22 Reel Fishing 3D: Paradise, 22 Rock Star Mickey, 15 RockSmith: Auth. Guitar Games, 23 ABC Food (Peapod Labs)

Simon Flash, 23 Spy Net Stealth Recording Video Glasses*, 23 Star Fox 64 3D*, 16 Stella and Sam Story Pack*, 16 Ticket Store Game, The, 24 Tiger Woods PGA Tour: The Masters, 24 Twinkle Twinkle 1.0, 16 Weird Al Yankovic's When I Grow Up, 17 Woogie, 24

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News & Commentary on Children's Technology



X Can Be More Than Xylophone. Finally.

Walk into any book store or library, real or virtual, and you'll see dozens of alphabet books. Each follows a similar plan—one page per letter, and the author tries to bring as much meaning as possible to that letter— also known as an abstract symbol associated with a phonemic sound. Over the years, there have been some very creative approaches to alphabet books, but somehow A is almost always something related to an Apple or an Aardvark and "X is Xylophone." A Chicago based app publisher has thrown down the ABC book gauntlet, by leveraging the iPad's crystal clear touch screen with the ability to fetch letter-related YouTube videos. So now, X can be XO Sauce, with a movie. Finally. See the review of Peapod's **ABC Food** on page 7.

Making Multi-Touch Toys: The Toca Boca Approach

When trying to figure out how to capture magic in children's apps, Swedish app publisher Toca Boca brings a refreshing new approach to children's publishing. What makes the Toca Boca special is that it came out of a 200 year old company, with a long tradition of making very traditional books. Recently, Toca Boca's CEO Björn Jeffery was in the United States when he dropped by my office for some tea. The Toca Boca story is on page 5, or you can watch the interview on YouTube <u>http://youtu.be/PiVBVVnHtmk</u>

LittleClickers: Online Lessons About Ice Cream

Can you name the three most common ingredients in ice cream? (Answer: cream, sugar and eggs). OK, that was easy. But do you know why ice cream can give you a headache? Or how an ice cream recipe differs from gelato? Find the answers in this month's LittleClickers, on page 3.

Kid Tablet Wars

Don't miss the review of the \$80 InnoTab on page 20, which performed significantly better than the camera equipped \$100 LeapPad Explorer. Both, however, fall short of the \$210 iPod Touch 4 when considering the cost of apps and responsivity.





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Can you name the five most common ingredients found in all ice cream? Do you know why ice cream can give you a headache? Bring on the answers!

1. What's the difference between ice cream and Gelato?

Gelato is a lot like ice cream, but it smoother and more gooey, because it contains more egg yolks (the yellow part of the egg) and less fat. Learn more at <u>http://bit.ly/I7HiW</u>

2. Why do I get a headache when I take a big bite of ice cream?

You may have "brain freeze." According to www.kidshealth.org (http://bit.ly/oG8gaJ), the roof of your mouth, called the palate, is full of nerves. When they feel something really cold, they send a rush of blood to your brain, causing your head to hurt. Don't worry, its not dangerous and it goes away as soon as your mouth warms up. To avoid it, just take smaller licks.

3. Q. I've noticed that ice cream stores and cafeterias have giant soft serve ice cream machines. I want one in my house! How much do they cost?

A: A lot. There's a lot to these machines, including a freezing system, mixer, pumps and valves. One machine can easily cost as much as \$8,000. Learn more at SaniServ (www.saniserve.com).



4. T/F Is it possible to make ice cream and play soccer at the same time?

A. True! The Play & Freeze ice cream maker is like a rolling ice cream mixer and freezer. After you fill it up the center with your egg/sugar/cream mixture, you fill the outside with salt and ice, seal it up, and roll it around. You can buy one at Walmart for \$25 http://bit.ly/gyPYZ7. See other models at

http://www.icecreamrevolution.com

5. Which is stronger, a waffle cone or a sugar cone?

The answer is in this video http://youtu.be/_f7-Eq4H0D8, but if you said sugar cone, you'd be right!

6. Which two ingredients are not found in ice cream.

A) Eggs B) Cream C) Sugar D) Flour E) Ice

Answer: D and E. There is no ice in ice cream! There is no flour, either. Ice is used only to freeze the sweet mixture. At Teachnet.com

(http://bit.ly/fcLXWu) you'll learn how the salt and ice combine to create lower than freezing temperatures. But, the salt and ice never touch the actual ice cream.

WANT MORE? Take a quiz, at <u>http://www.factmonster.com/guizzes/icecream/1.html</u>

You Tube LittleClickers YouTube Playlist: Ice Cream

http://www.youtube.com/user/childrenstech#grid/user/934102DE83099A90







14 438 views



ShowMeTheCurry

608 210 view



Palate

Tonque

Oral Cavity

CHOCOLATE ICE **CREAM - VIDEO** robjnixon 145.491 views







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908-284-0404 (9 - 3 PM, EST).

Recipe for No-Cooking Vanilla Ice Cream

Want to make your own ice cream? It's pretty tricky, so ask your parents first. You can see some recipes here http://bit.ly/I7HiW or watch http://youtu.be/zOlx9QclMns

This recipe makes 1 ½ pints.

- 2 eggs ¾ cup sugar
- 2 cups of whipping cream 1 ½ cups whole or 2% milk 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
- A pinch of salt

Mix the eggs really fast (whisk) until they're light and fluffy and add the sugar a bit at a time (keep mixing!) Now add the cream, milk, and vanilla. Mix some more. Put the mixture in a small zip lock bag, and place in a large zip lock bag full of a salt and ice. Start stirring for 15 to 30 minutes (check to see how it is freezing). You can also use a commercial ice cream mixer -- its a lot easier! Mix in fruit or candy for variety.

See this page online, at http://www.LittleClickers.com/lcicecream1011.html



Making Multi-Touch Toys: The Toca Boca

Approach by Warren Buckleitner

In my ongoing search for quality in children's interactive media, the funny name Toca Boca keeps coming up. All of their six apps have received high ratings on our instrument which is a rare accomplishment for any startup.

So when I was asked by a PR firm if I would like a visit from one of Toca Boca's founders (Björn Jeffery, the CEO), who was in the United States on a media tour from Sweden, and who was willing to take a commuter bus to spend the afternoon in Flemington NJ, I invited him to tea. Afterall, isn't that what a person does when having an international visitor? I also turned on my camera. You can watch the full interview on YouTube http://youtu.be/PiVBVVnHtmk

TELL ME THE STORY OF TOCA BOCA

I was doing research and analysis with a small R&D team for our parent company, Bonnier. We were doing this magazine prototype project, studying what happens when technology meets people. We released this protype video that came out the December before the iPad came out. It did really well because people thought it was a hardware prototype. But it wasn't -- it was just a piece of cardboard with a video rendition on it, so it looked like this amazing iPad-like device.

But it got great attention which was interesting. Once the iPad came out the thing really took off, and I started looking at some other things. We then had a combination of insights, and it was the tablet that really opened our eyes to it. When touch screens enter the homes of people, suddenly children -- very young children, can have their first interactive media experience because the interface actually works for them. And suddenly people can afford them. There were so many kids playing with their parents iPhones, but this [holding an iPhone] is an intrinsically personal device... something you lend to a child and get back. The iPad changed this dynamic because it's meant to be shared, so we started looking at what happens when kids, siblings and parents play together.

HOW BIG IS THE TOCA BOCA TEAM?

It's about ten. I started it with my producer Emil Overmar who is one of the driving brains behind it. He's been playing with his own kids for a long time. Together we dug into blockbuster toy design to better understand different types of play. We then mapped out the App store using play patterns, and didn't find experiences that met the way children play, which seems slightly strange. There are a disproportionate number of apps that are games, designed for linear play, or are that just aren't very good. We started looking at models for physical toys to better understand how to make products to fulfill the potential of the iPad.

We have technical prerequisites that are amazing.. gyroscopes, GPSs, accelerometers and cameras -- all sorts of things that weren't intended to be used for toys, but can be. Our job was to build a team to merge these two worlds

Initially we met people who had done games -- Sweden has quite a game tradition, but then we met people who were really good at understanding kids. We quickly realized that we didn't really need game designers. We needed people who know kids.

"We quickly realized that we didn't really need game designers. We needed people who know kids."



"What's fun about a tea party? It's fun to eat and serve people, but it's very fun when somebody spills. So we increased the frequency of the spills."

What They Believe (from www.tocaboca.com/about)

We think digital toys and games for kids often lack many things that you as a parent should be able to expect. Therefore we have six guidelines that we use to make sure all our products are as good as they can be:

1. A balance between the different needs that kids have

Kids have many different emotional needs, and we believe that digital products should try to address a wider spectrum of these than just playing games or teaching ABC. Used correctly, digital products can be an amplifier or synthesizer of kids emotional development too.

2. We think it is important to play. But not just games We believe we can make digital products that can be a part of, and facilitate, different types of play. On screen, and away from the screen too.

3. Products that allow you and your kids to play together Far too often, digital products are used as pacifiers for kids. We believe there is a place for digital products that allow kids and their parents to play together. More fun for both of you!

4. A positive view on technology

We believe that the development of technology is something positive, and that it should be embraced and used for good.

5. A safe digital environment for your kids

We believe safety should come first when your kids are using our products. That's why we don't have banner advertising or in-app purchases for kids in our products.

6. You will like our products, but your kids will love them We make products for kids, and our highest wish is to make them smile. When we develop products we test and co-create together with children to make sure that they like everything about them. No matter what the purpose of the product is, we believe that it should also start with a smile.

HOW MUCH DO KIDS SHAPE YOUR PRODUCTS?

About half of our team have kids. They helped us realize that maybe we should be making digital toys rather than games, that stimulate certain types of play that's not necessarily winning or losing.

WHERE DID YOU GET YOUR NAME?

One of our designer's daughters thought it we should be called "Rainbow Teeth." We didn't know why, but that was her very firm idea. We did have this branding idea that we would use some sort of mouth. It's a fun character and it's playful, but Rainbow Teeth didn't pass through the trademark filters very well. So, we started



to think about other things that were related to the mouth, and the Spanish words "touch the mouth" is "toca la boca." That's where Toca Boca came from. Its easy to spell, say and

completely unique. And, it sounds fun. I actually got a tweet the other day that said that Toca Boca was one of her kids first words.

Why start from scratch when you work for company that has so many existing brands and characters?

Bonnier has made kids' books for years, and has all kinds of rights, so if we wanted to go down that road it would've been very easy to do. We didn't feel this was a very honest way of taking this on. Media companies have made all sorts of mistakes trying to digitize what they already have rather than looking at what consumers are doing, and what they really want.

Talk about your development process

Our development process follows several steps. It starts in the ocean, which is the idea bank, and that's evolutionary. From the ocean it goes to the river, and then it goes to the mud which is the serious testing. Then from the mud, the ideas get fewer and fewer. We have more testing with kids, which includes mud wrestling to see if it is really going to work. If it makes it to this stage, it moves on to the beach which is preproduction. We then to the grass which is production and hard core crunching. Then we end up with a digital prototype. Now we can start testing for real. We film this with kids, and watch carefully to see how a three year old responds to it. Finally it goes to the twig, and then it's in the air, on to sales and marketing.

Talk About Working With the App Store

We've designed our company around the app store. That's usually not how traditional media companies think. Apple charges us 30% of our net revenue, which seems like a lot. But, for me, the 30% in commission gives us access to hundreds of markets. How would I do that otherwise? Do you know that we're the fourth best selling market for us is Kuwait? That's crazy. I've never even been to Kuwait! The app store isn't just about one little country. It gives you access to the world.

What about pricing?

That was another part of the first six month's experiment. What's the difference between \$free and \$1? A lot. It's a balance act that makes me very analytical. I think and I hope that people that find our brand, which is our bet, and that maybe that could lead to parents being willing to pay a bit more. Starbucks Coffee costs \$4. Buying an App for \$4 is a lot for a family, so it really has to be good. It's almost irrational, but that's the market we're in, and I have to prove my point that this is high quality stuff.

What are your thoughts about in-app purchases?

It's a brilliant mechanism if you're doing products for adults. It's great. I like the idea that you can add on things as you need it. But that doesn't work for kids. It's not OK to push sales on kids who don't know what they're doing. I don't think that's fair play.

So what's the magic of Toca Boca?

Our team. We hand-picked a combination of iOS developers, childexperts, artists and freed them from the sterile banks where they had been working. We all work in the same room, and we do a lot of video taping make sure we're on track. We continually film the kids and refine products. Parents have to like it, but the kids have to love it. It can't be the other way around.



Don't Miss The Eleventh Annual Dust or Magic Institute!

"An idea can turn from dust to magic, depending upon the talent that rubs against it." Matsu Basho

Where? The Inn at Lambertville Station, Lambertville, NJ (about one hour from Newark Airport)

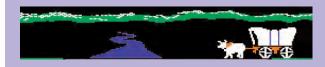
When? November 6-8, Sunday evening through Tuesday afternoon.

Sundays' events begin at 1:00 pm in the Lobby of the Inn With Children's AppFest, an informal public viewing of children's apps, followed by hors' d'oeuvres. At 4:00, the Institute formally begins, with the **2011 Product Briefing**. We'll then move to a banquet in the old train station, where we'll play with the Oregon Trail and then move into the Riverside room, to hear **Don Rawitsch** explain how he was able to get an entire generation of kids to worry about getting dysentery.

Monday will begin with a child development overview followed by the annual critics panel where reviewers like **Reyne Rice**, **Robin Raskin** and **Claire Green** will talk about their dust or magic products from the past 12 months. Next, **Chip Donahue** of the Erikson Institute will help us think about about "Erik Erikson's iPad" with feedback by Patrick Dickson, followed by an **AppDance** and a closer look at AI and digital puppetry, with MIT's **Seth Hunter**.

A fter lunch and a group photo, Jesse Schell will give us "A Peek Under The Schell," with more demos and a trip to the Mediatech Foundation to meet the testers. Dinner that night is on your own, but you'll want to be back in time for "Serving Creative Kids by the Millions" (Krista Marks) and an evening of informal play.

Tuesday will start with two back to back talks: Frank Migliorelli's "Time to Dust Off STEM Education" and Daren Carstens' "Beyond the Flashcards." After more demos and a break, MIT's Scot Osterweil will talk about "New Types of Games" and Scott Traylor will provide an update on virtual worlds, and then moderate the final panel, in which "old timers" like Mark Schlichting will review the past 36 hours, and help us connect the dots for 2012. The institute will conclude with a banquet and a ride to the airport.



Learn more at http://www.dustormagic.com

A CLOSER LOOK AT TOCA BOCA'S APPS

Here's a close look the Toca Boca apps we've reviewed in the past year. Apps are listed in the order that we reviewed them.

Helicopter Taxi. This innovative app brings the play outside the screen. How? By using the gyro in your iPad or iPhone. Your job is to run a helicopter taxi that picks up different characters that need to get to certain places. You "fly" by walking around the room, and rotate your device to see all different angles. You can also turn it upright to see the pilots Rita and Skip. The app uses the camera on the iPhone to make it look like it's really flying next to you. When they get a call from someone who needs a ride, they place the iPhone on a flat surface to land and pick up new passengers. The app features five characters including Señor Fox, Minda, Rooster, T-Bot and Dr. Clifton, and five locations to bring them too. There is no advertising or in-app purchases. Note: the app runs best on iPhone 3GS and newer devices, and the camera effect will not be used on iPhone 2G, iPhone 3G, and iPod Touch because the hardware can't support it. Toca Boca. http://tocaboca.com/ \$0.99. Ages 3-up.





Toca Tea Party. One of our testers all time favorite Toca apps, Toca Tea Party turns your iPad into a topdown view of a tea party complete with slurps and spills, with a real-looking set of tea cups, juice glasses, pastries and so on. You can toggle between background music (or mute it all together), Builds classification, role play. Toca Boca. http://tocaboca.com/ \$2.99. Ages 3-up.

Toca Doctor. Fun and well-designed, this collection of 18 puzzles keeps children coming back for more. The quick-moving format resembles Nintendo's WarioWare, only with a multi-touch screen, and a humorous health-related theme. You'll move a collection of food through a maze of intestines, drag and drop bones into place, flick splinters out of a hand, or drag and drop a set of gears, based on shape and size, to get the brain working. This app is light on real health facts, but very fun to play. Prices are \$.99 for the iPhone and \$1.99 for the iPad. See also Toca Tea Party Builds health, doctors, logic, matching. Toca Boca. http://tocaboca.com/ \$0.99. Ages 3-up.



Paint My Wings. Want to give children a highly successful symmetry experience? Paint My Wings starts with a butterfly who says "paint my wings!" Using a palette of colors, you finger paint lines or dots on one of the wings, and can see it mirrored on the other wing, in real time. It is easy to

save art as a picture, or clear the screen to start over. Note that there is no "undo" or options like fill, textures or layers. This is a very simple experience. Builds art, creativity, symmetry. Toca Boca. http://tocaboca.com/ \$0.99. Ages 2-6.

young children: getting a haircut. After you choose a customer from six possible human and animal options, you start combing, coloring and blow drying with your finger driving the action. The hair is a little hard to control, and the art is best described as irreverent, on par with other Toca apps. Content includes 12 hair colors and five tools. The app features four characters, including animals, who make funny faces and sounds as you work on their hair cut. If you're looking for a serious hair cutting app, you won't find it here. For a playful experience, however, you can't go wrong with this well designed, easy to control, playful app that follows in the tradition of other Toca Boca experiences. You can also take pictures of your creations and save them. If you make a mistake, there's even a magic potion (called G.R.O.) to make the hair grow back again. If life were only so easy. Builds creativity. Toca Boca. http://tocaboca.com/ \$1.99. Ages 3-up.





Toca Robot Lab. This brilliantly designed sandbox-style app designed for preschoolers mixes limited creativity with a maze type of flying game. You start by making a robot by selecting legs, a body, a head and arms using multiple-choice style menus. Next, you are taken to the testing area, which consists of a maze with hidden stars. The goal is to fly your robot to a magnet by

touching the screen to activate the foot rockets. The longer you press, the greater the power. You steer by moving your finger on the screen; a very easy process. The goal is to find all three hidden stars, but if you can't that's perfectly OK. There's no way to fail in this robot lab, and making the robots is fun because you never know what type of maze you'll get. Builds logic, some creativity, spatial relations. Toca Boca. http://tocaboca.com/ \$0.99. Ages 3-up.

Toca Hair Salon. Here's a theme that works especially well with



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

ABC Food

Fifth in the series of the ABC apps from Peapod Labs (see also Music, Wildlife, Play and Go), ABC Food turns your iPad or iPhone screen into an alphabet-themed visual encyclopedia. Instead of using stock art, however, these apps pull photos from royalty free sources, such as Flickr and YouTube. The result is an authentic presentation of letter-themed food art.

You start by pressing one of the 150 thumbnail images, organized alphabetically. Each leads to a letter themed food item. For C, for example, you won't want to miss the closeup view of a child eating an ear of Corn, one of the 38 photos used to illustrate the letter C. Others include coconut, chocolate and croissant. Hungry yet?

Each word is spelled on the bottom of the screen. Touching any of the letters within the word lets you quickly jump to a new set of words, offering a nice secondary navigation technique.

But wait, there's more. About a third of the photos include either YouTube videos (you can watch a girl learning how to separate egg whites, for example) or rub-away images, where rubbing a whole bar of chocolate gradually uncovers a chopped up bar, beneath it.

Note that you'll need an active Internet connection to keep the app updated. There are two minor flaws. The first is that it is too easy for a child to end up in the App store. The second is that your child might try to bite your iPad.

Details: Peapod Labs, www.peapodlabs.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: language, reading, letter recognition. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 9/21/2011. [WB]

Cars 2 World Grand Prix Read and Race

This 15 page/screen ebook is full of beautiful Cars 2 images and background sounds, but other than the general narration, there is no voice linked to words and objects. It creates a playful informal language experience.

Early in the story, you can customize one of the cars (from the movie) with premade patterns and a spoiler. You then can enter a race which is held on one of three tracks, at the end of the story.

Features include the ability to toggle between English, French, German, Spanish, Italian and Swedish. All text is highlighted as it is read making this a good informal early reading experience, although you can't touch individual words. The race makes it easy to win although steering can be frustrating because it requires turning the iPad like a steering wheel. It is very easy to hit a wall. For \$6.99, we'd like a bit more.

Details: Disney Publishing Worldwide, www.DisneyDigitalBooks.com. Price: \$6.99. Ages: 4-9. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, gross motor skill. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.8 stars. Entry date: 8/23/2011. [WB] Ease of Use 9 Educational 10 Entertaining 9 Design Features 9 Good Value 10





Ease of Use 8 Educational 8 Entertaining 7 Design Features 9 Good Value 6



FEATURE REVIEWS, OCTOBER 1, 2011

Cinderella – Nosy Crow Animated Picture Book

If you liked Nosy Crow's iPad treatment of "The Three Little Pigs," you'll love their rendition of Cinderella. Beautifully illustrated and carefully crafted through-and-through, the 25 screen story raises the bar of quality for children's book-inspired apps with such touches as fully orchestrated background music, a cast of professional child actors for narration, and art by Ed Bryan.

The interactive design is springy, responsive and multi-dimentional. For example, you can touch any character to read and hear a pop-up sentence of dialog, but if you touch a second or third time, you get another line. You can also help Cinderella with jobs, such as dragging and dropping scattered logs in the fireplace, cleaning up the King's invitations to the ball which are blown around the room, dressing the evil stepsisters for the party, building the carriage and selecting the background music for the dance (waltz, disco or Bollywood)? In the scenes where there's a mirror, you see your own reflection, as captured by the front iPad camera. We liked how each "page" is actually about 40% larger than the screen. You can explore this "out of site" space by tilting or touching.

Options are available for either UK English or US English. You can also choose the length of time the text appears (short, medium or long) to give early readers more time to read.

It's worth noting that liberties were taken with the storyline to make it much less mean spirited than the traditional story. The evil stepsisters aren't so evil (just very egocentric).

Details: Nosy Crow, www.nosycrow.com. Price: \$5.99. Ages: 3-12. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, some creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.9 stars. Entry date: 9/21/2011. [WB]

ClickySticky Cars

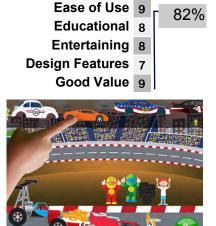
Crudely designed but fun, this animated stickerbook app features four scenes: Drag Race, Classic Roadster, Monster Car, and Junkyard Car builder. You tap and hold a sticker of a car-related item, such as a tire, then drag it into the scene. You can then resize it. To remove a sticker, just drag it off the screen. At any point, you can select a "play" button to animate the stickers, e.g., to make the cars start moving across the screen.

You can also double tap to change the direction of the stickers, or shake your iPod or iPad to remove all the stickers from the scene.

Details: Merge Mobile, Inc., http://mergemobile.com. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 9/23/2011. [WB] Ease of Use 10 Educational 9 Entertaining 10 Design Features 10 Good Value 10







FEATURE REVIEWS, OCTOBER 1, 2011

Club Penguin: Puffle Launch

Disney's virtual world for kids, Club Penguin, is reaching into your mobile device with this fun, fast and addicting physics game built around a series of cannons that float in the air.

The cannons shoot a ball-shaped Puffle (the furry pets from the Club Penguin virtual worlds) through a course full of moving hazards. To make it through, you steer your puffles from cannon to cannon by touching the screen -- it's a bit like putting "English" on a golf ball. As the Puffles float, they bounce off balloons. The better you do, the more levels you unlock. The challenges are arranged in 24 levels that can be unlocked, very much like Angry Birds. This is one of those games where you fail a lot and succeed a little, which can keep a child glued to the iPad screen like velcro. The downside is that it can breed frustration.

Nice design features include a pause button -- you can freeze a level instantly, and -- to show mercy to parents -- a mute for the driving rock background music.

So how's a \$.99 app support the Club Penguin franchise? Here's where it gets interesting. First, you don't have to be a member to play the game, and there are no inapp purchases. However, as you many know, the currency of Club Penguin is coins, which are used to buy things like an upgraded igloo, on the Club Penguin website. You can sync this app to your Club Penguin account (providing you're online and you have a user name and password), and have the coins you earn automatically deposited in your account. How's that for 21st century learning.

All things considered, this app could make a long car ride seems a lot shorter. Developed by Behaviour for Disney Mobile, produced by Disney Club Penguin.

Details: Disney Interactive Studios, www.disneyinteractivestudios.com. Price: \$.99. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: logic, temporal relations, fine motor control. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 9/13/2011. [WB]

Crazy Machines

Nearly identical in spirit to The Incredible Machine (1995, Sierra Online), this is a virtual invention lab with 100 levels, and 100 gadgets. While the concept is good, the instructions are overbearing (e.g., I could find no escape from the tutorial) and worse, require reading.

The title is part of the thinkSMART series from Mentor Interactive. There are four modes of play: Action Mode - play alone and break the riddles; Co-op Mode - break the riddles with a friend; Party Mode - play against another; and Sandbox Mode - edit your own level to set up chain reactions and share with friends. Ten years ago this type of title would be state of the art and much better appreciated. As is, it seems a bit dusty. If you can overlook some of the design quirks, the title could still be a good source of some weekend problem solving fun. Developed by FAKT/Mentor InterActive.

Details: Mentor InterActive, www.mentorinteractive.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Wii. Teaches/Purpose: deductive reasoning, logic, problem solving. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3 stars. Entry date: 7/21/2011. [WB]

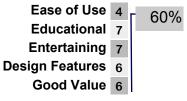
Educational 8 Entertaining 10 Design Features 9 Good Value 10

Ease of Use 9



92%





ESRB Rating: Everyone





Disney Pooh's Birthday Surprise

This well intentioned app looks good, but it is (at times) painfully didactic. It combines matching games with a playful Winnie the Pooh story; proof that some things don't mix particularly well.

The result is a slow moving ebook full of things that invite a touch. But in most cases, nothing happens.

For example, if you touch a word in the text, the entire block is read -- not the individual word. Many of the pages have one word that is highlighted. This triggers a matching activity. These vary in quality. There are no levels or tracking. The looping background music can be adjusted in volume.

Details: Disney Publishing Worldwide, www.DisneyDigitalBooks.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 3-5. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.2 stars. Entry date: 9/22/2011. [WB]

Explore With Farmer Jon

This farm-related interactive sticker book lets you touch and hear items and add your own stickers, which can be arranged on the screen.

Content includes 500 pieces of art on 20 pages, including a sticker drawer that lets you drag and drop different items on the page. Each scene can be toggled between day and night (just touch the sun or the moon).

There's plenty of finger play -- you can pick flowers, touch animals to wake them up, plant seeds or swat mosquitos. Because it is made with Game Salad, the responsivity is a little slow. There is also an HD version for iPad for \$1.99.

Details: Green Haven Games, www.greenhavengames.com. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 2-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: some language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 7/11/2011. [WB]

Happy Feet Two – The Videogame

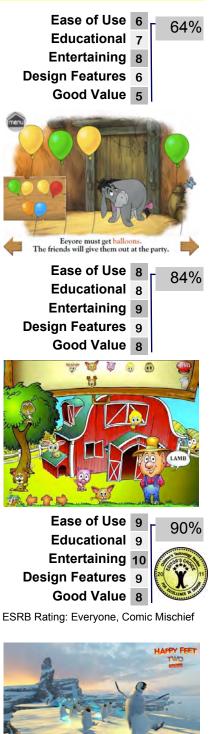
Here's what you get when you cross a frozen Antarctic world full of penguins with a Guitar Hero theme. The musical rhythm adventure game for one or two players crosses is inspired by the of the upcoming film Happy Feet Two.

In the game, new dancers are threatening the penguin nation and everyone must work and dance together in rhythm to save them from extinction. How? By dancing, carefully matching the beat by tapping on your game controller or touching the screen (with the DS).

You will use dance moves to recruit penguins with special abilities that help advance the adventure, stun enemies and opponents and manipulate the environment to solve co-operative puzzles. You can play cooperatively as Mumble and Ramon in the console games, and also use the penguin chicks, Bo, Atticus and Eric to help in the DS and 3DS versions. You can tap to the beat of the music, and compete in dance showdowns and belly sliding races.

Testers liked this game. Developed by KMM Games for Xbox 360, PS3 and Wii, and by Wayforward Technologies for Nintendo 3DS and DS. Scheduled for release Fall 2011. Prices are \$50 for the PS3 and Xbox version, \$40 for the Wii and 3DS, and \$30 for the DS.

Details: Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, Inc., www.warnerbros.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 6-up. Platform: PlayStation 3, Wii, Xbox 360, Nintendo DS, Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: rhythm, music. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 6/7/2011. [WB]



FEATURE REVIEWS, OCTOBER 1, 2011

Harold and the Purple Crayon

They say the key to a good ebook is a great story, which helps explain why this is such an excellent app; well worth the rather pricey \$5 download.

Based on the 1955 book of the same name by Crockett Johnson, this app tells the story of a little boy's journey into his dream, where he uses a crayon to draw things that he wants to see. For example, when he falls into the sea, he draws a "trim little boat."

One minor gripe -- the looping background music gets overbearing. Too bad it can't be adjusted.

So what's special about the app? Two key features -- first, you can fill in key elements with your fingertip. When the lines are complete, the story continues, so you really feel like you're helping Harold get home. Secondly, you can touch any object to see and hear it labeled (the print pops out of the object). That, and the highlighted text as the narrator reads, help to make this into a "must have" early language experience.

Details: Trilogy Studios, www.trilogystudios.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 2-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 8/19/2011. [WB]

Harry Potter Film Wizardry

First the bad news. This app, based on the book of the same name, costs \$13. That's plenty for a muggle. But the good news is that that it succeeds in satisfying the curiosity of any Harry Potter aficionado, young or old, with added ("oh wow!") interactive features that include pinch and zoom set blueprints, behind-the-scenes photos from the movie sets, and trailers for each Harry Potter movie. See... that's why you spent \$500 on an iPad.

Don't pass up the "extras" with some goodies from Scrollmotion, a New York Based studio known for their interactive finger scrolling techniques, letting you flip through the official Quidditch World Cup Programme, or Harry's official letter of acceptance into Hogwarts.

The popup table of contents lets you navigate sequentially.

Details: Insight Editions, insightéditions.com□. Price: \$12.99. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, Harry Potter trivia. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 9/20/2011. [WB]

Helicopter Taxi

This innovative app from Sweden brings the play outside the screen. How? By using the gyros in your iPhone or iPad.

Your job is to run a helicopter taxi that picks up different characters that need to get to certain places. Your kids can fly the helicopter by walking around the room, and rotate the iPhone to see all different angles as well as turn it upright to see the pilots Rita and Skip. The app uses the camera on the iPhone to make it look like it's really flying next to you. When your kids get a call from someone who needs a ride, they place the iPhone on any flat surface to land and pick up new passengers. The app features five characters including Señor Fox, Minda, Rooster, T-Bot and Dr. Clifton, and five locations to bring them too. There is no advertising or in-app purchases. Note: the app runs best on iPhone 3GS and newer devices, and the camera effect will not be used on iPhone 2G, iPhone 3G, and iPod Touch because the hardware can't support it.

Details: Toca Boca, http://tocaboca.com/. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad 2 (camera required). Teaches/Purpose: spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 3/29/2011. []

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

92%

85%



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



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





InnoTab

Originally called the InnoPad, InnoTab is designed for children aged 4 to 9 yearsof-age, whose parents are wary of giving them a smart phone. The InnoTab touch screen is significantly more responsive than the LeapPad Explorer, which is based on older Didj technology.

As tablets go, InnoTab is massive in size. When layed over an iPad you realize that it is the same height and width (but much fatter). Despite the bulk, the screen is relatively small; just 5 inches diagonally, which is slightly larger than an iPhone. Inside, are accelerometers for tilt and motion sensing, a microphone, headphone jack, SD card slot and a USB connection to a computer for downloading additional content. There's also a game card slot. The screen touch sensitive, like the Nintendo DS.

Included software includes a music player, games, an Art Studio with painting and drawing applications and a Photo Viewer/Editor that goes well with a stand that pops out of the back, in case you want to use it as a photo viewer, say, running jpgs from an SD card. Other included apps: an MP3 player for both videos or songs, a Calculator, Calendar, Notepad, Clock with personalized voice alarm and Friends Address Book.

There are nine cartridges at launch sold for \$25 each that feature licensed characters. In addition, you can download "apps" from www.vtechkids. com/download, providing you connect your computer to the InnoTab with the included USB cord. So how does InnoTab compare with the LeapPad Explorer? All things considered, it has some significant advantages. It is faster, cheaper, can be expanded with content and the games are more responsive. But it doesn't have a camera

Details: VTech Electronics North America, www.vtechkids.com. Price: \$80. Ages: 4 -9. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: early learning, reading, all school subjects. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 2/13/2011. [WB]

Kid-Tough See Yourself Digital Camera

What's built like a hockey puck, but also takes pictures? The Kid-Tough See Yourself Digital Camera from Fisher-Price (in stores now, \$70, www.fisher-price.com) moves the children's digital camera category up a notch by offering a new trick: a swiveling lens. So your child can take a traditional front-facing snapshot, or flip the lens 180 degrees toward something of greater interest -- their face.

Standard features are on par with previous versions. The images are mid-range -just 1.2 megapixels -- and there's no flash, so low light conditions create mediocre results. See for yourself, at http://youtu.be/PO8tFdyn3gs. There's also a bit of a lag when the shutter button is pressed. It is relevant to note that the iPod Touch 4th Generation or iPad 2 can deliver better front/back image quality, and there are dozens of image editing apps. These options cost more and are less durable, however.

An SD expansion slot augments the onboard 256 MB of memory, and the 1.8" color preview screen makes it easy to review pictures, crop photos, or edit on the fly with a set of playful face-warping tools. It is also easy to toggle the camera into video mode, making this a handy digital camcorder. The 4 AA batteries are preserved with an autooff mode. As with past versions of the Kid-Tough line, the rubbery case is designed to be dragged down a sidewalk behind a puppy; good news for a parent concerned about handing a real camera to an eager preschooler.

Details: Fisher-Price, Inc., www.fisher-price.com. Price: \$70. Ages: 3-7. Platform: Windows. Teaches/Purpose: Creativity, digital photography, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 9/1/2011. [WB]

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



ESRB Rating:



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







Kirby Mass Attack

This clever one player side-scrolling game is tricky to learn, but once you do, it's hard to stop playing. You navigate through the maze-like stages by learning a series of two-step swipes. For example, to get Kirby to float, you have to drag a star onto him, and then draw a line. While innovative (and effective) this control mechanism is unique to this game, and takes time to learn. There are ten stages, and some reading is required. We like it because it is full of problem solving opportunities, with some reading as well.

In the story, Kirby is split into 10 pieces by an evildoer with a magic cane. You use the stylus on the DS touch screen to control a group of Kirby characters (up to 10) as they set off on a journey to return to their original form.

The number of Kirby characters you control is important, because some challenges require a specific number of Kirbys in order to be solved. When the number of Kirby characters is increased, you can gain the upper hand. You can control each Kirby in a variety of ways, for example, a Kirby character can be launched into the air with a flick of the stylus, or you can make a swarm of Kirby characters dash to a given point by tapping on that spot on the touch screen multiple times. You can also swipe the touch screen to launch them in a mass attack against enemies, then tap the enemies into submission. The goal is to collect medals hidden throughout the various stages and to unlock additional minigames. Developed by HAL Laboratory, Inc.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, spatial relations, timing, fine motor coordination. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 6/15/2011. [WB]

Lego Life of George

Lego Life of George lets you test your pattern matching skills under the pressure of a stop watch, providing you have a camera equipped iPhone, iPod Touch or iPad 2, and have downloaded a free app called Life of George from iTunes (see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grNO42UK5q8). The app serves as your blueprint, timer, progress tracker, and -- most interestingly -- your judge.

The \$30 kit contains the basic supplies -- 144 Legos and a special cardboard grid that serves as a backdrop, allowing your camera to "see" your work, using special software called EyeCue (see www.eyecue-tech.com).

I spoke to EyeCue President Ronen Horovitz by phone to verify that it was his company that was used in this app. He told me that indeed it was, and that we could expect to see toys that can also "see." (He was understandably vague on details). He told me that his software, with the help of the grid and a ready supply of smart phone cameras, can detect how closely your shape and colors matche the model. This information is combined with your time to calculate your score. Fast accurate building equals louder applause, higher scores, and unlocks harder puzzles. Here's my attempt at a tree http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grNO42UK5q8. Things aren't always perfect. We had some testers complain that their perfect model was sometimes not detected. Testers also wanted to go back to a model to retry, which the app doesn't permit (models are randomly generated). Content includes 12 levels, each with 10 models (120 total). So there's plenty to do.

In addition to Game Mode which can be played alone or against one competitor in a pass-and-play format, it is possible to design and capture your own models to be saved in a scrap book.

So there you have it -- a set of Legos that requires a smart phone in order to work. Back in the olden days, all you needed were some AA batteries.

Details: LEGO Americas, www.lego.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: fine motor skills, logic, timing. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 9/29/2011. [WB]

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



ESRB Rating: Everyone



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



ESRB Rating:





Let's Rock Elmo

Two years ago Sesame Street and Fisher-Price parted ways, ending a 15 year licensing agreement to make toys like Tickle Me Elmo.

Rival toy maker Hasbro has continued robotic Sesame Street toy tradition, however. Hasbro's team is no stranger to the job, having made the FurReal line of toys, and Fisher-Price has continued to make updates to their Mickey Mouse robots. This all helps you understand how the two headliner toys for 2011 from both Hasbro and Fisher-Price both sing and dance. So how does Rock Star Mickey compare with Let's Rock Elmo?

Powered by six AA batteries, Let's Rock Elmo comes with three small plastic instruments, two of which are playable (the drums and tambourine). Elmo's hands and feet have pressure switches that trigger songs related to the instrument he holds. We liked how he moves, and the music is clear. The fact that you can place any object in his right gripping hand opens the possibility for more play.

Both are entertaining, but Elmo is more open ended, and has more generalized and lifelike motion with hinged arms. Plus, he can use different instruments that actually work. But Elmo uses more batteries and costs about \$20 more.

Children won't notice much difference. Other Let's Rock instruments (sold separately) include a guitar and keyboard. Let's Rock Elmo can sing six songs and requires six AA batteries (included).

Details: Playskool (Hasbro), www.hasbro.com/playskool/. Price: \$70. Ages: 18 mo. & up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: music, rhythm. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 2/11/2011. [WB]

Little Critter's Little Red Riding Hood

Mercer Mayer's rendition of the classic folk tale comes to your iPad. As you know, this fairy tale has a dark theme. Mayer deals with that by turning the wolf into a frustrated Shakespearian actor who simply ties up Grandma instead of eating her. When it comes time to eat Little Red Riding Hood, she's able to hide while the woodcutter chases the wolf away.

From a story perspective (and as a picture book) the graphics and narration are excellent, but the interactivity is disappointing. Testers hunted for hot spots they wished they could find, and the rather lengthy bits of narration can't be interrupted.

While there are two word search games, the multiple choice format grows tedious. The more you read or play, the more coins you collect, although there's no real connection between the coins and the story.

Details: Sterling Digital, . Price: \$4.99. Áges: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (iOS 3.0 or later). Teaches/Purpose: reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.4 stars. Entry date: 9/12/2011. [WB]

Little Explorers Firehouse Adventure

Eight timed games give young children a chance to play with firehouse themes. Games include Firetruck Traffic (help the firefighters get to the fire while avoiding other cars by tapping on the screen); In The Trees (tilt the screen to guide a firefighter into the trees to rescue pets); Put Out the Fire (spray water on burning windows); Safety Net (guide a net to catch jumping animals); Find & Rescue (a hard to control maze game); Helicopter Drop (a confusing game where you drop water out of a fire helicopter onto flames) and Firefighter Gear (a confusing matching game). Unfortunately the app uses some underhanded techniques to get "liked" on facebook, including asking children to "like" a game in order to unlock it (a technique we've never seen before). Testers also noted that the background music was annoying.

The good news is that the games are generally fun; and there is some logic (matching, spatial and temporal relations). So children can find some things to stay interested.

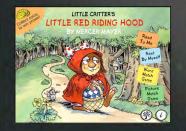
Details: Peapod Labs, www.peapodlabs.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: logic, matching. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.8 stars. Entry date: 9/21/2011. [WB]

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















Mercury Hg

If you've ever tried to roll a marble through a maze (by tilting the game board), you get the idea of the Mercury games. In this new edition, called Hg (the element symbol for mercury), 60 new levels offer nearly unlimited challenge. Why? You can always go faster.

This is an excellent exercise in logical problem solving, persistence and motor development.

The game uses the six-access motion sensing in the PS3 controller (we're not sure how the Xbox version works) to move a ball of Mercury through a series of creative twists and turns. Sometimes you have to split the blob in several parts, for example, and parts of the maze might be slippery or sticky tiles. Available for download from the Xbox Live Arcade and PlayStation Network. Watch the preview here: http: //youtu.be/AHxzDGiGdkQ

Details: Ignition Entertainment USA, http://us.utvignition.com/. Price: \$5. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Xbox 360, PlayStation Network. Teaches/Purpose: fine motor control, logic, problem solving. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 8/12/2011. [WB]

My First Disney Princess Singing and Storytelling Belle

Singing and Storytelling Belle (from Disney's Beauty and the Beast movie) is a large (20 inch) soft-bodied doll dressed in Belle's signature outfit. But this doll does a lot more than just look pretty.

Besides the doll, seven special accessories trigger one of 100 related phrases, stories or songs. For example, when you place the storybook in Belle's hand, she will read a Beauty and the Beast short story. We're not sure how the sensors work, but we think its RFID technology (a small sensor is embedded in each prop, that requires no batteries).

Place her microphone in her hand to hear her sing her two songs (including "Be My Guest"); hold a teapot to her mouth and you hear her take a sip of tea. Belle can also interact with her friends Chip, Mrs. Potts and Lumière (included) when placed in her hands.

Three AAA batteries fit into her back, hidden beneath her clothes, along with the on/off/demo switch. The doll was very popular with our testers. Note that it is possible for the parts to get lost. This is the kind of toy that retains play value even after the batteries die.

Details: Jakks Pacific, Inc., www.jakkspacific.com. Price: \$80. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: representational play. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 7/27/2011. [WB]

Nickelodeon Nicktoons MLB

This playful baseball simulation features a roster of Nickelodeon characters that take on professional players from 30 MLB teams.

The Kinect version lets you bat and pitch with your hands, no controller needed, and a two player option lets you play against a friend.

The Nicktoons roster includes SpongeBob SquarePants, ZIM, Dudley Puppy, Fanboy, Chum Chum, and Ren and Stimpy. Major League players include Matt Holliday (St. Louis Cardinals), Andre Ethier (Los Angeles Dodgers), Miguel Cabrera (Detroit Tigers), Jason Heyward (Atlanta Braves), Cliff Lee (Philadelphia Phillies), and Robinson Cano (New York Yankees).

You can create your own ballpark, based on themes such as Fenway Park or the frigid Frosty Freeze Field.

Created by High Voltage Software for Wii and Xbox 360 and by Black Lantern Studios for Nintendo DS.

Details: 2K Play, www.2kgames.com/2kplay/. Price: \$40 (\$30 for DS). Ages: 5-8. Platform: Wii, Xbox 360, Xbox Kinect*, Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: sports, baseball. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 6/8/2011. [WB]

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









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



ESRB Rating: Everyone





Rock Star Mickey

This noisy, scaled back robotic Mickey Mouse from Mattel/Fisher-Price is very entertaining, but offers less for children to do than Hasbro's Let's Rock Elmo.

This Mickey follows last year's larger, heavier, gyrating Dance Star Mickey. This time Mickey comes pre-dressed in rock star gear that includes sunglasses and a permanently attached guitar. We thought an alternative title might be "Costs Less, Weighs Less, Does Less Mickey."

Other than being able to press his foot to change songs, or his nose to start a tutorial, there are no interactive features. He's also not very cuddly. But he does turn heads, at first, anyway with his kicking motion. The motion is made possible by a set of small wheels on the edge of his foot. When placed on a flat surface, he kick-steps and can do a "mouska-split: at the end of his act, where he "plays the guitar" with his nose. See for yourself at http://youtu.be/uEHLJFi2KAs. Content includes three songs, including "You Really Got Me". Runs on 4 AA batteries, included. See also Let's Rock Elmo (\$70) from Hasbro for a musical robotic toy that does more.

Details: Fisher-Price, Inc., www.fisher-price.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 2-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: dancing, music. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 2/28/2011. [WB]

Star Fox 64 3D

Like stepping into a Star Wars movie with a comical twist, this 3D flying game lets you help Fox McCloud lead battle against a squadron of fighters in aerial outer space combat, for up to four players. The goal to shoot down the evil forces of Andross while saving the galaxy from destruction.

Once you get used to the 3D effects, you start to use depth to help you reach your goal. This is the type of game that 3D seems designed for. Both screens are used -- the top screen shows the 3D combat and the bottom screen displays characters and dialogue.

The game also features two control methods. The Nintendo 64 Mode offers the original controls, and the Nintendo 3DS Mode use the motion controls of the built-in Gyro Sensor.

In the game, if one of the wingmen - Peppy, Slippy, or Falco - is chased or captured by an enemy, you must act to protect them in order to keep your team strong. Each mission takes players through a different planet of the Lylat system. A new multiplayer option lets you play with up to three friends via a local wireless connection. You can also use the 3DS inner camera to display a live video feed of your face as you fly.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: flying, following instructions. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 6/14/2011. [WB]

Stella and Sam Story Pack

Looking for a calm, soothing high quality app? This four-pack of previously released apps create a nice collection of content, including 12 exploration activities that are based on the animated adventures of Stella (a big sister) and her little brother, Sam. Sam keeps asking questions such as "Are fireflies on fire?"

The app consists of four chapters: Into the Snow We Go (make pictures in the snow, decorate a snowman); Rainy Days and Rainbows (draw paintings, dig through leaves for treasures, race pine cones); Backyard at Twilight (look for bugs, discover constellations, learn about shapes); and Go-There-Square (pop musical bubbles, collect dandelions, build a bridge out of flowers).

Each adventure combines original animation from the Canadian Television series, and three activities that support free play. There is no print or reading. The apps can also be purchased separately for \$3 each.

Details: zinc Roe Design, www.zincroe.com. Price: \$6.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 8/25/2011. [WB]



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







Twinkle Twinkle 1.0

Featuring nice graphics but limited interactivity, this is a peaceful story set to the theme of the night, stars (that twinkle) and owls.

There are three modes: Read to me, Read myself, and Auto play.

You can touch the screen to launch animated events, such as making the owl's wings flap, or making the owl blink. There is also a counting game where you touch stars (up to 20) to hear them labeled.

Options include the ability to switch between a child or adult narrator.

The story and music come from Super Simple Learning, the animation is provided by Texas-based Fuzz Animation. Developed by See Here Studios.

Details: Super Simple Learning, www.SuperSimpleLearning.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad, iPod Touch (150 MB). Teaches/Purpose: some language, counting to 20. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.4 stars. Entry date: 7/14/2011. [WB]

Weird Al Yankovic's When I Grow Up

Based on the printed book "When I Grow Up" by Al Yankovic with illustrations by Wes Hargis, this 18 screen book deals with the age-old question "what will I be when I grow up." In this case, the question is answered by the author, "Weird Al" Yankovic, the famous wisecracking comedian/musician. So there's no surprise that the professions described include foot model and pickle inspector.

Note that the app was initially released as a book but has since been enhanced with five story-related games that are silly, but which vary in quality. For example, in Haute Cuisine Hero you're a cook who is supposed to tap an ingredient when it is above a pot of stew. But the zone of dropping isn't clearly marked. Other games include Xtreme Snail Race (tilt the screen to urge a snail toward the finish line) and Gorilla Masseuse (follow directions such as "tap one" and "swipe right" in order to make a gorilla happy). This one takes some practice. Finally Tarantula Shaver lets you try to shave hairy spiders by moving a shaver around the screen.

In terms of the eBook, the interactivity is rudimentary at best, with music and animated routines that loop endlessly. The text, better for upper elementary readers, is not read outloud, and there is no scaffolding mechanisms such as word highlighting or definitions. All in all, this is a mediocre app. Created by Bean Creative.

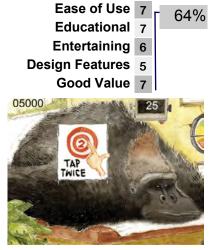
Details: HarperKids Interactive, www.harpercollins.com/hci. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, some logic, timing. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.2 stars. Entry date: 9/20/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use 9 Educational 6 Entertaining 7

Design Features 5

Good Value 7







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.

Big Buck Hunter Safari

This shooting gallery-style game turns your TV into a hunting video game. Content includes jungle and plain animals of Africa, including lions, tigers, bears and elephants. The game features nine mini games to sharpen your skills. These include Monkey Drop, Shrunken Head, Chameleon, and Hyena. The "gun" must be calibrated with your screen before using. Testers found the format to be fun, but reported growing tired of it rather quickly.

Details: Jakks Pacific, Inc., www.jakkspacific.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: hunting. Entry date: 8/30/2011.

Core Reading with Jazzles

This literacy development program is designed for young children, ESL, and special needs students.

It features a multi-sensory approach, incorporating visual, auditory, and kinetic activities to engage language learners and is adaptable to a wide range of learning needs. The program supports vocabulary development for more than 1000 words on English language words high fluency and sight word lists. Features include; letter-based and song-based interactive Flash files for each letter of the alphabet; unique letter song with animated characters acting out the song lyrics; 22 musical styles including rock, wing, county, and more; interactive games and activities; and printable resources including storyboards, crafts, and dictionary pages.

The program is designed for classroom use with an interactive whiteboard or projector and screen and includes all teaching objects as well as a Teacher's Manual with suggested lesson plans and guidance on teaching students with different learning needs. Prices are \$129 for a single CD ROM. \$175 or a single CD ROM with a 50-user online subscription, \$600 for a site license which includes an online site license for the first year, and \$500 for a one year online site license.

Details: Core Learning, Ltd., www.core-learning.com. Price: \$129 & up. Ages: 4-up. Platform: Windows. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Entry date: 9/14/2011.

corefx Creative

corefx Creative includes all the features of the older, highly regarded corefx Three Level program along with new tools and images to enhance your artwork. New features include round and custom selection tools to easily crop images, and animations can be saved as Flash (.swf) files.

Students can import images from digital photographs, image scans, web graphics and other sources as their starting point, and images produced with corefx Creative can be saved for use on the web (including animations), used in desktop publishing, presentation or word processing software or incorporated directly into other projects.

The program features five levels. The Begin to Draw Level features realistic crayons, markers, and paints; transformation tools; and hundreds of images for beginners. The corefx Art Level features an additional selection of realistic draw and paint tools including pastels, markers, paints, chalks, and more. The Animation Level lets students learn animation techniques to bring their artwork to life. Photo FX Level features photo-editing and photo FX tools create digital art, and images can be added to calendars, cards, and photo frame templates. And the corefx Creative Level combines the features of all four levels in one for a complete advanced digital art, photo-editing, and animation experience.

Prices are \$60 for a single user, \$1350 for a site license, and \$950 for a one year online site license.

Details: Core Learning, Ltd., www.core-learning.com. Price: \$60 & up. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Windows. Teaches/Purpose: art, creativity, drawing, animation. Entry date: 9/14/2011.





Crayola Creative Studio

Ideal for a promising young artist, Crayola Creative Studio (\$50, Windows) combines the features and tools of four programs in one - Art Start, Art Studio, Animation Studio, and PhotoFX Studio - allowing you to draw, paint, animate, photo-edit, and apply special effects. The five levels let you choose the one that's right for you based on skill level. The Art Start level is for young children just learning to use computers. The Art Studio level allows children to draw and paint using digital crayons, markers, paints, watercolors, chalk, acrylics, etc., as well as learn to enhance their digital images and add text to their artwork. The Animation Level lets children create animation to use in stories, web pages and emails. The Photo FX level features FX tools to edit and add special effects to photographs. And experienced users can use the the Creative Studio level to access all tools and design features.

Other features of the program include: 12 realistic art tools; hundreds of editable images to supplement artwork; progressive undo and redo; shape tools including circle, rectangle, star, polygon and spline; symmetry tools; photo effect tools such as smearing, lightening and darkening; and other tools including resize, rotate, skew, and distort.

Prices are \$50 for one user, \$800 for a 25 user license; \$1200 for a site license; and \$850 for a one year online site subscription. See also corefx Creative.

Details: Core Learning, Ltd., www.core-learning.com. Price: \$50 & up. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Windows. Teaches/Purpose: drawing and creativity. Entry date: 9/14/2011.

Disney AppMates

Disney AppMates (\$20 for two) are tiny cars that transform the multi-touch screen into a new kind of play space, where roads and ramps scroll automatically.

The base of each car is a pattern of capacitive sensors that let the iPad "see" each car. Not only does it know the difference between Lightning McQueen and Tow Mater, but it can tell which direction they're headed and scroll appropriately, with the correct sound effects. In addition, white pixels are used to send light through a window in the bottom of the car, giving it the illusion that the lights are working. No batteries required.

Once you the free download the app, you can either drive around the scrolling streets of Radiator Springs or complete missions, such as delivering a lost tow hook to Mater while earning hubcaps.

So how does it work, with no source of electricity, batteries, wires or bluetooth? The tiny car uses you as the power source. In order for it to work, your fingers must touch the sides of the car, that channels the capacitance of your hand through the toy and into the unique dot pattern on the bottom. This allows it to be recognized by the iPad's capacitive sensor as an arrangement of fingers. That's the technical answer. The easy way to say it is that there is technology in the toy that extends your finger, right through the car, into the screen. Based on the number of times the words "patent pending technology" was used in the press materials, Disney seems to be pretty proud of this accomplishment.

The app is free and can be controlled without a car, using your finger, which, last time I checked, is also free.

Details: Disney Consumer Products, www.disney.com. Price: \$19.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: representational play. Entry date: 9/28/2011.

Gabrielle's Ghostly Groove 3D

This rhythm game for the Nintendo 3DS features Gabrielle, an unlucky girl who has sneezed so hard that her soul has left her body.

You have to travel to Monsterville, and tap, slide and flick in time to the music to scare up the power you need to get Gabrielle back into her body.

The game also features unlockable minigames, outfits and items to earn, and more than 30 stages to master.

Details: Natsume, www.natsume.com. Price: \$call. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: music, rhythm. Entry date: 7/12/2011.







FUTURE RELEASES AND UPDATES OCTOBER 1, 2011

Kidlandia Kingdoms Online Digital Playground

Based on sets of customized maps, placemats and wall murals, Kidlandia Kingdoms Digital Playground (http://play.kidlandia.com/) is a freemium virtual world where you can earn Kaploons, which allows children to buy "cool stuff."

Kaploons can be earned by playing one of five online games like "Crown Jewels" and "Kreechur Pirates," which are featured as part of the game, or through the app, called Spikanunk's Run.

Also new: an accompanying set of four plush toys that come with a code that unlocks parts of the virtual world. The toys have names like Thumblebottom, Mousefly and Spikanunks, and each comes with a story.

In the app, children avoid obstacles and earn rewards. Higher levels are sold as in-app sales. For general information, visit www.kidlandia.com.

Details: Kidlandia, www.kidlandia.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX, Internet Site, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Entry date: 9/20/2011.

Kung Fu High Impact

Kung Fu High Impact is a side-scrolling fighting adventure designed specifically for the Kinect motion sensing system.

The sensor inserts your image into the game, letting you interact with the enemies. During our in-office demo, the motion tracking seemed quite accurate. This is the kind of game that makes exercise fun.

Details: Ignition Entertainment USA, http://us.utvignition.com/. Price: \$40. Ages: 9up. Platform: Xbox Kinect. Teaches/Purpose: gross motor coordination. Entry date: 8/12/2011.

Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword

Ideal for an older child or adult looking for a challenge, this refreshed Zelda turns your Wii into a flying, sword-fighting puzzle solving adventure. Note the E10+ rating, for plenty of fantasy violence, mostly due to the realistic fighting.

This title requires the use of the Wii's MotionPlus controller. The payoff is that every movement of Link's sword will match your motion with nearly 1-to-1 precision.

For the first time, some enemies can only be defeated with certain angled attacks. Other noteworthy features include a new "more intuitive interface," the ability to fire a bow, toss (or roll) bomb, and use a whip. Nintendo promises "a multitude of new game-play mechanics," that it says will make a refreshingly different feel from all of the past titles in the series. Zelda, like Mario, is one of the hallmark Nintendo characters. As a result, a special limited-edition version of the game will include a gold Wii RemotePlus controller will be available when the game launches on Nov. 20.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$50 (\$70 w/gold remote). Ages: 7-up. Platform: Wii MotionPlus. Teaches/Purpose: logic, timing, higher order thinking, memory, spatial relations. Entry date: 6/24/2010.





Little Reader Deluxe

Little Reader is flashcard-based reading curriculum for very young babies. Note that the educational validity of such an activity is highly questioned by most teachers and educational psychologists (including me).

The curriculum includes daily lessons to be administered over 12 months covering 3,000 words in 180 categories, supported by over 3,000 pictures, 6,600 sound files, and 460 videos.

You can personalize lessons to teach words such as your baby's name, and use personal pictures, videos and sounds for common words to make the lessons more meaningful to your child. According to press materials, you can complete the lessons in as little as five minutes per day.

Components of the package include Windows based software, storybooks, an instruction book, flash cards (called "Pattern Phonics Flip Cards") that let you create phonic word combinations, and sticker labels designed to let you make a game of labeling objects in your child's world.

Some of the materials might be useful for older children (ages 5-up) -- an age that is better suited for early reading instruction.

Details: BrillKids Inc., www.brillkids.com. Price: \$250. Ages: 4 mos & up. Platform: Windows. Teaches/Purpose: reading, phonics. Entry date: 7/25/2011.

Mario Kart 7 (3DS)

Fast, fun, and for the first time in 3D, this new version of Mario Kart is hard to stop playing.

On big jumps, a kart now deploys a wing to let it glide over a track shortcut. Or when under water, a propeller will pop out to help the kart cruise across the ocean floor. You can customize your vehicle with accessories to give you a competitive edge, such as adding giant tires to help drive off-road, or using smaller tires for city courses. You can also choose to race as one of your favorite Mushroom Kingdom characters, or use your Mii character. The new courses take you over a mountain road, on city streets, and through a desert. The game supports both Spot Pass and StreetPass features, and players can compete in local wireless matches or online over a broadband Internet connection. Scheduled for release Holiday 2011.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: racing. Entry date: 6/13/2011.

Moments Ago

Now this is a good idea, almost. Designed to let a teacher quickly broadcast email messages to a parent (or group of parents) from an iPhone, iPad or iPod Touch, Moments Ago is easy to start and use, providing you're comfortable with your email settings. The only thing I didn't like about this app was how canned the messages seem, even going so far as to mail merge a child's name into the body of the message. While you can write your own message, it needs to be created in advance to appear in the multiple choice option. So you can't quickly jot a note like "send Jason's shoes, please." In addition, there's no escaping the need for importing every parent's email address.

Details: Mobile Apps for Ed, http://mobileapps4ed.com. Price: \$3.99. Ages: NA. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Ipod Touch (iOS 4.0 or later). Teaches/Purpose: a utility for teachers. Entry date: 7/31/2011.

Pac-Man & Galaga Dimensions

Back in the 1980s these six classics earned a lot of quarters. Today, all six come on a cartridge the size of a quarter, for the Nintendo 3DS. Titles include Pac-Man, Pac-Man Championship Edition, Galaga, and Galaga Legions, along with two new 3DS only games.

In Pac-Man Tilt, you move Pac-Man through stages filled with obstacles, platforms and ghosts with tilt controls. You use flippers, platforms and power pellets to jump, flip, swing, and eat through to the finish line.

In Galaga 3D Impact, the 3DS becomes a ship's gun turret as you attack and defend the ship while ridding space of the incoming Galaga army.

Details: Namco Bandai Games America Inc., www.namcobandaigames.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, timing, spatial relations. Entry date: 7/22/2011.











Querty Town

Designed for schools, QwertyTown is a Flash-based, web delivered virtual world dedicated exclusively to keyboarding. It provides a "safe, teacher-controlled environment where students can communicate with their classmates, teachers, and friends" as they learn keyboarding skills. This communication includes the ability to compare scores on leaderboards ("who's the best typer"), send and receive Qmail, and chat with users on their Friends lists in an environment that will help provide them with a fundamental skill set essential for academic and professional success in the 21st century. Created by Paul Garofano & David Grammerstorf of Second Nature Learning. Prices start at \$30 per child per year. Only school accounts are available.

Details: Second Nature Learning LLC, www.qwertytown.com. Price: \$5.00. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX, Internet Site. Teaches/Purpose: keyboarding, typing, writing, fine motor development. Entry date: 9/18/2011.

Reel Fishing 3D: Paradise

Fishing simulations date back to the Oregon Trail, but not in 3D.

Designed specifically for the Nintendo 3DS, this fishing simulation contains 12 locations and a career mode where your goal is to become a master angler. Content includes 40 varieties of fish, 100 pieces of tackle, and three styles of fishing - lure, fly and bait. Not yet reviewed.

Details: Natsume, www.natsume.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: sports, fishing. Entry date: 7/12/2011.

RockSmith: Authentic Guitar Games

Rocksmith, "the first and only video game that allows players to plug in any real guitar into an Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 or Windows PC" to play along with a library of songs that range from recent hits to classics. Titles include "House of the Rising Sun" by The Animals, "Next Girl" by The Black Keys and "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction" by The Rolling Stones. Rocksmith adapts to the player's skill level from novices to an experienced shredder. Includes a 1/4 inch to USB cable that turns the guitar's signal from analog to digital, allowing it to be recognized and played through video game consoles. Also sold bundled with an Epiphone Les Paul Junior guitar for \$200. Visit www.rocksmith.com.

Details: Ubisoft, www.ubisoft.com. Price: \$80. Ages: 12-up. Platform: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Windows. Teaches/Purpose: music, guitar. Entry date: 9/14/2011.

Simon Flash

The second tile-based game from Hasbro (see also Scrabble Flash), this Simon game has been changed from its original round, plate-sized console design into four small, freestanding light up tiles.

You try to follow the growing sequence of flashing colored lights as you attempt to keep up with the computer. Besides the classic mode, there are several new ways to play, including a Shuffle mode, where the computer reveals a pattern of colors by lighting up in a flash, but then quickly rearranges the colors. You must shuffle the tiles to get them back into the original pattern. There's also Simon Lights Off (you get 90 seconds to slide and swap tiles before the lights come back on), and Simon Secret Color (players must rearrange the tiles until all the cubes light up as the same color).

Each title is powered by two AAA batteries (included). To turn on each tile you hold down the front, light up square. They turn off automatically if they are not used.

Details: Hasbro Games, www.hasbro.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: memory, logic. Entry date: 9/20/2011.









Spy Net Stealth Recording Video Glasses

You know you're living in the future when you can go to a toy store and pick up a 128 MB of memory, a tiny lithium polymer battery, a microphone, camera and video camera for \$40. To top it all off, all these components have been crammed into a pair of sunglasses.

If you're trying for style, the Spy Net Stealth Recording Video Glasses (\$40, www. jakkspacific.com) won't win any fashion contests. But they can record what you see, and the fact that the camera is mounted in the bridge of the glasses, takes this "toy" to a new level. The only clue that the camera is on is a tiny red LED mounted -- on the inside of the frame -- is the only clue that the hide a small camera in the center of your forehead.

Sure, these bulky-looking pair of dark framed glasses won't fool a cagey teacher, but they do work perfectly fine when walking down a street. You can either take snapshots or shoot video by pressing You can record up to 20 minutes of video, which can be transferred to your computer by way of a USB port. Learn more at SpyNetHQ.com. Includes Stealth Video Glasses, one USB cable, and rechargeable lithium polymer battery that charges from your computer.

Details: Jakks Pacific, Inc., www.jakkspacific.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Smart Toy, photography, cameras video recording. Teaches/Purpose: a video recorder. Entry date: 8/30/2011.

Ticket Store Game, The

Based on the traditional board game of the same name, this virtual world is designed to teach positive behavior changes -- in the real world.

The game attempts to leverage a parent's effort in behavior modification through positive reinforcement.

The virtual board game contains animated characters and avatars, and parents assign each child tasks to complete, in exchange for ticketed rewards.

Parents/teachers and children then make personalized game boards to provide the rewards for favorable behavior. A digital piggy bank is available to accumulate tickets and allow the child to use their savings to "cash" in for rewards. A bonus board allows children to move through "Tickieville" to earn additional tickets for community service, online library reading, performing a school activity and more. The goal of the Ticket Store Game is to provide a world of real life experiences to improve kids behavior.

The game is designed for both home and school use. Teachers can incorporate the concepts of ownership, savings, community service, anti-bullying, acts of kindness and rewards into a classroom, where kids compete for rewards. Prices are \$5.95/month or \$39.95/year for a single user and \$15.95/month for a family, classroom or group.

Details: The Ticket Store Game, LLC, www.ticketstoregame.com. Price: \$5.95/month & up. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Internet Site, Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: behavior modification, parenting. Entry date: 9/23/2011.

Tiger Woods PGA Tour: The Masters

New to this year's EA Tiger Woods title: a chance to win the green jacket -- the prize for winning the Masters at Augusta National

As you play, you will rely on the advice of your caddie. The career mode, called "Road to the Masters", takes you from amateur tour to Q School, Nationwide Tour, and finally, the PGA Tour. So you learn how the professional golf system works.

Content and features include a "Tiger at the Masters mode" (relive each of Tiger's four wins at the Masters, and then try to equal or beat his scores); 3D grass (designed to appear and respond more like actual grass); Fast Golf (complete a full round in half the time and save at any time).

Besides Tiger Woods, other famous golfers in the game include Rickie Fowler, Zach Johnson and Bubba Watson. Courses include the Augusta National Golf Club, Royal Melbourne Golf Club (Australia), Atlanta Athletic Club, TPC San Antonio, St Andrews Links and Pebble Beach Golf Links. Note price for the Wii version is \$50.

Details: EA Sports (Electronic Arts Inc.), www.eagames.com. Price: \$60. Ages: 10-up. Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii. Teaches/Purpose: sports, golf. Entry date: 7/25/2011.









Woogie

Woogie is a huggable case and media player for your iPhone, Android or iPod Touch, designed to offer protection.

Similar to a stuffed animal in softness, it also features a protective pocket that velcroes closed to hold your iPhone or iPod Touch with a touch-through screen protector that allows you to choose movies, apps or music for your child.

A built-in speaker is powered by two AAA batteries (included); plus there's a headphone jack.

Woogie has six arms that you can tuck under to prop up for viewing or sit it comfortably in your child's lap. The device doesn't limit content, however, it is possible to download a free Woogie app to let you preview content from Iceberg Kids.

Details: Griffin Technologies, http://www.griffintechnology.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 2up. Platform: iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: a protection device for smart phones or iPod Touches. Entry date: 8/3/2011.

