

Children's TECHNOLOGY Review™

Kinect Magic

Double Fine, maker of video games, taps the power of Kinect and inspires the field of computer/child interaction.

PLUS

- *40 Kids, One iPad*
- *The App Gap*
- *LittleClickers: Pianos*
- *Research Watch*

Once Upon a Monster by Double Fine for Warner Bros. on page 15

Children's Technology Review

November 2011

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* Donotes an "Editor's Choice" product, earning a 4.2 or higher rating.



We'll Miss You, Steve Jobs

Since this is our first post-Jobsian issue of CTR, let me pause for a moment to pay tribute to *the* original magic seeker. Sure, Steve Jobs didn't invent stuff like chips and multi-touch gorilla glass, any more than Julia Child invented butter. But he was adept at mixing them up to create magical results, and his products have empowered many, many children over the years. This is also a good time to remember that Steve wasn't finished with his grand scheme of digital domination, and that he left a lot of key ideas in the hands of a smart team with a lot of money. According to Walter Isaacson's biography, Steve was eyeing the multi-billion dollar textbook industry as a next target for digital transformation. One can only hope. Without Steve's hardware, we would never had software, and without software, we'd have nothing to review. To quote one clever tweeter, "thank you Steve, for the jobs."

Microsoft Presents "Kinect for Kids"

Last month in New York, I attended an extravagant press event targeting children. It was sure fun watching the kids try to figure out the tiny cheeseburger hor'dourves. In the past, Microsoft's attempts at the children's space have lacked credible titles (remember Viva Piñata?), but not this time. Besides unveiling partnerships with Sesame Workshop and National Geographic, they gave the audience a chance to try **Once Upon a Monster** (on the cover of this issue). Don't miss the review of this important product, with analysis on why it is pushing innovation in children's interactive media right now. See the review on page 15.

Learn About Pianos

What do Elton John, Lady GaGa, and Mozart have in common? They all started playing the piano when they were four years old. Learn more about this magical musical machine on page 3.

A Closer Look at Apps for Learning to Read

According to neuropsychologist Jeannine Herron, "Most of the apps currently being developed for teaching children reading skills have this serious gap of phoneme awareness that will hinder, not benefit the development of skilled reading because they produce inefficient wiring in the brain." Do you agree? Have a look at page 4.

One iPad, Forty Kindergarteners and Some Respect

"Wow, I could really use this" said Kindergarten Teacher Chris Crowell, as he started exploring ways to tap the power of the iPad. Using the camera feature, he figured out how to help his children understand ideas related to respect. See page 6.

Research Watch: Who Said TV is Dead?

Besides the death of Steve Jobs, October 2011 will go down as a big one for new research unveiled about kids and media use, a least in terms of Google new alerts. Fortunately for us, Scott Traylor covered both events, and he had his camera. See page 7.

November 2012

Volume 19, No. 11, Issue 140

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ONE YEAR SUBSCRIPTIONS are \$24/year, for 12 issues, \$108 for print & electronic issues including online database access. Issues are sent monthly. Send payment to *Children's Technology Review*™, 120 Main Street, Flemington, NJ 08822 or call 800-993-9499. Other subscription options are available, including Print, Electronic, Site Licenses and Top 100 reports. Visit www.childrenstech.com, or call to learn more.

PRODUCT SUBMISSIONS. Send one product with release information to *Lisa DellaFave, Editorial Coordinator, 120 Main Street, Flemington, NJ 08822 (Phone: 908-284-0404)*

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- We don't distribute or sell our subscriber information.
- Contributors are required to disclose bias.
- There is no sponsored or advertising content of any variety.

PUBLISHER INFORMATION *Children's Technology Review*™ (ISSN 1555-242X) is published monthly (12 issues) by Active Learning Associates, Inc. Send address changes or new subscriptions to *Children's Technology Review*™, 120 Main Street, Flemington, NJ 08822. **Use of this publication for any commercial publishing activity without prior written permission is strictly prohibited.**

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What do Elton John, Lady GaGa, and Mozart have in common? They all started playing the piano when they were four years old. Let's learn more about this magical musical machine, with 88 keys.

1. When was the piano invented?

Answer: At <http://piano300.si.edu/timeline.htm> you learn that the very first piano was invented in Italy in the year 1700, so the piano is 312 years old. You'll also learn that "piano" means "to be played quietly" because it was the first instrument to use a special hammer mechanism so it could be played loud or soft.

<http://bit.ly/t011q9>



One of the first pianos

2. If you dropped a piano off of a roof, would it still work?

Answer: Have a look! <http://youtu.be/Nfu1BB2F4TQ>. Every year the students at MIT see what happens when they drop a piano off the roof. Let's just say that the answer is no.

3. How much does a new piano cost?

You can pay as little as \$2 for an app like Magic Piano, or a million dollars if you're Elton John. For \$140 you can buy a 61 key Yamaha synthesizer. If you want a real piano, expect to pay the same as a new car -- from \$10,000 to \$100,000. See <http://www.bluebookofpianos.com> for the latest prices.



4. Can a cat play the piano?

Yes, at least if you ask the owners of Nora, the famous YouTube cat. If you're one of the few that hasn't seen it, heere's Nora! <http://youtu.be/TZ860P4iTaM>

5. How does a piano hammer work?

Visit YouTube <http://youtu.be/xr21z1CZ54I> where

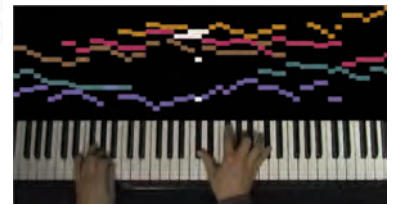
you can see a video of the mechanics of a piano hammer in action.



Animusic (above) and Music Animator (below)

Application: When Pianos Meet Computers

Back in the 1980s, computer programmers figured out how to digitalize music, and re-invent the piano. Want to see? Visit Wayne Lytle at Animusic <http://www.animusic.com> to see some sound driven digital machines, like this one <http://www.youtube.com/AnimusicLLC> or Stephen Malinowski's Music Animation Machine, at <http://www.musanim.com>. You can watch piano scores, one note as a time, at <http://youtu.be/RhKYJclQj5s>.









What to Learn More?

Tune your browser to the radio program to <http://www.classicsforkids.com> where you can learn more about music in general including a game that will test your ability to name the notes.



YouTube LittleClickers YouTube Playlist: Pianos

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL6DED9BA362642699>

 The Making of a Steinway - A Steinway SteinwayOfficial 1,300 views	 1969 Liberace Show Boogie Woogie showmanlee 1,083,233 views	 The Piano - Amazing Short - Animation by aniBOOM aniBOOM 17,101,072 views	 The Next Mozart? 6-Year Old Piano wgn 21,240,416 views	 MIT Baker Piano Drop 2007 luisblackaller 155 views	 MIT's annual Piano Drop in Cambridge - cambchran cambchran 5,492 views
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See this page online, at <http://www.LittleClickers.com/lcpiano1111.html>

Apps With Gaps

According to neuropsychologist Jeannine Herron, “Most of the apps currently being developed for teaching children reading skills have this serious gap of phoneme awareness that will hinder, not benefit the development of skilled reading because they produce inefficient wiring in the brain.” Do you agree?

There’s a disturbing gap in apps for young children. Although most developers of early reading programs would like to help children learn to read, they may be overlooking the most critical skill for reading—phoneme awareness.

Ask most reading researchers about the skills necessary for good reading and they will tell you that kids need to understand that their mouths make different sounds when they say a word (phoneme awareness), and they need to understand that letters were invented to make those sounds visible (phonics). That’s what the alphabet code is all about. *Reading skills need to be linked to speech.* Neural pathways for reading develop as the speech sounds identified in spoken words become linked to letters.

Two-thirds of America’s fourth graders have difficulty reading, and for most it’s because they have not developed phoneme awareness and linked these speech sounds to letters. These two skills—learning to identify speech sounds and learning to recognize the shapes of the letters that stand for those speech sounds—need to be learned simultaneously as children learn to construct the words they say. The theory is that brain will not build efficient databases if different skills are stored in isolation.

Neuroscience research shows that *the brain changes in response to instruction.* Classroom instruction, computer software and apps are all programming the brain. Neural systems will organize new inputs depending on how they are entered. Programmers know that elegant programming produces quick and efficient results; sloppy programming causes glitches, bugs, slow processing, and crashes. That’s very close to what’s happening in the brain with kids who struggle to read.

Most of the apps currently being developed for teaching children reading skills have this serious gap of phoneme awareness that will hinder, not benefit, the development of skilled reading because they produce inefficient wiring in the brain. Here are some examples:

Build A Word (\$3, @Reks, <http://www.atreks.com>) is a very nice idea, and well organized, with short-vowel three-letter words in the first level, graduating to long vowel words, etc. Children hear and see a word, then drag the appropriate letters to boxes to spell the word. However, the letters are *named* as they are placed C-A-P, and then the word is pronounced “cap.” The gap is that the program uses the letter *names* rather than the letter sounds. It assumes parents will help children sound-out the words, rather than having the program sound-out the words. It would have been easy to use the sounds of the letters instead of the names, and children would have been better able to recognize the sounds in the words, and link those sounds to the shapes (letters) they chose.

Intro to Letters (\$5, Montessorium) does use the sound of the letters, but the exercise is just to link the visual letter to the sound. The gap is that it is not teaching phoneme awareness. The letter-sound link is not meaningful to the child until he understands that those sounds are sounds in words he says, and that he can use those letters to spell out a word. This app company is called Montessorium, LLC. However, if the designers knew their Montessori they would know that she introduced letters by having children sound-out and spell words with moveable letters. She did not introduce letters isolated from meaningful words.

ABC Food (\$2, Peapod Labs) has a particularly serious gap. It is teaching children to recognize whole words rather than learning to sound-out words. No phoneme awareness whatsoever. Jazzy graphics, but poor pedagogy. California learned about the folly of teaching whole words (without phoneme awareness and phonics) the hard way. When the State mandated “whole language” and dropped “phonics,” reading scores in California plummeted. Recognizing whole words is a pattern recognition task. The *right* side of the brain is the hemisphere specialized for pattern recognition. Contour analysis, faces, and patterns are all



Jeannine Herron, Ph.D. became interested in the reading process as co-founder and program director for the Child Development Group of Mississippi, a Head-Start program for 5,000 children. This experience led her to become a research neuropsychologist. She spent 10 years investigating brain organization and dyslexia at the University of California, San Francisco. Learn more about Jeannine’s work at www.talkingfingers.com.

DISCLOSURE: I am the author of the federally funded products *Read, Write + Type* and *Wordy Qwerty* that can be viewed as competitive to products mentioned in this article.



processed in the *right* side of the brain, which is where kids with reading difficulties try to process reading. Kids who are skilled readers use the *left* side of the brain because they have mastered the links between speech and letters. (The left side is where speech resides—everything previously learned about words). If kids link the visual shapes of letters with the speech sounds of words they say, the data is more likely stored efficiently in the left side of the brain. Furthermore, ABC Food adds to the confusion in the brain by giving children words like CELERY, CAKE and CHOCOLATE to link with the letter C. What’s the most common sound that C represents? It’s the “c” in CAKE. It’s more efficient for the brain to learn the most common sound first, repeating it until that sound-letter association is fluent, then add exceptions later. And by the way, the CH in CHOCOLATE is a completely different phoneme. The only thing this program is teaching is vocabulary.



How Rocket Learned to Read (\$5, Random House) is a lovely story, well read and beautifully illustrated and animated. But even though Rocket is told that sounds can be represented by letters, when he starts to spell out words he is using the letter names rather than the sounds. So the connection between sounds and letters is never explicitly made for the players as Rocket spells the words. They don’t know why WIND is spelled W I N D. The games accompanying the story teach children to recognize whole words, and to find letters in alphabetic order. The order of the alphabet is not useful for reading, nor are letter names. It is the sounds of the letters that should be the grail—the secret to cracking the code. Presenting the letter shape as Bb is also confusing. It would be easier for kids to learn one or the other—caps or lower case. Don’t ask four year olds to learn to recognize 52 shapes all at once. 26 are hard enough.



Word Wizard (\$3, L’Escapadou) is on the right track, but does have a weakness. On the positive side, the player can choose caps or lower case and can choose to hear the phoneme pronounced. If the spelling game is chosen, kids must segment the word themselves and select the correct letters to spell out the word. Help is provided if necessary. And the letters are pronounced as sounds when they are touched. Vowels are colored red, and consonants blue for easy retrieval. The weakness is that the app uses Dolch lists for pre-primer spelling. These lists have words that kids would not be able to spell by sounding them out: COME, BLUE, FIND, FUNNY, LITTLE, ONE, SAID. A pre-primer list should have lots of consonant-vowel-consonant words that give children practice and *success* in sounding out words that are regularly spelled. Children can’t figure out words like BLUE, COME or SAID on their own. So instead of experiencing success with their beginner’s knowledge of the code, they have spelled the word wrong and need to ask for help. When they hear the word HERE, they don’t know if it’s HEAR or HERE. When they hear the word FOR, they don’t know if it’s supposed to be FOR or FOUR. But if teachers or parents dictate simple, regularly spelled words for pre-primer youngsters instead of using the list, the app is a useful tool.



In spite of hundreds of research reports documenting the importance of phoneme awareness and phonics for skilled reading, there are still hold-outs clinging to the old “whole language”/whole word approach. (Or, software designers who simply have not bothered to study the research). It may be easy to deliver glitzy apps with gaps, but these games are programming neural pathways that will become habitual, and habitually inefficient. I could go on giving examples, but there are probably hundreds of apps, already released or being designed, to teach *isolated* skills—letter names (useless for reading) or the sequence of the alphabet (useless for reading), or whole irregularly spelled words (confusing the brain), or letter-sound links in isolation from real words. Most of these apps completely omit the essential skill of phoneme awareness, or offer it as an isolated skill with rhyming or matching games. Phoneme awareness and phonics are not separate skills—they go together. Phoneme awareness activities become meaningful to children (and to their brains) when they understand that they are learning to identify these sounds in order to link them to letters. Educational technology is facing a serious credibility problem. With schools failing to capture the imagination of children, there is more and more demand for technology. But research is showing that it is not as effective as expected. Reading and math scores do not rise significantly. Why? One important reason is that the product designers are not aware of the educational research that will make their products really effective.

Apps with gaps are not helping. Mobile devices offer amazing tools for designing elegant instruction. These tools could help raise the literacy and even the I.Q.’s of the entire nation if they were thoughtfully used. Most children *can* organize efficient reading pathways with “elegant” instruction! And become skilled readers! Parents and teachers are learning to choose elegance. But shopping at the app store in the future, will they find elegance? Or more gaps?

40 Kindergarteners and 1 iPad

By Chris Crowell

My two Kindergarten classes (morning and afternoon) come from diverse populations. Besides keeping my day interesting, it presents me with the challenge and opportunity of working with a range of cultures and economic situations.

That's why we always put a lot of energy into trying to teach respect. Over the years, I've experimented — sometimes unsuccessfully — with ways to help my kids understand such things as “respect is something that is lost, and not earned” and “every person deserves respect but that respect could be lost for an individual if they don't follow the rules.” Those words might sound logical to an adult, but how do you get that idea across to a non-English speaking kindergartener?

Then I remembered a conversation with a special education teacher in my school district about using an iPad 2's camera to create short skits modeling the class rules. She had mentioned that while she assisted them in creating the videos, her students freely went back to the iPad to remind each other of the rules. Hmmmm...

As we were getting ready to go to the library one day, I grabbed the iPad and told the class we would make a video to show the librarian that we know the procedure for checking out a book, and that we “respected” her rule of “browser in, book out, book in, browser out.” The kids thought up a role-play, and it took less than a minute for us to record the video. The class loved the ability to instantly see their work. We walked down to the library, eager to share. I told the librarian that we knew she would want to make sure we knew the process for selecting books in her library so we made a video. She teared up while watching the short video and then hugged every student. She said, “I don't have to review procedures with this class and I am so happy. Take your browsers from the can in the middle of your tables and lets go shopping for books!”

While the librarian was reading a story to class, I thought about how easy using the iPad camera was, and how easy it was for the entire class to see the screen, to share the results. By doing so, we discovered a new way to show respect to the librarian. The iPad was like a video camera and projector, all in one. Wow -- I could use this in a lot of ways.

After the story, the students lined up and recited a poem the



Chris Crowell has been a Kindergarten teacher for 17 years at Desmares Elementary School in Flemington NJ

DISCLAIMER: “I have no commercial interest in products mentioned in this article.”

librarian does with them each week to remind them how to hold their books and walk quietly in the hallways. As the class started to enter the hallway I subtly turned on the camera and held it by my side. I recorded the students walking back to the classroom. I turned off the camera once we reached our class door and proceeded to tell the students the procedure for keeping our library books at our tables until we finish our “Do Nows” and then placing our completed work and books into our cubbies. I explained that if everyone tried to put their books into their cubbies at the same time, chaos could ensue and books might get damaged. We entered the classroom and proceeded to do our “Do Nows” which I had explained prior to going to the library.

As the students were working on their “Do Nows” I set up the iPad on my table, which also serves as the iPad center during “Choice Time”, and once again turned on the camera to record the students working at

the table closest. As I circulated the room, assessing the students' abilities and interacting with individual children, the camera recorded the four students working. At one point during this time the four children noticed that the camera was recording them. The predictable “hamming it up” ensued for a few minutes, but soon the novelty wore off and the focus returned to the assignment. The camera ran for about five minutes.

Later, when we were all gathered for large group time, I held the iPad, story book style, and showed the videos to the class, pointing out how they showed respect through their actions. The video and sounds were crystal clear, and the response was amazing! They noted how the video we made for the librarian showed respect for the books and an understanding that the books in the library are for everyone at the school to use. By following the procedures of the library we are showing respect for others who use the library.

The video of the class walking in the hallway back from library elicited responses about how walking quietly was showing respect for the students and teachers in their classrooms by not distracting them. They observed that no one was touching the walls or student work hanging on bulletin boards and this was displaying respect. During the video, my class also passed another class who waited patiently and politely for us to pass them exiting a stairwell. This brought comments that the older students were showing their respect for our class.

The camera function on the iPad gives me a new, much more concrete way to help my kids understand an abstract concept. The quickness in which the lesson came together was outstanding. My students have referred back to it often not only directly to me, but when discussing respect for each other.

As a teacher with 40 children, I have a hard job, but it just became a little bit easier, with a tool like the iPad 2.



Research Watch

This last month was a big one for new research unveiled about kids and media use, a least in terms of Google new alerts. Here's a look beyond the headlines.

Event #1: The AAP Position Statement

In mid-October the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) made a statement regarding media use for young children ages 0 to 2 years of age at the AAP National Conference held in Boston. Media research fans may remember the AAP released a position statement over a decade ago stating screened media use for children ages 0 to 2 should be avoided entirely because there is no proof that television can be of educational value to children at such an early age. **Fast forward to last month and the policy statement is pretty much the same.** TV at this early age is still not educational. But hasn't the media delivery landscape evolved from passive to interactive? What about all of those iPhones, iPads, tablets and other mobile devices? Should young children avoid using these devices as well? The AAP was much more savvy with their presentation this time. They acknowledged in their press announcement that the realities of being a parent with a young child mean that sometimes a television is used to pacify a child so the parent can take a shower or cook dinner. The AAP acknowledges that screen use is almost at two hours a day for some of the youngest media consumers. However, the AAP could not make any recommendations related to interactive media. While there is a mountain of research available related to linear video viewing, there just aren't many studies available regarding interactive screen use, for any age group.

Event #2: Zero to Eight: Children's Media Use in America

Exactly one week after that AAP press event Common Sense Media held its own media event in Washington DC based on a survey of families regarding the use of media with children 0 to 8 years of age. This time, the survey considered interactive useage. You may recall that Vicky Rideout used to work with the Kaiser Family Foundation, and was a lead researcher on a series of studies related to children, media use, and health. She coordinated three 5 year surveys of media use across a wide range of platforms, ages, ethnicities and socio-economic groups. When Vicky announced in March, 2010 that she would be moving on from Kaiser, the media research space collectively wondered "Would we ever see another five year media study again?" Thankfully we recently found out the answer was a resounding yes! Not only did this new report cover areas of concern by the AAP, but it also provided great insight into the iPad/iPhone/mobile and interactive screened media world for kids. One of the most shocking data points in this study was the percentage of televisions found in a child's bed-

room. **30% of all children age 0 to 1, 44% of all children ages 2 to 4, and 47% of children ages 5 to 8 have a television in their bedroom!** The scariest part of this data is these numbers are just averages. When you tease out percentages for ethnic groups and low-income families these numbers rise, and by a lot!

Another surprising data point was the percentage of children that have used interactive devices like the iPad. That number is only 7%. A handful of people have asked me, "Is that right?" First, this number is an average across all ages and as you slice the data the percentages rise as a child ages and lowers for younger children. Again, this percentage drops significantly with ethnic groups and low income families. What we also learn from this number is that television is a primary source of educational content for non-white ethnic groups and lower income families. **The question I ask an eager iPad development community "Are we creating apps in an attempt to provide really great learning opportunities for all children when the reality is only a small sliver of economically advantaged children actually benefit from our apps?"** Another surprising number, among the poorest households 38% of respondents didn't know what an "app" was. This paper describes a new trend referred to the "app gap." Those of us working in the children's software space have long theorized that kids are spending more time with interactive media, games, handhelds and iPads and less time watching television. This latest report says no, television is still very much the leading device, alive and well more than we ever could have imagined. But wait, that's a research slice in time that has already passed! In conversations with Vicky she suggests that the world of screened media for kids, be it interactive or passive, is changing very fast. Reports she was part of that came out every five years are not able to accurately capture the incremental changes in the children's technology space. Thankfully additional reports may be on the horizon in two, probably three more years says Vicky.

So what are the main take-aways? **Television is still very prominent in the lives of children ages 0 to 8.** Just three years ago researchers were not aware of the influence the app concept would have in the children's media space. Apps didn't exist. **Change is happening, but not equally for all children.** Television still remains the best way to reach young children with educational content, especially children in socio-economically disadvantaged homes. **However, there is now no doubt that interactive media is changing the media landscape.**



By Scott Traylor

Links

(These should all be live in the PDF version. The last three links are YouTube interviews.)

AAP Policy Statement Media Use by Children Younger than 2 Years.
<http://bit.ly/siXgdh>
See also <http://bit.ly/tV3PdX>

Zero to Eight: Children's Media Use in America
<http://bit.ly/s1LOAy>

Media Use Among White, Black, Hispanic and Asian American Children (an update to the 201001 Kaiser Family Foundation children's Media Use Report)
<http://bit.ly/ljBjTA> and
<http://bit.ly/jEzZxr>

Kaiser Family Foundation Generation M2: Media in the Lives of 8- to 18-Year-Olds <http://bit.ly/7XukS3>

Study Shows How Kids' Media Use Helps Parents Cope.
<http://bit.ly/t5mCi9>

Generation M: Media in the Lives of 8-18 Year-olds.
<http://bit.ly/3EpxHs>

Kids & Media @ The New Millennium.
<http://bit.ly/mMlbp>

Vicky Rideout interview - Zero to Eight Children's Media Use Research Overview
<http://bit.ly/sVteSi>

Vicky Rideout Presentation of Report <http://bit.ly/vioVfm>

AAP policy statement for the press <http://bit.ly/pd8Md8>



Feature Reviews

NOVEMBER 1, 2011

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.

AbcDay

This alphabet app has a distinctly home-made feel to it. The idea is to teach children to read and write the alphabet, one letter at a time. Sound familiar?

Activities include picking the right letter to fill in the blank to complete a word, singing along with the alphabet song as they pop each bubble to reveal a hidden creature, and tracing letters.

Details: Hompimplay, www.hompimplay.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-5. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: letter recognition, reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.4 stars. Entry date: 10/17/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	68%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	6	
Design Features	6	
Good Value	6	

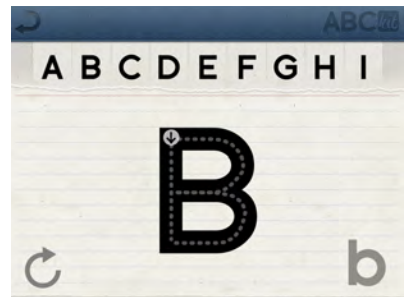


ABCKit

Dry but cleanly designed, this letter recognition app is designed to introduce and teach letters in Spanish, based on the Montessori methodology. After each letter is introduced, children can practice writing each letter, one at a time, in upper or lower case by following the prescribed path. If you stay inside the line, you are praised in Spanish. We noticed that it is easy to fool the program and get the praise with random scribbles. If you're looking for a clean, quiet design, this is a consideration. The app is available in Spanish and Catalan.

Details: Arquinauta, <http://arquinauta.es/en/>. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: Spanish, letter recognition. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 9/23/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	83%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	N	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	8	





Appfinity AppBlaster

iPhone/iPod holders come in many forms -- but as a two-triggered assault rifle? Dressed in bright orange and white colors (to make sure it doesn't get confused with a real gun), this is a plastic gun that houses your camera-equipped iPod Touch, iPhone 3 or greater in a plastic case that snaps onto a gun barrel, about where the sight would be. So instead of looking down the barrel, you look into your iPhone screen.

The first step is to download one of the apps. We tried AlienAttack, a game that plays exactly like many Nintendo DSi and 3DS games, where you see creatures floating around your room as seen through the camera on your device. A radar screen clues you into the creature location -- the more you shoot, the harder the challenge, following a recipe that's been used dozens of times before.

There are just two buttons on the app, one for each trigger. When you pull the trigger, the capacitive energy from your finger is passed to the screen, through a little plastic pad that presses against your screen. We found the action to be surprisingly responsive feeling. To reload, you tilt the gun back; all sounds come from your device.

Our testers found the entire concept to be quite fun, although the single app we reviewed was a one trick pony. The success or failure of the AppBlaster lies in the depth of the apps, which we notice cost an additional fee (on top of the gun). This might be because they can be played with your fingers directly touching the trigger points -- bypassing the \$40 AppBlaster purchase. Created by Apptoyz (www.apptoyz.com) for Appfinity. The gun is made and sold by Spinmaster.

Details: Appfinity, www.theappblaster.com/. Price: \$40. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: fine motor control, temporal relations, timing. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 10/29/2011. [WB]

Bartleby's Book of Buttons Vol. 2

Continuing to stretch the definition of "ebook", this second edition of Bartleby's Book of Buttons contains 17 pages, each containing one or more puzzles that must be solved in order to unlock the next page. The entire experience turns into a beautifully illustrated, well-crafted maze that nicely exploits just about every feature of your iPad, from the accelerometer to the multi-touch screen.

For example, in the page labeled "Whale in the Way" you must figure out how to get a sleeping whale to wake up, in order to see the door to a hidden cave. This requires playing records on Bartleby's phonograph (spun with your finger). If you pick the right record (street noises) long enough, the whale wakes up. Other screens have you tilting the screen to steer a bubble and shining a spotlight on various points on the screen.

Other noteworthy features include the ability to toggle the narration on or off, the ability to use AirPlay on Apple TV (on iPad 2 and iPhone 4S with iOS 5) external screen support on all other devices, the ability to unlock achievements in Game Center, print stickers using AirPrint or tweet your accomplishments using Twitter (iOS5) and iCloud support so you can pick up where you left off on any of your devices (iOS5).

If you liked the Bartleby Vol. 1, you'll like this creative collection of puzzles just as much, if not more. Created by Monster Costume (Kyle Kinkade is the CEO). Vol. 3 will be called "Bartleby and the Moon Button."

Details: Octopus Kite/Big D TV, Inc., http://octopuskite.com. Price: \$4. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: logic, reading, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.9 stars. Entry date: 10/14/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	83%
Educational	N	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	8	



Ease of Use	9	98%
Educational	10	
Entertaining	10	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	10	





Clicky Sticky Cars

Car lovers may be willing to overlook the design limitations in this crudely designed electronic flannel board. There are four sets of resizable stickers that can be combined, and then "played" on a race track, as a rock riff plays.

There are no coloring or drawing features, but it could still function for giving children practice expanding or shrinking icons, by pinching or spreading your fingers, making this a good fine motor exercise as well.

If you're looking for coloring and painting features, you'll be disappointed by this app. However, those seeking a simple, structured drag-and-drop experience will find it easy to use.

Details: Merge Mobile, Inc, <http://mergemobile.com>. Price: \$.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, car play. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 9/22/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	78%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	8	



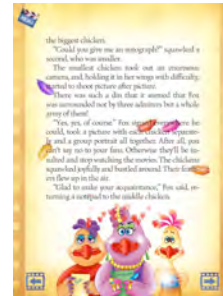
Cut! It's a Wrap! The Secret of the Mummy from the Cellar

Designed for older (upper elementary) readers, this 40 page/screen story is about life at the animal film studios, where The Fox is the director. The mystery has to do with finding some stolen jewelry.

While there are no text-to-speech features, each page has something interesting to discover, or fun to do to support the story. On one page, you might match various types of lace to different dresses to complete a wardrobe. Clearly, a lot of thought went into the design of this app. One drawback, the story is not finished on the last page (you see a "to be continued" sign).

Details: eMotion Tales, www.emotiontales.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language, reading comprehension. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 7/11/2011. [WB]

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



Go Vacation

Fun, but unpolished, this collection of resort games takes place on a trip to Kawawii island, a virtual family resort.

The game features co-operative and competitive events, and you can play with up to four players. Activities include sky diving, surfing, white water rafting, beach volleyball, tennis, miniature golf, snowball fights and shooting water guns. It is also possible to explore the island on horseback, through scuba diving, or riding snowmobiles. While all this sounds fun, the design of some of the games feels clunky and hurried, as if the designers were trying to pack too much into one title.

The game is compatible with the Wii MotionPlus controller and the Wii Balance Board. See www.govacationgame.com.

Details: Namco Bandai Games America Inc., www.namcobandaigames.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Wii. Teaches/Purpose: sports, gross motor movement. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 9/1/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	7	80%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	9	

ESRB Rating: Rating Pending





I Am T-Pain Mic

I Am T-Pain Mic (\$40, Jakks Pacific) combines three rhythm tracks, an MP3 Player, auto-tune technology, a speaker, an audio-out jack and a USB port, with enough memory to store up to three minutes of your voice.

So does it work? Actually, yes. The final version, tested in October 2011, had a very high novelty effect with our testers. It's fun to try out for a few minutes. You wouldn't want to use it for any serious work, however, it could be a good way for young children to play with their voice.

Your goal, of course, is to sound like rapper T-Pain, one of the first to use auto-tune technology in his music. Powered by 3 AAA batteries, the Mic comes in four styles. You can sing in freestyle, or record and play back your songs. The three demo beat and soundbytes were created by Nappy Boy's Young Fyre. See the demo at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kxFEvpESSgo>

Details: Jakks Pacific, Inc, www.jakkspacific.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: music. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 3/8/2010. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	83%
Educational	N	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	8	



JibJab Jr. Books

Here's a fun way to put yourself into a book, and create a funny language experience. Note, that you'll need a camera on your iPad (e.g., the iPad 2). Also note that there are both free and paid version pathways to these stories. The free version does everything on Earth to trick you or your child into buying additional content by way of an in-app sale. It also tries to snag your contact information, (email address, twitter or facebook information) if you share your work.

This first title, called "The Biggest Pizza Ever," tells the story of a kid who wreaks havoc on his town with a gigantic pizza pie. The book features simple character animations. Additional titles cost \$8 each, or you can subscribe for \$4/month.

The second book, "The Alphabet Wrangler," is about a child who has to chase the letters of the alphabet around the house after they mischievously escape from a book. JibJab plans on releasing new titles every month. Once you purchase a book, it can be personalized an unlimited number of times at no additional cost.

Details: JibJab Media Inc., <http://sendables.jibjab.com/>. Price: \$free/\$7.99. Ages: 2-6. Platform: iPad 2, iPhone or iPod Touch with camera. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, fun with language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 9/27/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	92%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	10	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	9	



Kinect Sports: Season Two

Easy to play, smoothly designed, and extremely fun as a social game, this second version of Kinect Sports contains six sports: tennis, golf, American football, baseball, skiing and darts. Of all the Kinect titles we've reviewed, this is one of the best at accurately mapping your movements, so it actually seems like you're throwing the darts. The football game lacks in-depth features such as a career mode, but you can use audible commands to choose plays and snap the ball.

Each game has three difficulty levels, with the starting level (rookie) designed to make sure that a child can succeed. Sharing is possible either online (an Xbox Gold membership is required, sold extra) or with as many as four other players in your living room.

Noteworthy features include in-game voice commands and much better motion tracking than last year. Also new is Challenge Play for Xbox Live, which lets you send a challenge to a friend for later when they log on. You can also log onto KinectShare.com and download photos and videos capture in-game and share with friends and family, and for the first time, post these directly to your Facebook wall.

Other features include an in-game calorie counter, and unlockable avatar awards. Developed by Rare and Big Park Games for Microsoft Studios.

Details: Microsoft Game Studios, www.microsoft.com/games. Price: \$50. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Xbox Kinect. Teaches/Purpose: sports, bodily kinesthetic movement. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 10/19/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	96%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	10	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	10	



ESRB Rating: Everyone, Comic Mischief



Kinectimals Now with Bears

Featuring jaw-droppingly clear graphics with ten animals (five bears and five large cats), this interactive animal sim lets you explore an island with a realistic looking pet. If you liked last year's edition, you'll like this year's even more.

After you choose your pet, you can give it a name using the Kinect's voice recognition abilities (you don't actually hear your recorded voice, but your pet runs over when you say it's name).

Other voice commands include "jump," "roll over" and "play dead," plus you can give the Kinect general yes and no commands, which speeds things along.

There are two guides -- Bumble and Lina who tend to talk excessively, giving you advice and tips. The story varies with each pet. If you choose a cat, you'll solve a mystery on the island of Lemuria; bears undertake Fiddler's Quest on the island of Mira. On both islands, you'll be able to unlock items and personalize the gameplay experience. These items include special toys that can be unlocked by buying one of the \$12 plush toys, that include a special tag. The items can be unlocked by holding a tag up to the "scan stone" at the start of the game. Microsoft now has a deal with select Build-A-Bear Workshop stores, which also use the Microsoft Tag technology.

Content includes five cats (Lion, Royal Bengal Tiger, Cheetah, Leopard or Panther) and five bears (Black Bear, Grizzly Bear, Cinnamon Bear, Panda Bear or Polar Bear). There are 10 more animals that can be unlocked.

Weaknesses include some clumsy controls and a feeling that you don't always have control over items on the screen. There could be better direct body mapping. Our testers were able to adapt, but there can be frustrations.

Note that the voice won't work in all languages; a list can be found at xbox.com/kinectimals.

Created by Frontier Developments Ltd. for Microsoft. The game is \$50 and there's a \$15 "Bear Island" Xbox LIVE downloadable add-on.

Details: Microsoft Game Studios, www.microsoft.com/games. Price: \$50. Ages: 4-up. Platform: Xbox Kinect. Teaches/Purpose: movement, physical coordination, gross motor movement, lower body movement, following directions. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 10/19/2011. [WB]

Magic School Bus, The: Oceans (DS)

Ms. Frizzle's Magic School Bus comes to your Nintendo DS, complete with hundreds of ecology-related facts, great for a playful introduction.

This is a game that you progressively unlock, which is both a strength and a weakness. But the games are fast-paced and generally fun. For example, in one you try to find fish with spots as quickly as possible, while avoiding predators. In another, you sketch fish outlines. There are seven types of activities, which also provide fine motor practice.

There are six levels which can be unlocked with ocean animal facts and trivia challenges. The game features seven games with just under 200 science interactions, and you will earn points to unlock ocean areas to explore and learn hundreds of facts about underwater life.

Details: Scholastic Media, www.scholastic.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 4-up. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: ocean life. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 10/13/2011. [WB]

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

ESRB Rating: Everyone



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

ESRB Rating: Everyone, Comic Mischief





Millie Was Here

The series Millie Was Here is a book app series for iPad featuring Millie, a mischievous dog. The first book in the series, Meet Millie, is a free teaser, in the form of an eight page introduction. You'll learn about Millie's origin, and see some of her magical powers in action. There are pop-ups and mini games on each page.

Other features include a bedtime mode for a calmer experience for nighttime reading

The second book in the series, Millie & The Lost Key is \$4. In it, Millie travels to a far away land in search of a powerful treasure - The Key to Endless Bacon.

Details: Megapops, www.megapops.com. Price: \$free/\$3.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 8/26/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	90%	
Educational	9		
Entertaining	9		
Design Features	10		
Good Value	9		

ESRB Rating:



Pokémon Rumble Blast

You heard it right, Pokémon fans -- 3D, for the first time. Let me start by saying I'm a far cry from a Pokémon expert, but I can tell you that the 3D effects do look amazing, and that a lot of the gameplay feels similar to previous Pokémon games I've tested in the past with one exception. There does seem to be more online fighting and action.

The game contains 600 Pokémon, including the libraries from both Pokémon Black and Pokémon White.

There's also Boss Pokémon, which is stronger, and two new battle modes. In Team Battle, you are joined by two of your own Toy Pokémon as you battle numerous mini bosses in a quest to defeat a Boss Pokémon. In Charge Battle, the strength of your team is challenged when two large battalions of Pokémon collide. The game also allows for two players to team up and play over a local wireless connection, or you can use the StreetPass features and challenge Toy Pokémon that other nearby players have collected, and view customized Mii characters within the game. Developed by Ambrella for Nintendo of America.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$35. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, reading, math, reading charts. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 10/21/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	96%	
Educational	9		
Entertaining	10		
Design Features	10		
Good Value	10		

ESRB Rating: Everyone 10+, Mild Cartoon Violence



Poky Little Puppy, The

Adapted directly from the printed Golden Book with the same title, by Janette Debring Lawrey, this 23 page, 12 screen ebook (two "pages" per screen) is thick with touch-and-hear print that is augmented by the ability to record your own voice, reading each page. We tested the iPad version, and suspect that the print might be too small on smaller screens.

The story -- of mischievous puppies getting into trouble -- is supported nicely with good interaction, professional narration, and guided exploration on each page.

Weaknesses include some inconsistent leveling between the reading level and the activities, plus the pages must be swiped to be turned. This process may be less than obvious for younger children (static arrow icons work better).

However, these are minor points, as children quickly figure out the page turning. The story is tried and true, and the springy illustrations wait quietly for a child's touch. It is easy to jump to any page at any time, making this a solid addition to your ebook library.

Details: Random House Children's Books, <http://www.randomhouse.com/kids/apps/>. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 5-12. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, classification. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 9/22/2011. [WB]

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





Puss in Boots: The Video Game

If you like jumping around with imaginary swords, as well as humor piped straight from the Dreamworks movie, you'll also like Puss in Boots: The Video Game. We tried the Kinect version, and quickly became exhausted -- in a good way -- as we kicked, waved our arms, balanced, strummed a guitar, clawed and snuck our way through the first of what looked to be about four levels (we cannot confirm this). We also did not try the two player features.

The motion mapping is not exact, but it is good enough, and an on-screen model shows you what you need to do. There's a lot of playful comic mischief, and the game is a great context to get kids moving around. The PS3 Move compatible version lets you use your controller, or choose to use the Move remote and transform the gameplay into a full-motion sword fighting experience. In the Wii version, you use the Wii Remote to slash with Puss' sword, the Nunchuk to dodge attacks, and button combinations to deliver damage to enemies. The handheld DS/DSi version continues the movie's storyline with a new plot that has Puss engaging in swordfights, flamenco style dance battles, dozens of mini games, and rhythm-based activities.

Prices are \$50 for the Xbox Kinect version, \$40 for the PS3 version, and \$30 for the Wii and DS versions. Created by Blitz & ImaginEngine for THQ.

Details: THQ, Inc., www.thq.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Xbox Kinect, PlayStation Move, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360, Wii, Nintendo DSi, Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: Kinect version: Gross motor skills, coordination, strategy, logic, memory. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 10/19/2011. [WB]

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



ESRB Rating: Everyone 10+, Cartoon Violence, Comic Mischief



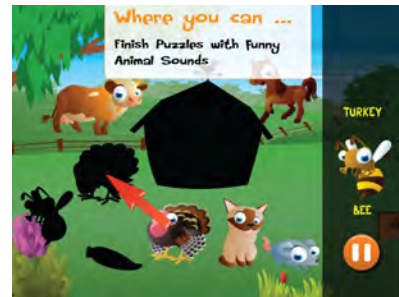
Puzzingo

Fun, and high in child control, but cursed by an occasional crash, Puzzingo was inspired by classic wooden puzzles for kids.

As children play with the puzzles, they learn what the different pieces are, as well as the different sounds they make. After they complete a puzzle, they are rewarded with minigames - including singing the ABC song, popping balloons, swatting flies, and more. In addition, once a puzzle is completed, children will unlock new puzzles to play. All the puzzles come together to build a circus ground. There is also a secret bonus puzzle that you can access once you are done with the main game, by double-tapping then swiping the clown on the opening scene. Puzzle themes include farm animals, ocean animals, toys, letters and numbers.

Details: 77SPARX Studio, www.77sparx.com. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 3-5. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: spatial relations, matching, vocabulary. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 10/4/2011. [WB]

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



Puzzle Pop

Drag-and-drop puzzles abound these days in the app store, but not many have animated pieces. That, along with 27 timed levels that start easy and get harder, and the quality background music, make this an exceptional addition to any app library.

The animated features bring a new type of timed problem solving to the challenge. For example, you can watch an animated part of the scene move, and use that as a clue to know the order in which the parts go. In addition, the corners are always marked, and two pieces can be dragged together, to speed up the problem solving.

All in all, this is one of the most innovative puzzles we've seen. Songs include Take Me Out to the Ball Game, Oh Where Has My Dog Gone?, Down By the Bay, Itsy Bitsy Spider, You Are My Sunshine, Old MacDonald, This Old Man, I'm a Little Teapot, Twinkle Little Star, Yankee Doodle, Bach Minuet, Wheels on the Bus, London Bridge, Saints Go Marching, Boccherini Minuet, and Coming Around the Mountain. See the demo at <http://tinyurl.com/puzzlevideo>.

Details: Duck Duck Moose, . Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: logic, problem solving. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.9 stars. Entry date: 10/24/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	98%
Educational	10	
Entertaining	10	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	10	





Sesame Street: Once Upon a Monster

Sound the trumpets and jump for joy -- in this case literally -- in front of your Xbox Kinect controller. Somebody finally has used Sesame Street characters in a video game. And the results are stunning, in part because they break new ground in the area of how children interact with computers.

The designers are not a group of educational game designers. Instead, this game came from an extremely non-educational company, called Double Fine, best known for games that the ESRB says are not for children. See for example, *Brütal Legend*. This time, Double Fine has taken on an even harder-to-please audience -- preschoolers.

After you log into your Xbox account (required in order to bookmark your progress) a storybook is introduced by Elmo and friends, and you are shown how you can turn pages with a slow wave of your arm. To jump into the page to play an activity, you move both arms slowly as if doing a slow breast stroke. This takes some getting used to, but our testers were soon able to figure it out, in because many of the screens directly mirror your body position.

You quickly discover that there's something on each page that asks you to do a different activity. This includes jumping through an obstacle course (jumping, ducking and leaning left or right), growing a garden by tossing seeds and squirting a hose, flying through a maze by flapping your "wings," dancing, pulling weeds, and calling out your name, to have it recorded by the Kinect microphone.

At any point, you can step out of view of the Kinect camera to pause the game. If the Kinect spots another person, it seamlessly logs them in as a guest, assigning them the body of one of the monsters. This "pull you in by default" model of interactivity worked like a charm in *Mediatech*, where dozens of different kids walk by the Kinect camera every day, and it sets a new standard in the very important and often complicated logging in process.

One drawback -- pointed out by Chris Crowell, a teacher, is that this product doesn't do much to reinforce learning, other than following instructions and promoting a LOT of physical movement. Most, if not all of the "academic" types of tasks are below the level of the intended audience. That said, this game offers a wonderful experience with something that doesn't find it's way into the school curriculum that frequently -- playing together cooperatively.

Details: Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, Inc., www.warnerbros.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 3-6. Platform: Xbox Kinect. Teaches/Purpose: classification, large motor coordination, collaborative play, socialization . Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 4/16/2011. [WB]

Sing N' Match: Head To Toes!

Featuring good music, but bad design, this app is designed to introduce children to parts of the body.

The music was written by Dancing Bears Music, and the app was developed with Webrich Software. There are three screens: Learn, Match and Compose. Learn lets children's watch and listen; Match lets them listen to the song and choose the image that corresponds to the music; and Compose lets children compose their own song by selecting the pictures they would like to include in the song.

Details: Dancing Bears Music, <http://www.singnmatch.com>. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 2-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: body parts, music, memory. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 1.6 stars. Entry date: 10/13/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	92%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	10	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	9	



ESRB Rating: Everyone



Ease of Use	5	32%
Educational	4	
Entertaining	3	
Design Features	2	
Good Value	2	

ESRB Rating:





Skylee Lovable Dragon

First released in 2009 as a penguin (see Penbo), Skylee is an interactive, talking dragon that comes with a storage compartment designed to hold a plastic egg in her belly.

The baby, called "Bebe" doubles as a three button infra-red remote control, with ears that can be used to drive Skylee across the room. Sensors include a touch switch on the top of the head (tap to hear a question or comment -- if you hold your hand on her head, she'll fall asleep). Touching the heart switch on the front has multiple functions, which is one of the reason Skylee is hard to figure out. It might open the door, start a dance, or launch a game. A switch near the tail tells the computer that the dragon is off the ground. When picked up, Skylee "flies" by flapping her wings.

Testers noted that the belly is hard to open, and found the speech to be muffled and hard to hear. At one point, one of the wings on her back became stuck (note that we were testing a pre-market version) which caused Skylee to hang. While the mother/baby theme is potentially appealing, the lack of control over the functions is potentially frustrating. Skylee is powered by 6 AA batteries; Bebe by three LR44 button cells.

Details: Bossa Nova Robotics, www.bnrobotics.com. Price: \$60. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: causality. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2.4 stars. Entry date: 10/25/2011. [WB]

Sleepy Mole's Moving Day

A maze meets an ebook, in this very simply designed ebook about a Sleepy Mole who can't find a place to rest. You help, by choosing a direction to flip the page. If you choose down, Sleepy Mole digs down, where he might meet an angry frog, who might tell him to go away. Content includes four directions to move, with 16 different animals along the way. There are no interactive features, and the text is small on the page.

Details: Ginger Whale Interactive Stories, <http://gingerwhale.com/>. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 4-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, directions. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.1 stars. Entry date: 10/26/2011. [WB]

Tetris Axis

Tetris fans might like the 3D frosting that comes with the Nintendo 3DS edition of the game. Just keep in mind that the 3D sparkle wears off quickly. The basic Tetris challenge is the same as always; to steer a falling block into place on a grid as quickly and efficiently as possible. Color and shape matches earn points. This is an excellent exercise in spatial relations.

Content includes 20 game modes with names like Marathon, Computer Battle, Fever and Survival, plus Party Game Modes for two to eight players, using the Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. Developed by Hudson Soft for Nintendo.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 10/13/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	6	48%
Educational	5	
Entertaining	4	
Design Features	5	
Good Value	4	

Ease of Use	8	62%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	5	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	4	



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





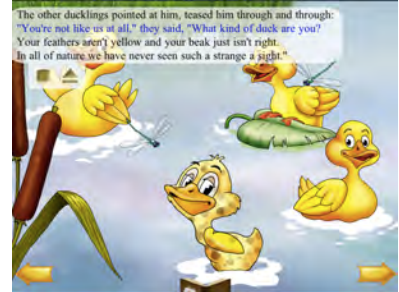
Ugly Duckling, The

This is a narrated version of "The Ugly Duckling" presented Living Books style. There are 15 screens, each with about five hidden hot spots. Sometimes they are sequential. For example, you can press an egg several times before it will hatch.

It is possible to record your voice on each page. Each page has hidden hot spots and background animations. There are some design quirks -- for example, some of the hot spots are located close to navigation icons, which can lead to accidental page turns.

Details: TabTale, www.tabtale.com. Price: \$2. Ages: 3-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.3 stars. Entry date: 10/17/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	66%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	5	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	5	





Future Releases

NOVEMBER 1, 2011

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.

Booksy!

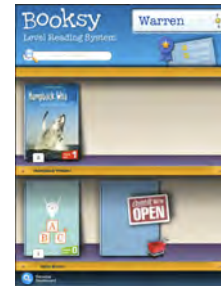
Designed specifically for a teacher that has 25 kids and one iPad, Booksy is a leveled reading system, with specialized high interest books that provide a clean examination of each topic.

You first start the app (called Booksy) to see a virtual bookshelf, with an easy first name log in screen. The teacher management features make it possible to know how many times a child has read a book. Because children log into their account when the app first starts (by touching their name), there can be individual records for each student.

Two free books are included; the rest appear as covers that lead you to a store when they are selected. Most books costs \$.99 each.

The books are level-readers on science topics and feature clear illustrations. Children can touch any word to hear it read aloud or they can hear the entire page read by the narrator. They earn a star for each book read.

Details: Tipitap Apps, www.tipitap.com. Price: \$free (books cost \$1). Ages: 3-up.
Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, decoding. Entry date: 10/26/2011.



Cinderella

So Ouat's second app (the first is Three Little Pigs) lets you toggle between English and French, and contains definitions, illustrated explanations, vowels, and cursive handwriting.

Details: So Ouat!, www.so-ouat.com. Price: . Ages: 3-10. Platform: iPad.
Teaches/Purpose: language, cursive, French. Entry date: 10/26/2011.



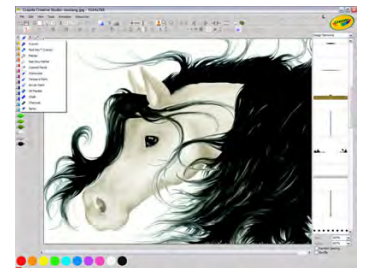
Crayola Creative Studio

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.





Eddy's Number Party, The

The first app in the KinderSpark series, The Eddy's Number Party! incorporates the "latest neuroscience on how the brain learns best, plus best practices from educational experts on the development of age-appropriate and engaging content."

The app features four levels of counting, listening and matching for preschool and kindergarten age children, designed to build basic math skills as well as strengthen memory and attention skills. The levels adapt to the child's progress. Levels 1 and 2 begin with basics such as matching numbers 1 to 10 with groups of objects. In Level 3, children must make as many matches in as few moves as possible in order to win the race. Level 4 adds memory demands. Other features include bonus activities and stickers rewards for children's progress, verbal hints and demos, and Grown-Up Central which allows parents to review their child's progress.

Details: Scientific Learning, www.scilearn.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: math, counting. Entry date: 10/24/2011.



GameChanger

Made in the Netherlands, GameChanger is an electronic game board that works with the iPad. After you buy the board and download the app, you can play two different games; The Magic School Bus from Scholastic or Animal Mania. The iPad slides into the GameChanger cradle, and one of the included game skins can be placed on top of the board. Parents download the App, which is free, but requires the GameChanger to work.

A "spin" of the wheel on the iPad lets players move their pawn across the game board. Since the game board and the iPad are connected, all game play is completely guided and tracked.

The Magic School Bus game includes facts about the world. Animal Mania covers animals, their habitats and behavior by way of trivia questions. The kit comes with the game board, two game skins for each game (Scholastic's The Magic School Bus and Animal Mania) and four game pieces.

It is recommended for children ages 6-up, and has a suggested retail price of \$80. It will be available beginning on November 1, 2011 at retailers.

Details: Identity Games, . Price: \$80. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: trivia, logic. Entry date: 10/25/2011.



Harvest Moon 3D: The Tale of Two Towns

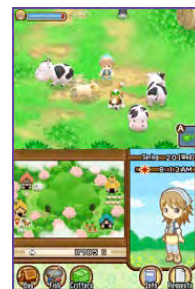
Harvest Moon fans... you now have a 3D version. In this title, Konohana and Bluebell were once friendly neighbors, but a fight over food has turned them into bitter enemies.

You are a new farmer to the area; Can you bring the two farms together again with your clever farming?

After you choose which village to live in, (Eastern-styled Konohana with abundant crops, or animal loving, European-styled Bluebell), you decide to play as either a boy or girl. Then, you pick a home. Next, you plant and grow crops, raise livestock, woo a spouse and start a family.

If you develop your skills enough, you might even find a way to bring the two towns together again. (This game can take a long time to complete.)

Details: Natsume, www.natsume.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, trading, economics, reading. Entry date: 7/12/2011.



Howtosmile.org

Teachers take note: Here's a new online resource, and the price is right.

Howtosmile.org is a free, public (NSF-funded) online database based at the Lawrence Hall of Science containing 2,000 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) activities for learners from pre-K to adult.

The activities are drawn from science centers and informal science education organizations from around the country. There is also a free SMILE app for for iOS devices. Visit www.howtosmile.org.

Details: Lawrence Hall of Science, . Price: \$free. Ages: NA. Platform: iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: science. Entry date: 10/12/2011.



ICO & Shadow of the Colossus Collection

Featuring both ICO and Shadow of the Colossus, this collection of games has been remastered in HD, with stereoscopic 3D support.

In ICO, you enter a world of enchantment, where Ico, a mysterious boy, has been expelled from his village and confined in a castle. He begins to have eerie dreams of rescuing a young princess from evil spirits. Fantasy and reality blur, and Ico embarks on a quest to save her.

In Shadow of the Colossus, you will journey through ancient lands on a quest to bring a girl back to life by defeating sixteen gigantic beasts. The games also feature exclusive bonus content including five behind-the-scenes videos about the making of the games.



Details: Sony Computer Entertainment America, Inc., www.scea.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 13-up. Platform: PlayStation 3. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Entry date: 10/21/2011.

Kinect Sesame Street TV

First introduced October 2011, Kinect Sesame Street TV is designed to let children jump into the world of Sesame Street. In one scene, for example, children help Elmo sort items by throwing them into different bins.

According to press materials, "new content will be created exclusively for Kinect, and will provide access to hundreds of classic clips from the Sesame Street archive." Very few details have been provided on how much it will cost, how it will be delivered (we suspect Xbox Live), or how much content will be provided. We also wonder about the quality of the interactivity... In the example shown, the praise was thick, and the activity was thin. Stay tuned! Created by Soho Productions for Microsoft Studios using Sesame Street content. Scheduled for release Spring 2012.

Details: Microsoft Game Studios, www.microsoft.com/games. Price: \$na. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Xbox Kinect. Teaches/Purpose: early learning. Entry date: 10/19/2011.

Kineo Android Tablet

Kineo, from Brainchild Corporation is an Android-based tablet designed specifically for classroom use. This includes utilities for controlling Internet use, texting and "non-academic" types of activities. The company offers a "Globalsynch technology" to use for tracking progress. We have yet to test one, but the site promises "rugged construction, a huge battery, and HDMI output for group instruction on whiteboards or LCD projectors."

Details: Brainchild Corporation, www.brainchild.com. Price: \$300 and up. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: an Android tablet for classroom use. Entry date: 2/1/2011.





Kirby's Return to Dream Land

Back in 2002, Kirby: Nightmare in Dream Land was one of the best titles for Nintendo's Game Boy Advance system.

Kirby's back in the Wii version of Dreamland.

In the story, an alien spaceship crashes in the otherwise peaceful realm of Planet Pop Star, and its pieces are scattered throughout the land. You must guide Kirby to find the ship's parts and help an alien return to its home planet. But, this time, Kirby is not alone. At any time during the game, up to three more players can join in and play as Meta Knight, King Dedede, Waddle Dee or a different color Kirby.

The game features Kirby's Copy Ability, which allows him to inhale, spit and transform as he encounters enemies. Other features include classic and new abilities including: Sword - Kirby dons a green cap and wields a sword; Beam - Kirby wears a jester hat and can shoot energy from a magic wand; Whip - Kirby wears a cowboy hat and can lasso enemies; and Leaf - Kirby is surrounded by a whirlwind of leaves. Also, in the game are new Super Abilities, which are activated when Kirby inhales special enemy characters. For example, the "Ultra Sword" Super Ability allows Kirby to swing a giant sword and wipe out an entire screen's worth of enemies.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Wii. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Entry date: 8/26/2011.



Lettersaurus

Lettersaurus is a plastic dinosaur pal designed to let children explore letter names, letter sounds, colors and music.

The dinosaur has 26 colored letter buttons on his back. When pressed, they reward children with a familiar tune. When children press his head, they can sing along to the Alphabet Song.

You can even make letter learning a personal experience by adding in the first letter of your child's name. You can also connect to LeapFrog's online Learning Path for customized learning insights, and ideas to expand the learning. Requires 3 AA batteries, included.

Details: LeapFrog, www.leapfrog.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 12-36 mos.. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: alphabet, music, colors, fine motor skills, letters. Entry date: 8/17/2011.



Mavis Beacon Keyboarding Kidz

There's not much that's new about this edition of Mavis Beacon, other than the kid-friendly theme. Designed for children who are either learning to touch type or want to improve their keyboarding skills, this edition of Mavis features the characters Mavis and Dex, who are helping out at the movie concession stand.

They need help taking orders, but you can only do it after mastering the QWERTY keyboard. The program allows you to set your own words-per-minute goals, see what keys you need to practice and shows you what keys you know well.

You can also play games to practice what you've learned and to improve your speed and accuracy. Content includes 250 keyboarding lessons, 200 practice session topics and ten typing games. You can also customize your music selection, track your progress by individual and print award certificates.

Details: Encore, Inc., www.encoreusa.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: typing, keyboarding. Entry date: 10/11/2010.





Me Books

The Me Books App for iPad, iPhone and iPod touch includes fourteen titles, including The Zoo, Cinderella, Gingerbread Man, Jack and The Beanstalk and The Three Billy Goats Gruff, sold as in-app purchases.

Features include the ability to create interactive audio 'hotspots' anywhere on a page by drawing around images or text with fingers and recording to them using the microphone.

The idea is to let anyone personally narrate the story. It is also possible to add pre-recorded sound effects (such as the trumpeting of an elephant, to the chattering of monkeys in The Zoo).

Voices are provided Adam Buxton, reading Goldilocks, and Josie Lawrence reading Cinderella. According to James Huggins "Audio is often hugely underused in the digital space. Sound is incredibly immersive and evocative and offers the perfect middle ground between a static book and interactive game experience. A story can be brought to life but, importantly, still leave plenty to the imagination."

Details: Penguin Books, www.uk.penguin.com. Price: \$call. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language. Entry date: 10/10/2011.

Moxie Girlz

Dress your Moxie Girlz dolls on your Nintendo DS. Features include journal and diary options, Moxie Girlz quizzes and the ability to upload pictures of yourself, providing you have a DSi (with a camera). All modes and gameplay focus on the "positive Moxie Girlz message of Be true! Be you!" Developed by 1st Playable for GameMill.

Details: GameMill, www.game-mill.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 5-7. Platform: Nintendo DSi. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, writing. Entry date: 10/25/2011.

My Discovery House

Children explore doors, windows and switches that push, slide, open, close, and turn in My Discovery House; a busy box experience that runs on AA batteries.

Content includes five play areas featuring more than 75 learning responses. Children can explore opposites in the context of daily household routines, as they listen to songs and stories. Appropriate for children ages 6 to 36 months.

Details: LeapFrog, www.leapfrog.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 6-36 mos.. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: cause and effect. Entry date: 8/17/2011.

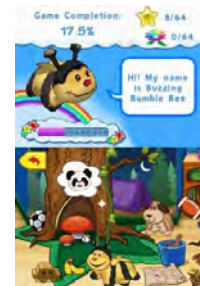


Pillow Pets

Based on the children's line of plush pillows from CJ Products, the Pillow Pets game for Nintendo DS lets you jump and fly through the world of Dreamland. The pets can be dressed with hats, glasses, shoes and more. In the story, a pet is missing. You must bring it home, by exploring, meeting other pets and collecting tokens.

Content includes 16 Pillow Pets characters, levels that include "Fantasy Woods," and "Rainbow Valley" and the ability to accessorize your pets with 40 items. Developed by First Playable.

Details: GameMill, www.game-mill.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 5-8. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Entry date: 9/22/2011.



Project Columbia

Code-named "Project Columbia," this Kinect-based titles offers controller-free interaction with stories, and was demonstrated during a press event in New York, October 2011. It looked a bit like an ebook on Kinect, where you can "touch" the words on a page to explore various meanings.

The title was created in collaboration with Sesame Workshop and the Games for Learning Institute. Details are sparse.

Details: Microsoft Game Studios, www.microsoft.com/games. Price: \$call. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Xbox Kinect. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Entry date: 10/19/2011.



Punch-Out!

Originally released in May 2009, Punch Out is being rereleased as part of the Nintendo Selects for \$20. To play, hold the Wii Remote controller in one hand and a Nunchuk controller in the other as you step into the ring to box.

Boxers including Little Mac, Glass Joe, King Hippo along with trainer Doc Louis. The motion-sensitive controls of the Wii mean that when you throw a punch, Little Mac throws a punch as well. You can use the Nunchuk to throw a left punch and the Wii Remote to throw a right punch.

You can also play with classic NES-style controls by turning the Wii Remote sideways, and use the 1 and 2 buttons along with the cross pad to throw hooks and jabs or to dodge. You can obtain special "Star Punches," which allow Little Mac to take more health from his rival in a single punch.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Wii. Teaches/Purpose: timing, logic, strategy. Entry date: 8/18/2011.

Scribblenauts Remix

Scribblenauts Remix for iOS brings touch-screen, puzzle solving action to your iPad, iPhone and iPod Touch. The game features 10 original levels designed specifically for Apple devices, along with 40 fan favorite levels from Scribblenauts and Super Scribblenauts. There are hundreds of customizable objects you can use to solve puzzles, earn Starites, and unlock in-game achievements. Using Apple's iCloud system, players can sync their game progress on any iOS device across the iPad, iPhone and iPod Touch and continue playing where they left off. Players can also share their favorite objects and post their high scores and in-game achievements on Game Center leaderboards, Facebook and Twitter. Developed by 5th Cell and Iron Galaxy for Warner Bros.

Details: Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, Inc., www.warnerbros.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: reading, spelling, creativity, logic, memory. Entry date: 10/21/2011.