

Children's TECHNOLOGY Review™

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surprise!



What if words were toys? That's the idea behind Mark Schlichting's KAPi award winning new app **Noodle Words**. See page 18.

Children's Technology Review

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* Denotes an "Editor's Choice" product, earning a 4.3 or higher rating.



This issue of CTR contains reviews of 66 new apps, toys and games to keep on your radar screen, including a first look at what 13 expert jurors said were the best children's technology products of 2011. You can see the entire list on page 6. For younger children, try Mark Schlichting's **NoodleWords** app (on this month's cover) or zinc Roe's

DoodleCast for Kids. For older children, **Bobo Learns About Light** is a safe download for iPad. And as we wind down one of our busiest years in history—with 643 reviews—and head into a bit of a vacation, let's all pause and remember that no technology can replace a walk around the block with a puppy and a friend, or the chance to get some snow in your boots when you tumble off a toboggan. There will never be an app for that.

Car Tech! It is now common knowledge that Google has been experimenting with driverless cars. Have a look <http://bit.ly/qCB7TQ> and you learn the computer guided lasers help the car map a safe route. Since it was invented, the automobile has always been the target of clever inventors, which is why it is the subject of this month's LittleClickers. If you turn to page 3, you'll find a set of sites and videos that illustrate such things as air bags exploding, in slow motion, and a car with folding wings <http://youtu.be/Xo0MEQSGW8w> that can fly like an airplane.

Ready or not, here comes the iPad in K-3 When the Auburn, Maine schools announced that every Kindergartener would receive an iPad, some people had doubts. How would they be implemented? Could such an expense pay off? These questions were debated recently during a three-day conference called the Leveraging Learning Institute. In case you weren't one of the 100 participants, don't worry. CTR contributor Bonnie Blagojevic was there, taking notes and photos, and we're lucky to get her exclusive report. Turn to page 4.

New Searching Features Unveiled in CTR's Review Database

Are you looking for highly-rated first grade iPad math apps? Now you can quickly generate a list, thanks to some new fields that are now live in reviews section of www.childrenstech.com. Available to subscribers, the popup fields let you zoom down to just what you want, from our pool of 10,232 reviews, as of this issue. Using the new pop-up menus, you can quickly mix-and match your search criteria to try different curriculum tags, platform and grade level. In addition, a new printer friendly report lets you print your listing. Let us know what you think of these new features, and please send more suggestions as we improve. Give it a try!

Grade Level: Contains 1st Grade
Platform: Contains iPad
Teaches: Contains Math
Stars: 1 = low, 5 = high. Greater Than 4.0 stars
 Find records if any fields match
 Find records if all fields match
Note: results will be listed by rating, from high to low.
Display: 50 Records
Sorted by: Number of Stars Sort Order
Find Records Reset

Visit <http://reviews.childrenstech.com/ctr/ctrlogin.php>.



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- We don't sell software or profit from products that we review. Review copies are donated to the Mediatech Foundation (www.mediatech.org), a non-profit public technology center.
- 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.

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You ride in one every day, but how much do you really know about cars? Here's a quiz.

1. Is there such a thing as a driverless car?

Google thinks so. Go to <http://bit.ly/qCB7TQ>, and you can learn how a 64-beam laser, mounted on the top of the car, generates a detailed 3D map that is used to help the car navigate around things like a parking lot.

2. Take a guess. How many parts are in a Toyota Corolla?

If you said 10,000 you'd be way short. According to the Toyota children's room, at <http://www2.toyota.co.jp/en/kids/faq/entry/6203.php> the average car has about 30,000 parts, if you count even the smallest screw.

3. Your car is probably carrying an explosive. Do you know where it is located?

Did you know that your steering wheel is hiding a very specialized bomb? It is controlled by a computer that can sense motion, and it inflates your car's airbag. Want to see one explode? Visit <http://youtu.be/ZEWCFjbqaaE>.

4. Oops. What's the most expensive driving mistake in the world?

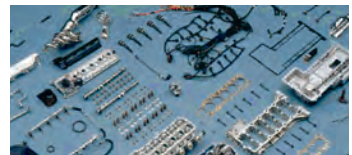
We're not sure, but a recent car accident in Japan cost over \$1 million dollars. Oops. The crash included eight Ferraris, a Lamborghini and three Mercedes sports cars. Read more at <http://nyti.ms/sj28QC>

5. Can cars fly? At <http://www.terrafugia.com> the answer is a definite yes. For the cost of a small house in New Jersey (\$280,000) a company called TerraFugia will let you pre-order you a car with self folding wings that can take off like an airplane, and fit in your garage. Want to see it take off? See <http://youtu.be/iE2Ij7Rfw1Q>

APPLICATION

Make a Balloon Car! Make your own car, using a balloon, a cracker box and some old CD-ROMs (finally, a use all that old educational software!) See <http://www.mrg-online.com/car.htm>.

How green is your parent's car? Some cars are more planet friendly than others. How does your car rate? Find out using the tool at <http://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/Index.do>. Currently in New Jersey, the most planet friendly car is the Chevrolet Volt, a plug in car that gets 100 MPG.



YouTube LittleClickers YouTube Playlist: Car Tech

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL7FC15CAA828A83E4>



See this page online, at <http://www.LittleClickers.com/lccartech1211.html>



iPads in K-3

Notes From Maine's Leveraging Learning Institute

By Bonnie Blagojevic

"All kids are rockets. Our job as educators is to ignite the fuse." Tom Morrill, Former Maine Superintendent

When the Auburn, Maine schools announced last April every Kindergartener in the district would receive an iPad, some people had their doubts. How could such an expense pay off? These questions were discussed last month (Nov 16-18) during a three-day conference, called the Leveraging Learning Institute. In case you weren't one of the 100 participants, here's a run through the agenda, along with some links that will let you follow Auburn's iPad initiative.



Bonnie Blagojevic (shown center, above with NAEYC co-presenters Mark Bailey, Warren Buckleitner and Diane Bales) is an Education Consultant, adjunct faculty member at the University of Maine and an Apple Distinguished Educator. She is an active member of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Technology & Young Children Interest Forum (techandyoungchildren.org). Bonnie is a consulting editor for NAEYC, has co-authored several technology related articles for NAEYC's magazines and books and has been a featured presenter at NAEYC national conferences.

STATEMENT OF DISCLOSURE
"I am an Apple Distinguished Educator, however I don't work for Apple. I have no direct commercial motivation for writing about or mentioning the products in this article."

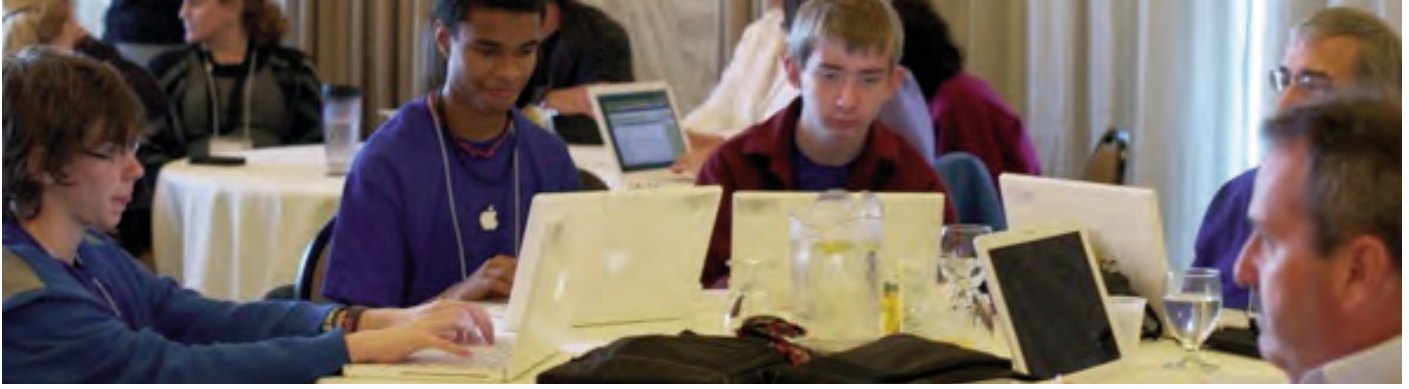
Day 1 – Why iPads? Why This New Initiative?

We started with a lively Q & A session with Education Commissioner Stephen Bowen and Former Governor Angus King, moderated by Mike Muir, Auburn's Multiple Pathways Leader, called "Considering Education in the Past, Present and Future." The panel discussed the need to create an education program that is customizable for each learner and engaging.



Technology should help kids "power up" while at school, not just outside of school. They shared stories from Maine's statewide 1-1 laptop program, the first in the nation, the Maine Learning Technology Initiative, also known as the MLTI. For more on this topic, you can read Commissioner Bowen's post, called Taking a chance on behalf of kids <http://goo.gl/POESN>. Some key points:

- The current proficiency scores of 63% for literacy and 60% for math by third grade are unacceptable. The goal is 90% mastery by 2014-15.
- Teaching the same way, only harder, has not worked. We need a new approach.
- The best time to reach a learner is when they are at the beginning of their public education— not at the end.



Auburn middle schoolers were asked to tweet about the sessions using their MLTI MacBooks

You can follow Maine's Learning Technology Initiative at <http://maine.gov/mlti/about/index.shtml>.

In the afternoon, former Auburn Superintendent Tom Morrill shared Auburn's Advantage 2014 story. He said "All kids are rockets. Our job as educators is to ignite the fuse." His memorable quote was aptly captured by one of the Auburn Middle School tweeters (https://twitter.com/#!/ams_trevor). Morrill expressed his hope that we could provide every child with the tools and support needed to not only develop the creative and problem-solving skills valued by future employers, but that can allow them to lead lives filled with purpose, meaning and happiness.

The next panel, called "Auburn Understands - It Takes a Community to Raise a Child" consisted of a school board member, the parent of a Kindergartener, Auburn's Technology Director, a Kindergarten teacher and Auburn's Superintendent. In this panel, each member provided his or her perspective on the application of new technologies. The panel helped remind the group that any change to a school happens under the umbrella of the larger community.

That evening, Mike Muir who serves as one of the project consultants gave a talk entitled "Being Deliberate About Change." in which he emphasized that the focus must always be on children's learning, and that it is important to use a blended and balanced approach of technology alongside regular classroom tools. Being deliberate includes providing responsive professional development and including all members of the teaching team when it comes to decisions about how to use a new technology, such as an iPad.

DAY 2: From Theory to Practice

The second day was devoted to the nuts and bolts of iPad implementation, with presentations describing four key elements-or strands-required for the success of such a project. Schools were invited to send teams to attend each strand. These included (1) leadership and professional development (2) curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (3) research, on how to collect data to measure how well an initiative is meeting goals, and (4) technical project management, from purchasing, managing and syncing apps to establishing policies and procedures. There were also open time blocks of time for collaborating, planning and discussion, where attendees could network, ask resource people specific questions, and learn together. The idea was to both give and take information. Both evenings, there were presentations involving app use and selection and "appy hours," for participants to share their favorite apps.

Day 3: Planning for Implementation

A highlight of the last day was when two Maine high school students, Hannah Potter and Chris Jones, shared stories of how

the MLTI program influenced their lives. Hannah, a senior at Yarmouth High School, did not consider technology a strong interest area. However, after participating in a Global Village program in the US, together with Iraqi teens, she started a blog called New View <http://newviewus.blogspot.com> demonstrating how technology can break down geographic and cultural barriers. Chris Jones, of Oak Hill High School credited MLTI for introducing him to technology. His technology adventures include his current involvement with an innovative company called Studio 182, which is made up of members all under 18. See their work, at <http://www.studio182.net>.

After the concluding luncheon, there was an opportunity to sign up and visit Kindergarten classrooms. We watched children using iPads alongside traditional classroom materials, at Center time. The children were happy to show and explain to visiting educators what they were doing, as you can see in the Auburn Sun Journal article "Auburn Shows How Students Learn on iPads" <http://bit.ly/uexLaA>.

What's Next

We were invited to review Institute Resources, posted at http://institute2011.auburnschl.edu/Institute_Resources.html, and you can too! Goodies include a list of apps aligned to literacy targets used by Auburn Kindergarten students, presentation slides on topics such as "Deliberate Leadership," "Leading for Change," and "How Do We Know It's Working?" that details the implementation plan, professional development strategies, data collection and research efforts. You can also discover practical classroom management tips, such as photos of a poster with a poem children recite to help them remember how to hold the iPad, and with iPad storage systems.

It's important to remember that the Advantage 2014 Initiative has just started. Half the Kindergarten children received iPads in September and the other half will receive them in December in order to study their effects, and the research results are expected next year. For those interested in the project, your first stop should be Advantage 2014 website, <http://bit.ly/vhWS1F>. Stay tuned!

Additional Resources

News article — Lucias Rice, a Kindergarten-age child, shows five teachers from Auburn, Maine how he uses an iPad
<http://www.sunjournal.com/city/story/1014429>

YouTube video — Here's a video called "Advantage 2014: Learning in the Hands of Children"
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8GM41Mboyg>

News article —from CNN: School gives kindergartners iPads:
<http://bit.ly/twN98x>

The Quest for the Best:

Announcing the 2012 KAPi Awards

Eight Products and Two Individuals Are Awarded the Kids at Play Interactive “KAPi” Award at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) by Warren Buckleitner

Grab your fancy shoes and dim the lights. It’s time to celebrate the best of the past year in children’s interactive media.

Welcome to the 3rd Annual Kids at Play Interactive Awards, aka the KAPis; an ambitious attempt to identify and formally recognize excellence in children’s interactive media over the past 12 months. The winners will be formally recognized on January 12 at world’s largest technology gathering, the Consumer Electronic’s Show in Las Vegas.

Making such a selection is a big job. This year, a 13 member volunteer jury selected by myself and Robin Raskin considered 635 children’s technology products and 30 individuals. In order to qualify for the award, the products were required to have a 2011 copyright date. In some cases, such as for virtual worlds, the jurors agreed to accept a major feature or an upgrade. The nominees for the pioneer awards were collected both online and during the Dust or Magic Institute. Here are this year’s results, as well as more background on the prize.

Best App for Younger Children. DoodleCast by zinc Roe. This was an incredibly competitive category this year. In the end, after spirited debate, DoodleCast edged out Toca Tea Party by a nose. Jurors: “DoodleCast removes any doubt that a screen can be a powerful creative, collaborative tool, even for the very young.”

Best App for Older Children. Bobo Explores Light by GameCollage LLC enjoyed a slight margin over Bartleby’s Book of Buttons Vol. 2 for cleverly mixing play and science facts in an active learning setting.

Children’s Book App or eBook. Cinderella – Nosy Crow Animated Picture Book. This was another full category this year. In the end, it was the craftsmanship in Cinderella that put it over the others. Jurors: “We all want the very best quality for children -- the best sights, sounds and interactivity. Cinderella raises the bar for all of these.” Juror Kate Wilson of Nosy Crow recused herself from this category.

Video Game Software. Once Upon a Monster by Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment. Jurors were impressed at the way this Xbox title effectively tapped the power of the Xbox Kinect for children. Jurors: “This is one of the most innovative titles of the year.” Juror Carley Schuler of the Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop recused herself from this category.

Hardware. iPad 2 by Apple. After consideration of the Nintendo 3DS and Android tablets like the Nabi, the selection of the iPad 2, with the addition of the two cameras, was a fast one. Jurors: “Apple made an amazing product more amazing.”

Most Innovative Technology Toy. Disney AppMates by Disney Consumer Products. Several of the jurors were less than enthused



The People Behind the Choice— Meet the 2012 KAPi Jurors



The volunteer jurors used online polling and conference calls to narrow the field from over 600 to 10. Each juror had one vote and were not allowed to participate in categories in which they had a vested interest. There were three such cases: Ann McCormick, Mark Schlichting and Scott Traylor were nominated for “Legend” categories, and Mark Schlichting and Kate Wilson had products that were nominated. Here are the jurors for 2012.

Warren Buckleitner, Editor, Children’s Technology Review

Lana Castleman, Editor, Kidscreen

Claire Green, President, Parents’ Choice Foundation

David Kleeman, President, American Center for Children and Media

Ann McCormick, President and CEO, Learning Friends and Co-founder of The Learning Company

Frank Migliorelli Sr., Founder of Mig Idea; on Faculty at NYU

Robin Raskin, Founder, Living in Digital Times and former Editor & Publisher, Family PC Magazine

Mark Schlichting, President, Noodleworks; creator of Broderbund’s Living Books

Carly Shuler, Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop

Andrea Smith, Producer and Technology Reporter, ABC Radio News

Aleen Stein, CEO, Organa; Co-Founder, Voyager and President, The Criterion Collection

Scott Traylor, President, 360KID

Kate Wilson, Managing Director, Nosy Crow



by some of design features in the interactivity of the AppMates, but in the end, they liked the innovative approach for leveraging the iPad's potential for content delivery. Jurors: "This is was the most interesting product we've seen to bridge the world of toys with the world of apps."

Educational – Noodle Words by Noodleworks. Jurors noted that "just 18 little words can change how children read" calling this "a skillful application of the principles of magic on the iPad." Juror Mark Schlichting recused himself from this category.

Virtual World – MineCraft by Mojang. After discussion about the improvements this year in both Club Penguin (especially the new chat system) and Moshi Monsters, the Jurors selected Minecraft. Jurors: "Every child loves to play hide-and-go-seek, but few have figured out how to bring this play pattern to the screen... until MineCraft."



Emerging Pioneer – Ge Wang, Co-founder and Chief Creative Officer, Smule; Assistant Professor, Stanford University. Ge Wang was recognized for his continued streak of innovation, for MadPad. On the short list for this category was Dale Dougherty, the guy who started the Makerfaire Movement and Michael Acton Smith of Moshi Monsters.

Legend Pioneer. Mark Schlichting, Creator of the Brøderbund Living Books and now founder of NoodleWorks was recognized from a list of a dozen for inspiring a generation of younger designers, twice. The first at Brøderbund, by way of the Living Books with titles like "Just Grandma and Me" (Schlichting played the voice of Grandma himself), and the second with his new app, Noodle Words, the winner of the education category. Jurors: "It's about time this guy is recognized for his contribution to the field." This year there will be an acknowledgement to the late **Steve Jobs**. Mark Schlichting was not involved in the selection of this category.



ABOUT THE KAPi AWARDS. When we were faced with the challenge of creating an award program, we considered two outcomes often associated with research findings. **Validity** (does the award have meaning to the outside world?) and **reliability** (can you trust the outcome? Was bias recognized and managed? Would a second jury, comprised of different people come up with similar conclusions?) In order to ratchet both of these measurement benchmarks as high as possible, we began by casting a several nets. Our first "net" is an online form at <http://childrenstech.com/kapis>. Any publisher, large or small can enter, from any location, for no cost. This year 112 nominees and people were collected from this form. These were combined with the 643 products we reviewed for CTR, and the entire list was presented to the 60 attendees of the Dust or Magic Institute (www.dustormagic.com); a meeting of reviewers and designers that takes place in early November. Each participant was given a sealed ballot and asked to nominate and rank the products and the people. Megan Billetti, one of our staff members who is not me, tabulated the results. This list was given to the jurors, who were selected by myself and Robin Raskin for having knowledge of recent products. Each juror is required to disclose potential conflicts and cannot nominate, discuss, or vote on their own products. This year two of the jurors (Wilson and Schlichting) were on the final ballot. Because this presented a conflict of interest, we removed them from the jury pool when it was time to discuss their product. We also want you to understand the motives behind this award. The KAPi awards are funded by Robin Raskin of Living in Digital Times, and managed by me and my publication (*Children's Technology Review*) who has no knowledge of the KAPi conference sponsors. At the end of the judging, after the results have been tabulated I always take a moment and ask the jury "If any of you disagree with these choices, speak up now, or forever hold your peace." It is important that we all feel that we've done good work and our selections are valid, and that we are each proud to have our names on this prize...for the good of our children. To the 2012 jurors, Robin and I say thanks, and to the winners, we offer our congratulations. You earned it.

Links 2011 Winners: <http://childrenstech.com/blog/archives/3205>; 2010 winners: <http://childrenstech.com/blog/archives/1995>

About Living in Digital Times Founded in 2002 by tech journalist and consultant Robin Raskin, *Living in Digital Times* is designed to create a dialogue between companies and key consumer demographics via a variety of media projects. In addition to the six CES-based TechZones, *Living in Digital Times* offers a range of services that articulate the digital experience to various constituencies. Services include trade show planning and management, web site promotion, and consulting services. Learn more about *Living in Digital Times* at <http://livingindigital-times.com>.

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Feature Reviews

DECEMBER 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.

Antique ABCs

The 1800's come to the 21st century, with this interesting but rather dry feeling early language app.

The contents are based on 26 hand-engraved alphabet prints made by the famous German lithographer Joseph Martin Kronheim (1810-1896). There are three modes: Song, Spinner and Shuffle. The Song mode sings the classic alphabet song with period sound effects and animations. Spinner lets children spin the rattling wheel and test themselves on letters as they come up in random order. In Shuffle, children must reorder the jumbled alphabet by dragging and dropping each letter tile.

All in all, this app presents yet another way to let children play with letters and related sounds and words.

Details: Fusionlab, Inc., <http://www.fusionlab.com>. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: letters, early reading, letter recognition. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 11/29/2011. [WB]

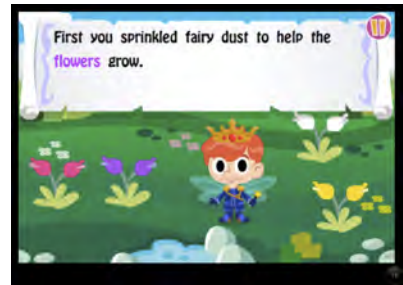
Ease of Use	9
Educational	8
Entertaining	7
Design Features	8
Good Value	8

80%



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

78%



Big Kid Life: Fairy Princess

This is one of the four new free FingerPrint apps created by former Leapfrog executive Nancy MacIntyre. See also Big Kid Life: Firefighter. In this title, children are introduced to a story, step by step, and then are asked to remember the main events. A child's progress is tracked using the Mom-Comm tracking mechanism, and can be reported automatically to your Facebook account. The more you play, the greater the challenge.

Details: Fingerprint Digital, www.fingerprintplay.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 4-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: reading comprehension, memory, matching. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 12/14/2011. [WB]



Big Kid Life: Firefighter

Fun but educationally shallow, this set of timed maze game challenges is embedded with multiple-choice problems. For example, in order to use a ladder to rescue a kitten, you must "find and tap the number ten" (from four possible numerals) or "find and tap something round" (from four shapes). This game is thick with repeating instructions and bite-sized multiple-choice questions that don't go much deeper than colors, numbers and shapes.

The controls could be more intuitive for a maze game. For example, when you touch the screen to get your firefighter to move, the firehouse starts shooting water, in one case on a nearby kitten. You soon learn that quick taps result in movement and longer taps make the hose turn on or off.

We also didn't like how frequently this app repeats instructions (do children really need to be told to shoot water on a fire?). Fortunately you can skip through the slow parts, and children can be forgiving when there's a chance to use a firehose.

The more you play, the harder the mazes and the problems. The most interesting part about this series is how it is distributed (currently free) and how it gives you the option of using email and Facebook to keep you updated on what your child does. The price of these management features is clutter in the first few screens. It is possible to play as a guest, and not register, as long as you can find the "guest" button. So how does this app make money? Here's the scheme -- if you sync the app to your Facebook account, you'll start getting posts that say things like "Math is easy for a hero like Jenna, playing Big Kid Life Fire Fighter! My truck and I were on duty! I rescued 3 animals and I also battled 2 firemonsters." This post has links to other FingerPrint apps, and some of these are for sale. If your child won't mind the scripted didactic interactions (most kids won't) and workbook-style problems, this is a possible consideration.

Other titles in the series include Big Kid Life: Veterinarian (more letters, numbers, colors and shapes), Big Kid Life: Fairy Princess (a shallow attempt to introduce reading comprehension by way of 15 adventures); Fingerprint Play Maker (matching and spelling, with the ability to record your own game sounds) and DoReMi, 1-2-3 (a third party app designed to be building blocks of musical pitch).

This is one of the four new free FingerPrint apps created by former Leapfrog executive Nancy MacIntyre.

Details: Fingerprint Digital, www.fingerprintplay.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 4-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: numerals, shapes, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 12/14/2011. [WB]

Bobo Explores Light

Science teachers take note of this amazing app. Bobo Explores Light is a great example of how an app can let children aged 7-up play with -- and better understand -- an abstract concept; in this case light. What better way to understand how light changes when it hits a mirror, than to let a child manipulate the mirrors. Other noteworthy content includes a schematic of an eyeball, a conversation with Thomas Edison, and an experiment on mixing colors of light.

Organized as an ebook, the 21 page (or screen) app covers a range of light-related topics, starting with the sun, and ending with fireworks. Each screen contains three pull tabs that lead to videos, facts, and definitions.

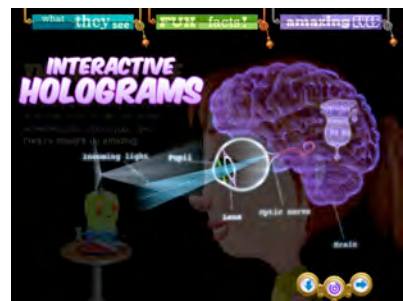
The best part about this app is the way that it lets children directly manipulate the concepts, so they can "try the ideas on for size." See the demo, at <http://youtu.be/G0LIP7pl08w>. The app was created by Juraj Hlavac at Game Collage, LLC., with text and research by Craig Fusco and illustrations are by Dean MacAdam. Game Collage also produced The Three Little Pigs and the Secrets of a Pop-up Book.

Details: GameCollage LLC, www.gamecollage.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: science, light, angles. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.9 stars. Entry date: 10/17/2011. [WB]

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



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





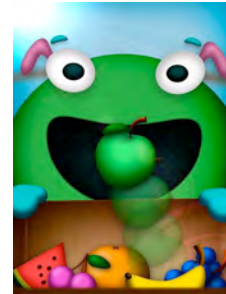
Color Monster

This app is designed to teach children the names of common colors using a hungry but friendly monster. You are shown a set of fruit, of all different colors. The monster changes to a color (e.g., blue) and says "I'm hungry for something blue". He also turns blue, which is a good hint.

Children must drag the correct fruit to the monster's mouth. Wrong answers are spit out. There are 10 language options (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Dutch, Swedish, Russian, Japanese and Chinese) which makes this app potentially very useful for learning color words in other languages.

Details: Wombi, www.wombiapps.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: color words in ten languages (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, Dutch, Swedish, Russian, Japanese and Chinese). Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 11/29/2011. [WB]

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



DanceDanceRevolution II

Longing for the smell of vinyl, from an old-fashioned DDR dance mat? If you are, this edition of DanceDance Revolution--the game that started it all-- is for you. Why? Because it will give you the best of the old, with new challenges, a smoother interface, and updated music. After you plug in one or two mats into your Wii (for one or two players, or one player with two mats), you can choose from 80 music tracks that include classics and original music created specifically for the game by Vanilla Ice and Maxi Priest. There are three modes of play: School Mode, for new dancers, offers an option for training. More skilled players can choose the Challenge difficulty level, which also features a new Doubleplay functionality that allows a single player to play on two DanceDanceRevolution mat controllers simultaneously.

The Workout Mode lets you enter your weight and track your fitness progress and estimated calories burned. The game features all new dance characters and is compatible with your Mii so dancers can capture a likeness of themselves or the dance partners. Prices are \$50 bundled with the Dance mat and \$30 for the standalone game.

This version skips the gimmicks and gets right to the dancing.

Details: Konami Digital Entertainment, Inc., www.konami.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Wii. Teaches/Purpose: dance, rhythm, gross motor coordination for both upper and lower body. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 12/1/2011. [WB]

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



ESRB Rating: Everyone 10+, Lyrics
Mild Violence, Suggestive Themes





Disney AppMates

One of the most innovative applications of iPad technology this year, the Disney AppMates (\$20 for two) are matchbox-sized cars that transform the multi-touch screen into a slippery playspace, where roads and ramps scroll automatically. Kids love them for a few hours, but the novelty fades; a problem that is solved by buying another \$10 car (each car unlocks more content).

The base of each car is a pattern of three 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, a block of white pixels is used to send light through a window in the bottom of the car, giving it the illusion that the lights are working. No batteries are required.

Once you 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. Effects include working headlights (you see the beams in front of your car, in real time) and a large mirror where you see a perfect digital reflection of your car.

So how does it work, with no 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 transfer process isn't always perfect. When you get too close to the edge of the screen the scrolling can stop and start, which can be frustrating.

The app is free and can be used in limited form 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. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 9/28/2011. [WB]

DoodleCast for Kids

This "talk and draw" experience makes self-narrating and sharing a drawing into a nearly one-step process, providing you have an iPad. In addition, having an active YouTube account is handy for the optional sharing part.

This is a very important App; a fact that was recognized by the 2012 KAPi jurors when they called DoodleCast the "best app for younger children."

For young children, this app turns the iPad screen into a creativity space where sounds and drawing can be mashed into the same project seamlessly. What if you make a mistake? You can easily pause the recording and erase, resuming, or exiting to try again with a clean screen. To help you get started, there are 24 idea starters, including a blank white screen.

It is also easy to fast forward or rewind your drawing in playback mode. The "cast" part of Doodlecast is the one-touch uploading to YouTube, with a "made with DoodleCast" tag embedded at the end of your video. The process is what's important here -- this app turns the iPad into an ideal experience to share with an adult.

Details: zinc Roe Design, www.zincroe.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 2-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, art, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 10/3/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	7	86%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	9	



Ease of Use	9	95%
Educational	10	
Entertaining	N	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	10	





Everybody Dance

If you have a PlayStation Move and you like to dance, get this singing and dancing game.

The song library contains 40 party hits including Usher's OMG, Party Rock Anthem by LMFAO and Barbra Streisand by Duck Sauce, along with the original artist's music videos.

Using the PlayStation Move controller and PlayStation Eye camera to track and score moves, you can test your dancing skills with three difficulty levels, each featuring unique routines. You can also dance solo, team up with a friend for a cooperative Partner Routine, challenge a friend to a competitive Dance Battle, or use the Party Play mode where up to 20 players can go head-to-head in the ultimate dance-off.

The game features a Dance Class feature to improve your skills through routine breakdowns, a Dance Creator feature that lets you develop your own choreography, a Dance Workout that tracks your fitness progress and calories burned; and Sing-Along. You can also record your performances using the PlayStation Eye camera, and share your moves by uploading your performances to everybodydancegame.com and sending links to friends' Facebook and Twitter accounts.

There are dozens of well-designed dancing experiences for the Wii and Kinect, but not so many for the PlayStation 3. Until now.

Details: Sony Computer Entertainment America, www.scea.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 7-up. Platform: PlayStation 3 Move. Teaches/Purpose: dance, rhythm. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 6/9/2011. [WB]

Fetch Lunch Rush

Augmented reality flashcards? Why not? One of the first ever math facts programs to use augmented reality, Lunch Rush provides an "out of device" experience. Here's how it works.

After you download the app, you must print out a set of cards from the Fetch Lunch Rush web site: <http://pbskids.org/fetch/games/hollywood/lunchrush.html>. There are nine cards; one per number. You lay the cards around a table (or room) and sign into the program. You're then given a math problem, such as $14 - ? = 5$. To enter the answer, you find the correct card (9) using the iPad, iPhone or iPod Touch camera. This also causes a set of food items to appear over the numeral, superimposing computer graphics onto the real camera image.

Content includes five rounds of addition or subtraction questions (three per round). The delivery mechanism is fun, but the content is limited. They're cool flashcards, but they're still flashcards.

Details: PBS Kids, www.pbskids.org. Price: \$free. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: math facts (addition, subtraction, division and multiplication). Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 12/2/2011. [WB]

Fingerprint Play Maker

This is part of a series of apps that feature a new Mom-Comm tracking mechanism, that lets you look over the shoulder on what your child does using Facebook or email.

Play Maker was created for Fingerprint by Krome studios. After you design a character by mixing and matching heads, bodies and legs, you can record a happy sound and sad sound. Next, you see your character filling the screen with letters attached to them. You are asked to match all the characters holding a number 9 card, and are told not to touch a robot with the wrong number or you'll loose. It is possible to adjust or turn off the sound, music and voice.

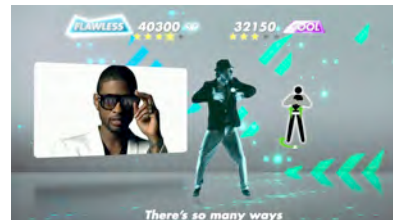
Strengths include the ability to customize the characters. Weaknesses include a shallow focus on matching and some cluttered first menus.

Details: Fingerprint Digital, www.fingerprintplay.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 4-8. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: matching letters or numbers. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.8 stars. Entry date: 12/14/2011. [WB]

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



ESRB Rating: Teen, Sexual Themes



Ease of Use	7	82%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	10	



Ease of Use	8	76%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	8	





Flat Stanley (App)

Inspired by the 1963 book "Flat Stanley" by Jeff Brown and moved into the age of apps and Facebook by Dale Hubert, a Canadian elementary teacher, the Flat Stanley App is a free download that lets you superimpose a Flat Stanley cutout character over a photo taken with your iPhone, iPad or iPod Touch camera. The idea is not unlike a message in a bottle. But instead of a bottle, your image captures your location, and you can type a little story about what Stanley is seeing.

The app is easy to use, and offers one-touch access to your Twitter, Facebook or email accounts, although you are required to register with a screen name and password.

Your photo can then be mixed in with a pool of photos from around the world and it is represented by a pin on a map; an excellent way for children to learn more about the world.

We could find no advertising, and we're not sure how Flatter World makes money from this app, other than by selling books. Note that Flat Stanley is a trademark of the Trust u/w/o Richard C. Brown f/b/o Duncan Brown and is used with permission by the Flatter World.

Details: Flatter World, www.flatterworld.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: geography, language, photography. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 11/30/2011. [WB]

Fortune Street

Combine the board game Monopoly with the zany spirit of Nintendo and you get Fortune Street, a fast-paced business game that contains 15 game boards based on popular Mushroom Kingdom and Dragon Quest locales. Nintendo's twist on Monopoly is a turn-based business game for one to four players.

Using virtual dice, you move around one of 15 themed boards in random intervals, buying shops to build your portfolio and collecting symbols you can cash in at the bank to earn gold.

There's a lot of money going on, and because all the calculations are automated, it is possible to lose track of all your stores and money. It's a bit like Monopoly on autoplay... if you don't pay attention, the game can get ahead of you.

You can play the stock market, purchase shops and collect shopping fees. Players with multiple shops adjacent to one another see them grow in value and their shops level up, and if another player lands on those squares they have to pay an increased fee. Who says video games can't teach?

A beginner setting lets you learn the basics, and there is an advanced mode with more challenges, options, and the ability to play the stock market.

To play, you hold the controller handle bar style, and you have the option to use one controller and pass it from player to player, or have each player hold their own controller. The adventure-themed symphonic sound track is right out of Nintendo's play book. Developed for Nintendo by Square Enix.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Wii. Teaches/Purpose: money, logic, economics, math. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 6/15/2011. [WB]

I SPY Castle

The riddles are clear, but not the graphics, in this collection of thirty-six hunt and find I SPY riddles for the Nintendo DS.

As with other I SPY titles, the riddles form the basis of the castle theme. They also hide 12 mini games and three logic puzzles. The more riddles you solve, the more items you collect. These, in turn, unlock more rooms. A hint system helps you find the most challenging objects.

There are three sign-in slots, so three players can save their progress. If you are limited to an older DS, this is still a viable option and the game play is solid. Just know that there are much nicer looking I SPY's out there on devices like the iPad.

I SPY was written in book form by Jean Marzollo with photographs from Walter Wick, in 1991. Other versions run on the Mac, Windows, Wii, Leapster, Leapster2, Leapster Explorer DS, and LeapFrog's Tag Learning System, iPod touch, iPhone and iPad. The game is distributed by Cokem International. Visit <http://www.scholastic.com/ispy>

Details: Scholastic Media, www.scholastic.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, classification, attributes, sorting. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 7/18/2011. [WB]

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



Ease of Use	7	86%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	9	



ESRB Rating: Rating Pending



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





Jim Henson's Sid's Science Fair

Put a science center in your iPad, with this playful, easy-to-use collection of three activities, featuring Sid the Science Kid characters.

Created by award winning designer Daren Carstens (see Math Arena), each does an excellent job informally reinforcing an early math and science curriculum, where collecting, charting and noticing differences are the desired outcomes.

Following a noisy introduction -- just like the show -- you tap one of the three Sid characters to start a no-fail activity.

In the Collection Inspection, you use a magnifying glass to notice subtle differences in 14 sets of items.

Chart It presents seven collections, which vary by shape, color and pattern. You can move them onto dynamic charts. Wrong answers fall back to the bottom of the screen, giving the charts authenticity, and realtime feedback.

Time Machine lets you play with time relationships as you freely explore 14 sets of objects such as an apple being eaten, a candle burning or a plant growing. After you put the pictures into order, you're rewarded with an innovative time slider, where you can play back the time differences, either by tilting the screen or dragging with your finger. Amazing.

Teacher-testers would like a mute button for the ever-looping background music, and there is no assessment, tracking, or connection between the activities.

For free exploration of some messy concepts that lie at the heart of STEM learning, you can't beat this app. And no cleanup is required. Created by Jim Henson Studios and Carsten's Studios for PBS Kids.

Details: PBS Kids, www.pbskids.org. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 4-7. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: science, math, charts, noticing differences, collections, observation, counting. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 10/4/2011. [WB]

Kinect Disneyland Adventures

Can't afford a trip to Disneyland? Bring it to your HD screen, with this innovative one or two player exploration game that uses your body motions as controls. Created by Frontier (the same studio that made Kinectimals) Kinect Disneyland Adventures lets you move around a realistic 3D version of Disneyland. To walk, you point your hand. To walk faster you raise your hand higher -- a navigation scheme that takes a while to learn.

The level of detail is noteworthy, right down to the burger stands, and you can interact with the mascots -- asking for autographs, giving high fives or finding burgers. You can also jump to an area of the park by using a park map. At any time, a second player can jump in (or out) making this a great context for social play.

Each activity has you moving in a different way. In Frontierland, you can jump onto a mine cart in Big Thunder Mountain Railroad, pumping your arms to go faster or slower. You can fly through Neverland with Peter Pan, with your arms extended like wings or challenge Captain Hook to a sword fight. Content includes 18 rides or attractions and 35 Disney characters. The more you play and explore, the more Disney-themed items you can collect. Other rewards include virtual parades and fireworks. A helper mode lets a second player or parent jump in to assist on difficult challenges. The game adjusts difficulty based on skill, allowing players of all ages to participate. This is a well designed game that is fun to visit, and offers plenty to do, for all ages. Just like the real Disneyland.

Details: Microsoft Game Studios, www.microsoft.com/games. Price: \$50. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Xbox Kinect. Teaches/Purpose: gross motor coordination, rhythm, Disney. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 6/6/2011. [WB]

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



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



ESRB Rating: Everyone 10+, Mild Cartoon Violence





Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword

Ideal for an older child or adult looking for a challenge, this refreshed one player Zelda game turns your Wii into a flying, sword-fighting puzzle solving adventure, complete with problem solving opportunities and reading. Note the E10+ rating, for plenty of fantasy violence mostly due to the realistic fighting. Also note the gender bias, with a story line full girls who tend to giggle and boys who are warriors who must prove themselves for the girl's approval. You must play the male role.

This title requires a Wii 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 new features include a new "more intuitive interface," the ability to fire a bow, toss (or roll) bomb, and use a whip. The downside is that each feature must be learned, through in-game tutorials.

Games can be saved in one of three game save slots. Testers noted that the controls come with a learning curve. They also noticed that the graphics didn't look as good as contemporary PS3 or Xbox action adventures.

Zelda, like Mario, is one of the hallmark Nintendo characters. As a result, the limited-edition version of the game (\$70) includes a gold Wii RemotePlus controller and a music CD featuring the Zelda Symphony. If you have the time, you'll enjoy it.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$50 (\$70 w / gold remote). Ages: 7-up. Platform: Wii MotionPlus. Teaches/Purpose: logic, reading timing, higher order thinking, memory, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 6/24/2010. [WB]

Let's Cheer

As a 50-something male, reviewing a cheerleading program is a bit out of my league. But as an educator, it is easy to spot the teaching potential of this movement experience, which leverages the Kinect sensor to gently coach me through real cheer moves.

To make the program, 2K Play told me that they used motion capture on professional cheerleaders, which adds a sense of realism to the models that you follow. If you miss a move, you see a glowing region around your weak spot. At the end of the routine, you are scored and you get to unlock new levels or try again. You will learn High V, Broken T, and Right Punch, as well as more advanced, combination moves including the Blad Cap and Touchdown Sway. Songs featured include both licensed cheerleading songs and popular cheer dance hits including Rihanna's Disturbia and Gwen Stefani's Hollaback Girl. You can also show off your skills with controller-free, full body cheerleading jumps like the Double Hook and Herkie. The game features voice enabled technology that rates your spirit level and makes sure you stay on count. You can earn spirit stars to rank-up, unlock new routines and advance to the Nationals. Other features included estimated calorie tracking and two player competitive or cooperative play. Developed by Cat Daddy for 2K Play.

Details: 2K Play, www.2kgames.com/2kplay/. Price: \$40. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Xbox Kinect. Teaches/Purpose: physical education, gross motor coordination, cheerleading, dance. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 8/24/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	6	86%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	10	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	9	



ESRB Rating: Everyone 10+, Animated Blood, Cartoon Violence, Fantasy Violence



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



ESRB Rating: Everyone 10+, Mild Lyrics





MadPad

MadPad, the latest app from Smule (of Magic Piano and Ocarina fame), turns your camera equipped iPhone or iPad into a sound mix board. Instead of using existing songs and beats, it lets you capture everyday sounds, which can be easily recorded and played back or warped with a two finger swipe.

To make your first sound collection, you touch "create" to divide the screen into 12 empty squares. Touch one of the squares and your microphone instantly starts listening. A feature called "SoundTrigger" grabs up to about 4 seconds of sound. To make a set you tap any box to start the recorder, or you can import sounds from the Smule server -- don't miss the 1991 Honda Accord collection. SoundTrigger also trims the sound so there's no dead space before and after sound, and you get just the good stuff.

An included library of stock sounds includes everything from a set of carefully tuned soda cans. In testing the app, here's my own attempt <http://youtu.be/ojnJquAxLyM>.

My only complaint with this app is how it tends to turn your work into a Smule commercial. It costs \$2.99 for the iPad version, and your work can be exported to YouTube free. Share it on Facebook, Twitter or eMail, however, and the app generates the message "Check out this awesome MadPad set! I just made a remix of my life with MadPad! Check out this set and then make your own!" This leads to a Smule page that says "in order to view this set, you must own the app and open this page on your iPad, iPhone or iPod Touch. Don't have MadPad? Get it now! (for \$2.99, of course).

Part of the joy of this app is making and modifying silly mistakes -- because you hear your sound parroted back, you can decide if you want to keep it or trash it. Everything about the process is easy and automated -- kids I tested the app with were able to make their first set in less than a minute. Is your washing machine on it's last legs? Got a neighbor with an annoying dog? Turn it into a concert.

Details: Smule, Inc., www.smule.com. Price: \$.99 for iPhone, \$2.99 for iPad. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: rhythm, music, creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 9/9/2011. [WB]

Moshi Monsters: Moshling Zoo

Now Moshi Monsters (the popular virtual world) can fit in your pocket, in the form of this one player Nintendo DS collecting and problem solving game that has a slight resemblance to a Pokémon title.

There is no scary content -- the monsters are presented in comical form. There is a lot to explore.

Your mission is to explore eight areas of the Woolly Wilderness to see if you can spot hiding creatures, called Moshlings. There are 52 Moshlings to find, and each has specific needs that are met by shopping, searching and combining various elements such as the string with a banjo. Some Moshlings are rare and wild, which keep things interesting.

There's also a Monstro City that includes Buster's Baby Care, the Glormatorium, and Raaghly's Stararcade. You can also unlock rare Moshi Monsters rewards including achievements and super secret items. This is a stand alone game -- you don't need a Moshi Monster membership to play. Developed by Black Lantern for Activision and Mind Candy.

Details: Activision, Inc., www.activision.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: reading, logic, problem solving. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 11/17/2011. [WB]

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



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



ESRB Rating: Everyone, Comic Mischief





My Own Story Time Pad

Rugged, dependable and easy to hold, this car-trip friendly toy delivers a close to endless supply of letter-related skits, stories and-or songs, delivered on a very low-tech black and white LCD screen.

The membrane keyboard is responsive, and the device goes into a sleep mode automatically. To turn it on, all you need to do is press a button.

It is possible to personalize the content with your child's name, including customized emails from family and a music playlist. Note, however, that this requires plugging the device into an Internet-connected Mac or Windows computer. This also syncs the device with the Leapfrog's online Learning Path.

Included content includes one story, one email and three songs, and holds up to five stories, ten songs and three emails at a time. Requires 3 AA batteries which are included.

Details: LeapFrog, www.leapfrog.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 2-4. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: alphabet, phonics. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 8/17/2011. [WB]

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



Ease of Use	8	85%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	N	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	9	

Nabi

Designed for kids yet powerful enough to be highly desired by a big brother, sister or parent, this Kindle-sized Android powered tablet isn't kidding around when it comes to such things as the ability to play Netflix movies, or apps like Angry Birds.

Nabi comes with a Kid Mode that gives parents what they've been asking for on an iPad -- a parent-controlled, password-protected interface that locks a child inside a gated digital community. This means you can pick the apps, videos and sites you want your child to see, and because the app runs Flash, this can include sites like PBS kids. Downsides include a smaller screen size than the iPad, slower rather clunky scrolling, and many more crashes.

If you want to use the tablet to watch a movie or check your own email, you start "Mommy Mode" by entering your password. At this point Nabi is no different than any other Android tablet.

An essential part of the business model is the Nabi App Store, home to 500 apps, games and other content, and there's a direct pipeline to the Toysrus.com app. Fifteen apps come pre-installed, plus some ebooks and movie trailers. The speaker-sound is acceptable; stereo headphone jacks definitely supplement the audio. Also noteworthy -- the mini-HDMI port, so you can plug the tablet into your HD screen.

Nabi's tech specs are impressive with a 1.1GHz Cortex-A9 CPU, 7-inch multi-touch screen and 5 hour battery life. We were less impressed with the "University" -- a collection of dry multiple-choice questions for Pre-K through 5th grade. There is 4GB of onboard storage and MicroSD card input and support for Flash 10. Visit <http://www.nabipad.com>. Additional game content can be loaded by way of a MicroSD card slot.

Details: Fuhu, Inc., www.foozkids.com. Price: \$200. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: A tablet for kids. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 9/26/2011. [WB]





Nerf Digital Camera

Sometimes the word cheap is used to imply low quality; other times low cost. In this case both apply. This 2.1 megapixel digital camera comes with a 1.5 inch LCD preview screen and uses three AAA batteries, not included. The interface is confusing to use. Features include a flash and a digital zoom. The camera connects to your computer with the included USB cable.

Details: Sakar International Inc., www.sakar.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: a low quality digital camera. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 1.9 stars. Entry date: 12/1/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	3	38%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	6	
Design Features	1	
Good Value	2	



Nikoli's Pencil Puzzle

If you already like puzzle Sudoku, this collection of 600 puzzles for one player could keep you interested. If you're new to the genre, however, you might want to skip this title. There's little help, and the tutorial mode requires reading the instructions.

Games include Sudoku - the classic numbers game in 3D; Bridges - link all the islands on the screen with bridges, making sure to match the on-screen numbers to the amount of islands you are connecting together; Boxes - divide the board into rectangles where each piece has to be included with the digit that will be the size of the boxes; Museum - light up an entire hall without overlapping the lighting with the limited number of lights given to you; and an exclusive unlockable 3D puzzle created specifically for the Nintendo 3DS. The game lets you utilize either the stylus or the control pad, and features dual screen support with the lower screen displaying the game and the upper screen showing the pieces in 3D. Developed by Hudson Soft for Konami. There are three game-save slots.

Details: Konami Digital Entertainment, Inc., www.konami.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, math, grids, memory, follow directions. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.8 stars. Entry date: 11/16/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	5	75%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	8	
Good Value		

ESRB Rating: Everyone



Noodle Words

How can 18 words like run, sparkle and pump turn a non-reader into a reader? They do it by jumping, stretching and dancing if they are touched. Introducing Noodle Words: Active Words Set 1, a set of 18 words that wait quietly until you touch them. The trick is that every action is directly related to the word. In addition, the child's touch is the driving force behind each routine. Tap quickly three times on the word "pump" for example, and you'll hear "pump, pump, pump" with the word getting fatter, as if it is being inflated like an inner tube. Keep on pumping (what child wouldn't) and the word eventually starts hissing, and quickly deflates, zipping around the screen like a balloon that has been released, startling two little bugs who rest on every screen, waiting to see what you'll do next.

As \$3 apps go there's rather limited content; with just 18 words and 100 animations; just a small bite of possible Dolch Words. But what you will find is 18 words that are presented very well, in a child-controlled early language experience that can help a child understand that words have meaning. Because the setting is so silly and playful, this notion comes quick and easy, an impressive feat for any early language experience. Note that this is the first set of a planned series. The app was designed by Mark Schlichting (creator of the Living Books) and programmed by KwiqApps using Cocos2d.

Details: NoodleWorks Interactive, <http://noodlewords.com/>. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 4-7. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 11/4/2011. [WB]

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





Oddballz Circus

Mix-and-match different heads, bodies and legs of animals, in order to make a match. You are then rewarded with the chance to count food items, and pop balloons -- tasks that seem tossed into the mix.

To change a part, you swip. As more characters are created, more surprises are revealed: kids can poke animals to hear them roar, chirp or tweet; balls bounce; and a lion helps keep count of his steaks.

Details: Oddballz Apps, www.oddballzapps.com. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: classification. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.7 stars. Entry date: 11/22/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	74%
Educational	5	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	8	



Pillow Pets

Think Super Mario Bros. with pillows as characters, and you get the idea of this fast-paced, fun one player game for the Nintendo DS.

We liked how it combines tried and true gaming mechanics.

Based on the children's line of plush pillows from CJ Products, the idea is to collect accessories for your pets by completing each level. You also help pets find their friends. The story idea works well. 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.

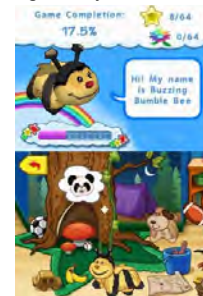
This could be an excellent first title for a younger player.

Details: GameMill Entertainment, LLC, www.game-mill.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 5-8. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, fine motor, reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 9/22/2011. [WB]

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



ESRB Rating: Everyone



Pirate Puzzles

Drag and drop jigsaw puzzles on the iPad abound, but few are as well designed as this one. There are two puzzle sets, each with nine puzzles that start easy (with six large pieces) and become more difficult. A hint system makes trial and error possible. The pirate is playful and it is hard to not complete a puzzle to see the ending. Preferences let you turn off the background music. This is one of the better designed iPad puzzle apps.

Details: Ayars Animation, www.AyarsAnimation.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: spatial relations, jigsaw puzzles. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 9/25/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	10	88%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	9	





Radica Mindflex Duel

Two years after the the original Mindflex (CTR Feb 2009), comes Mindflex Duel -- with two headsets for two players instead of one, and a higher price. The headset fits tightly onto your head so it can capture information related to your body's electromagnetic energy, by way of two sensors -- one you clip on your ear lobe, and the other that you fit on your forehead. Note that the sensors have been improved and simplified since the last version -- now you only need one ear clip.

The levels of energy are fed into a computer that controls a small blower that causes a small foam ball to go up or down, Bernoulli Blower style. When in two player mode the game is like a tug-of-war -- the idea is to move the ball across the game's obstacle platform to your opponent's side.

So how does it work? Mindflex uses EEG (Electroencephalograph) related-technology, which is used in lie detectors. According to Tansy Brook of NeuroSky (www.neurosky.com), the company that supplies the sensor technology to Mattel, the Mindflex chip, called Thinkgear, consists of a single sensor that sits on your forehead, and the ground and reference point is in your ear clip. Typical hospital-grade EEGs -- of the variety used to measure brain activity -- require multiple sensors and a conductive gel. NeroSky's chip, ThinkGear, is also being used in Uncle Milton's Star War's Force Trainer.

Other notes:

- Some of the feedback is rather harsh.
- The game uses background music and speech. The speech is nice, but the volume is hard to figure out.
- The controls are on the side and are hard to find.
- You have to remember to turn off the headsets when not in use to preserve the battery.
- There are plenty of small parts which can get lost, and cats especially love the foam balls.

Note that there are nine challenges; two of which are two player. Many of the maze games from the prior version are still playable.

The bottom line? Getting the ball to respond takes practice and introspection, and there are a lot of false positives -- when the ball seems to jump for no reason. That said, testers certainly had fun with this mind-vs-mind play patter, making this an often requested party game. Or, you could just try a old fashioned stare down to see who blinks first -- lots cheaper and requires no batteries. Mindflex requires four C and six AAA batteries (three per headset).

Details: Mattel, . Price: \$100. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: concentration, fine motor coordination, socialization, biofeedback. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 3/15/2011. [WB]

Scribblenauts Remix

Highly educational but also, at times, highly frustrating, this iPad version of Scribblenauts offers a potentially useful problem solving app.

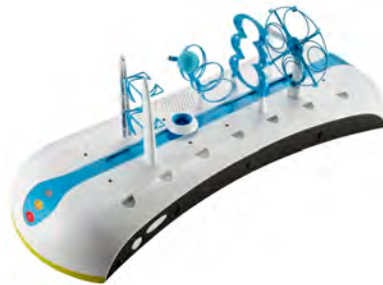
As with other editions of Scribblenauts, children use language to unlock puzzles, by typing in the items they need. Need to kill a shark? Type "hair dryer" and drop it in the water, to electrocute it. Want to get through a gate? Type "shovel" and dig under it. Content includes 10 original levels designed specifically for Apple devices, along with 40 fan favorite levels from Scribblenauts and Super Scribblenauts.

Weaknesses include clumsy controls, forcing you to tweak the positions of items in order to make them work. Hopefully this can be improved in future editions.

The more levels you solve, the more Starites you earn, and these 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. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 10/21/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	7	83%
Educational	N	
Entertaining	10	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	8	



Ease of Use	6	86%
Educational	10	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	9	





Skylanders Spyro's Adventure Starter Pack

Here's an innovative new twist to video game controls: a wireless plate-sized controller (called the Portal of Power) that you sync with your PS3, just like another game controller.

Skylanders Spyro's Adventure combines a video game with collectible toys, with a set of 32 plastic figurines (three come with it) that interact with the game using a "Portal of Power". The toys "come to life" within the game for you to control when placed upon the Portal of Power.

You take on the role of a powerful Portal Master and can control 32 different characters, including the fire-breathing dragon Spyro. As you explore the 3D world, you fight creatures, collect gold and solve puzzles while trying to save your world from Kaol, the evil Portal Master. Each interaction figure remembers your shared experiences and leveled-up abilities, allowing you to customize and power-up your toys, and bring them to life on a friend's Portal of Power for co-op play and player-versus-player arena battles. This feature makes this one of the most innovative toy/video game marriages to date.

You can change characters at any time, allowing you to utilize different interaction figures and strategies each time you play. Each interaction figure is classified by element type, i.e. Earth, Air, Fire, Water, Life, Undead, Magic, and Tech, and each has their own challenges that are unlocked as more characters are collected. Our testers, who were veteran Spyro players, liked the game.

Details: Activision, Inc., www.activision.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 8-up. Platform: PlayStation 3, Wii. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 2/21/2011. [WB]

Super Mario 3D Land

Along with Mario Kart 7, this title marks Mario's debut on the Nintendo 3DS, and the results are top notch. By combining the motion sensing abilities of the Nintendo 3DS with a 3D screen, you can use depths and distances to get from one platform to the next. You can also share the game with another player using the Street Pass feature.

There's a lot of innovation: Mario can perform a rolling somersault attack or run fast with a dash move. Or he can use his tail to hover and perform floating jumps or attacks as Tanooki Mario. The Circle Pad let you control Mario through each environment. New enemies include Goombas with tails, tall stacks of Goombas, and a Piranha Plant that spits ink to obscure your view. If you have a 3DS, this is a no-fail title.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: spatial relations, problem solving. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 6/14/2011. [WB]

There's No Place Like Space

Stretching the term "non-fiction," The Cat in the Hat's Learning Library is an ebook adaptation of the Dr. Seuss series, done in classic Oceanhouse Media style, where you can touch any item or word to see it labeled.

So what's different? Some of the words, like Sun, appear in boldface form. If you touch it, a definition pops up. Touch the definition again and it is read aloud. You can also tap the stars on some of the pages to reveal constellations and see them identified. Other titles in the series will explore subjects including dinosaurs, pets, marine life and trees, each featuring classic characters from the original The Cat in the Hat series.

For a good clean design with excellent language support and some embedded science content, it's hard to go wrong with this title. If you're looking for a lot of fancy animation, however, you won't find it here.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, www.oceanhousemedia.com. Price: \$5.99. Ages: 5-8. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: reading, science, astronomy, outer space, the solar system. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 11/22/2011. [WB]

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



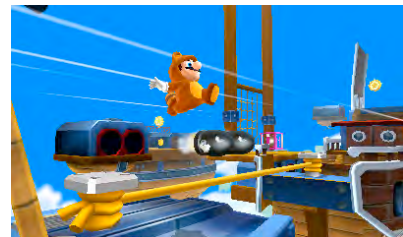
ESRB Rating: Everyone 10+, Cartoon Violence



Ease of Use	9	93%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	10	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	10	



ESRB Rating: Everyone, Mild Cartoon Violence



Ease of Use	10	88%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	8	





Toca Kitchen

Great for role play in early childhood classrooms, Toca Kitchen turns your iPad or iPhone into a virtual kitchen, where you can cook for four hungry characters. There is no reading or languages -- the characters communicate through grunts or happy sounds.

You start by choosing from one of four characters to feed (a boy, girl, goat or cat). You then choose from 12 food items in the fridge by dragging and dropping the items on the plate. To feed your person, you touch the food and drag it near the mouth. They will either eat it, or refuse it. If it is the latter, you can visit the kitchen where you can cut it, blend it, boil it, fry it, or use a microwave. Each item can be made in many different ways. Each of the characters in the app have specific food preferences, and their reactions are dependent on how you prepare the food. They may refuse to eat certain foods, or they may start drooling even if the food is uncooked. As in real life, the expression says a lot.

The design is clean and encourages accidental success. All in all, you won't be disappointed by this cleanly designed role play experience.

Details: Toca Boca, <http://tocaboca.com/>. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: cooking, socialization. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 12/1/2011. [WB]

uDraw Studio Instant Artist

Last year we reviewed the uDraw tablet for the Nintendo Wii (CTR, Dec 10). Conceptually we liked the idea of turning your HD screen into a giant easel, but we found the interface to be slightly clunky, with a slight lag in the drawing (you might recall that you snap your Wii Remote into the device).

Not anymore. The Xbox 360 version of Instant Artist, the title that comes bundled with the \$80 uDraw game tablet package, feels much more responsive and the monotonous stylus glides across the 3 x 6 inch surface, nicely replicating an artist's easel.

While the interface can be confusing to the first time user, you soon learn how to customize the interface so you can make some powerful drawings. Note that there's a similar package for the PS3 that we did not test.

All the drawing basics are included -- pencils, brushes, chalk and charcoals, and an infinite number of colors. You can easily fill or undo with one button, and a redraw feature lets you review your painting, as you drew it. A smart pallet system remembers your most frequently used colors and tools.

One important weakness -- there is no pressure sensitivity; an important feature for any drawing program. We also didn't like the looping new age background music, although this can be turned down in the control panel.

Other content includes an art school with 15 tutorials on such things as perspectives and shading. Projects can be saved online or to an SD card.

uDraw Studio: Instant Artist comes bundled with the uDraw GameTablets for Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 (\$80), as well as individually for the Wii uDraw (\$30). Visit www.worldofudraw.com for more information.

Details: THQ, Inc., www.thq.com. Price: \$80. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Xbox 360*, PlayStation 3, Wii. Teaches/Purpose: art. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 9/9/2011. [WB]

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

94%



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

90%

ESRB Rating: Everyone





Wappy Dog

This toy / screen experience turns your Nintendo DS into a remote control for a robotic dog.

Instead of using standard infra-red signals, however, this dog is controlled by sound, in the form of coded chirps that come out of your Nintendo DS speakers. A microphone in Wappy Dog can "hear" the chirps, which can be sent to Wappy Dog's computer for different responses.

There are two modes: Home and Travel. In Home mode, you select tricks such as singing and dancing.

In Travel mode, you play with a screen-based version of your dog, petting it with your stylus. This includes nurturing your dog, playing games and buying treats. When you reunite your DS with your physical pet, they sync to enable the same personality and status. The dog works for a distance of about 3 feet. Testers found the idea interesting at first, but Wappy Dog's range of responses is narrow, which makes things far less interesting over time. Buy with caution. See <http://youtu.be/vY6GCRK923k>.

Details: Activision, Inc., www.activision.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Nintendo DS, Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: cause and effect. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.6 stars. Entry date: 9/20/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	72%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	6	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	7	





Future Releases & Updates

DECEMBER 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.

A Charlie Brown Christmas

Loud Crow Interactive and Peanuts Worldwide have partnered to produce a series of digital interactive books based on the cartoon specials. The first in the series, A Charlie Brown Christmas, features narration by Peter Robbins, the original voice of Charlie Brown, along with original scenes and dialog from the 1965 animated classic, and digitally remastered illustrations, animation, and music optimized for your smartphone or tablet. You can play Schroeder's piano, finger paint, go caroling with the Peanuts choir, and participate in the Spectacular Super-Colossal Neighborhood Christmas Lights and Display Contest to unlock decorations for your own Charlie Brown Christmas Tree. Other features include: word and note highlighting designed to help improve reading and musical skills; hear individual words spoken when tapped; and touch and drag object to make them come to life or tilt to watch them slide and move.

Details: Loud Crow Interactive Inc., www.loudcrow.com. Price: \$6.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: reading, music. Entry date: 11/17/2011.



Adventures of TinTin: The Game, The

We had a quick look at the first level of the Adventures of TinTin; testers were not that impressed... "it sure is a lot like other exploration games, even though you get to be a dog." However, this is a rich game with 20 levels and we don't have enough information to assign a rating.

Your job is to investigate a mystery that may lead you to one of the greatest sunken treasures. You will join forces with Snowy the dog and Captain Haddock as you try to beat the greedy art collectors, arms dealers, and other crooks to reveal the truth behind the Secret of the Unicorn ship.

You can play as TinTin, Snowy, Captain Haddock or three other unlockable characters, each with their own personality and skills. Content includes 20 environments from the movie. You get to pilot a plane, drive a side-car, sword-fight and solve puzzles and there are both one and two player co-op modes.

Both the Kinect and Playstation Move versions allow you to play using your whole body. Note the PC version is \$30.

Details: UbiSoft, Inc., www.ubisoft.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Wii, Windows, PlayStation Move, Xbox Kinect. Teaches/Purpose: logic, spatial reasoning. Entry date: 6/6/2011.



Air Hogs R/C Fly Crane

This is a remote controlled helicopter that with a grapple hook feature that can be let out or retracted as the copter flies. One kit includes three cargo baskets, and one controller/charger. Designed for indoor use. Requires six AA batteries, not included. Our testers found the helicopter harder to fly than other models, making it very difficult to actually pick up anything.

Details: Spin Master Ltd., www.spinmaster.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: spatial relations. Entry date: 11/16/2011.





BEYBLADE: Metal Masters

Inspired by the Beyblade TV cartoon series, this game features 37 characters from the first two seasons. You can take on and battle in a last-man standing competition of Beys in the battle arena.

You can customize your Beyblades with different parts for offensive and defensive abilities, and each Beyblade features special attacks to inflict damage on your opponent. You can also link up the DS version with the Wii version (provided you own it) to acquire rare blades.

Other features include the ability to use voice commands (DS version only) and play two player Battle Mode on the DS via Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection or wirelessly using one game card.

Details: Hudson Entertainment, www.hudsonent.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Nintendo DS, Wii. Teaches/Purpose: collaborative play, fine motor coordination. Entry date: 12/1/2011.



Big Kid Life: Veterinarian

This is part of a series of apps that feature a new Mom-Comm tracking mechanism, that lets you look over the shoulder on what your child does using Facebook or email.

In this title, you race to touch objects which have certain attributes, curing animals. See also Big Kid Life Firefighter.

Details: Fingerprint Digital, www.fingerprintplay.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 4-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: classification, logic, matching. Entry date: 12/14/2011.



DoReMi, 1-2-3

This is part of a series of apps that feature a new Mom-Comm tracking mechanism, that lets you look over the shoulder on what your child does using Facebook or email. According to the press materials there are "moo-sical cows, boat-rowing pandas, and twinkling stars" that help children learn to distinguish between the building blocks of musical pitch and melody. And this, the PR materials go on, "boosts brain development." (Yikes).

This is Fingerprint's first third-party app developed by Creativity Mobile and Funosophy, and the first in a planned series of music education games.

Details: Fingerprint Digital, www.fingerprintplay.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 4-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: music. Entry date: 12/14/2011.

DQM2: Dragon Quest Monsters - Jokers

This turn-based RPG (role play game) lets you become a monster scout. Your job is to recruit wild monsters and build a team to battle against other players.

You crash land on a mysterious island after your airship is struck by lightning and must rescue your missing passengers and crew members by fighting enemies. In order to get off the island you must solve its mysteries.

Content includes 300 monsters, and the ability to synthesize two monsters to create something new and more powerful. You can customize your monsters using more than 240 skill trees or battle monsters against others using a local wireless connection. You can also share data with other players via Tag Mode. Developed by Square Enix.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, reading. Entry date: 9/13/2011.





Dr. Fresh FireFly Battery Powered Toothbrushes

These AA battery powered toothbrushes feature high-speed dual action rotary vibrations. The handles also flash for two minutes, the dentist recommended amount of time for thorough brushing. They are available in either Barbie or Batman themes.

Details: Dr. Fresh, Inc., www.drffresh.com. Price: \$5.99 & up. Ages: 6-12. Platform: battery powered rotary toothbrush. Teaches/Purpose: proper dental hygiene. Entry date: 11/22/2011.



Family Game Night Fun Pack

Combining Family Game Night 2 and 3, this game features 10 screen-based versions of Hasbro games, for 1 to 4 players.

These include Operation, Jenga, Bop-It, Connect 4x4, Pictureka, The Game of Life, Clue, Twister, Mouse Trap, and Yahtzee Hands Down. Each is hosted by Mr. Potato Head and features customizations, rewards, multiple party modes, and both classic and remixed versions of the original board games. As you play the games, you can unlock new content and items to customize your party space. The games vary in quality. Testers: perhaps good for a weekend, but none of the games are that unique.

Details: Electronic Arts, www.ea.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Xbox 360, Wii. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Entry date: 12/1/2011.



inviZimals: Shadow Zone

Augmented reality comes to your PSP, with this year's sequel to inviZimals, providing you own a PSP camera (sold separately). The camera enables players to find, capture and battle virtual monsters, or inviZimals, hiding in your house.

You point the camera behind sofas, into corners, and under bushes to find virtual monsters. Once you spot one, you use a "trap card" (a printed card that can be seen by the PSP camera) and place it near the creature.

The story unites players with Jazmin, Keni and Dawson, and lets you investigate the stories of inviZimals that are linked to ancient civilizations. Players will travel the world to recruit other hunters for a secret global society of hunters, called the Alliance, whose mission is to stop villains from using inviZimals for evil.

Content includes 100 new inviZimals, and the ability to share and modify your inviZimals and change their names and colors. A new cooperative play feature lets you work with another player.

Details: Sony Computer Entertainment America, Inc., www.scea.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 10-up. Platform: PSP. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Entry date: 11/30/2011.



Let's Rock Elmo Guitar

Easy to play and noisy, this fat guitar plays three preschool tunes and has three modes of play with light up keys and a whammy bar.

It is designed to work with Let's Rock Elmo (sold separately) who knows when you have the guitar and will play along. Requires three AA batteries (included).

Details: Playskool (Hasbro), www.hasbro.com/playskool/. Price: . Ages: 18 mo. & up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: music. Entry date: 9/13/2011.





Let's Rock Grover Microphone

The Grover microphone features three songs and a button to amplify your child's voice like a real microphone. It is designed to work with the Let's Rock Elmo character (sold separately) who knows when you have your Grover microphone and sings along with you. Requires 3 AAA batteries (included).

Details: Playskool (Hasbro), www.hasbro.com/playskool/. Price: \$15. Ages: 18 mo. & up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: music. Entry date: 9/13/2011.



Letters for Santa

Santa is busy this time of year, and so are we, so we didn't get time to review this seasonal ebook from Ireland. But we'll put it in as a new release because of the theme.

The app tells the story of Ruben, an inventor reindeer who is Rudolph's young nephew. Ruben is training for his first Christmas Eve sleigh ride with Santa, but has missed the reindeer flight school training. Rudolph and Santa find him asleep at his desk, and find that he has been working at night on a new invention that can let children anywhere write a letter to Santa. Children can write their own letter with their finger, which can be sent to a parent's email address. At the end of the story, the child's name is displayed on a Christmas present tag.

Details: drawinginc Limited, . Price: \$1.99. Ages: 4-10. Platform: iPad, Android. Teaches/Purpose: language. Entry date: 12/6/2011.



Me Reader

Here's a low cost solution to the ebook. The Me Reader system consists of a set of eight hardcover books designed especially to work with a book-sized electronic book reader. Each book has a unique symbol. If you press the symbol, and then one of eight page symbols, you can hear the page read aloud.

There are two collections available: Disney Classics which includes The Lion King, 101 Dalmatians, Aladdin, The Jungle Book, Peter Pan, Winnie the Pooh, Dumbo and Finding Nemo; and Disney Pixar which includes Cars, Mickey Mouse Clubhouse, The Incredibles, Toy Story 3, Tangled, Monsters Inc., WALL-E, and Up. Teaches exposure to print and some reading. Requires three AAA batteries, included.

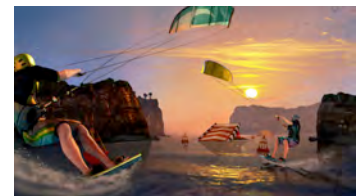
Details: Publications International, Ltd., www.pubint.com. Price: \$25. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Entry date: 11/30/2011.



MotionSports: Adrenaline

Challenge your friends in eight games: Wingsuit (flying); Mountainbike; Rock climbing; Kayak; Kitesurf; Parkour; Extreme Ski; and Extreme Trampoline. The games take place in sites like the Himalayas or on waterfalls on the Amazon river. A Party Mode lets you play with up to four players in races, relays and trick trails, and you can use collectable items to affect your opponents. These include water bombs to slow and disorient them. You can choose to compete against friends or play cooperatively with them, or play online and automatically take on and set online challenges as you participate in each event. Developed by Ubisoft Vancouver. For more information visit www.motionsportsgame.com.

Details: Ubisoft, www.ubisoft.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 12-up. Platform: Xbox Kinect, PlayStation Move. Teaches/Purpose: sports, gross motor movement. Entry date: 7/7/2011.





My Very Own Talking Bear and Book

This talking plush Santa bear swaps lines of narration with a specialized six page printed book (and vice-versa). It can further blur a child's conception of Santa.

You start by squeezing the bear's left paw (operated by 3 AAA batteries, included) to hear a clear, low, very Santa-like voice telling you "the book talks to me, and I answer." This makes sense, until you realize it is coming out of a six inch plush toy. Some fear that this type of technology could prompt the question "Daddy, is this bear really Santa?" We'll leave that answer to you.

You start by flipping open one of the thick pages of the colorful book -- a story about the Bear-santa's quest to deliver gifts to the other animals. The book (powered by button cell batteries, included) starts out, reading the first paragraph of text. Each page is marked with an icon, which, when pressed, sends a radio signal to the bear, telling it what page you're on. It also sends radio signal to the bear, which tells it when to start reading. The book is colorful and the pages look as if they could survive in any pediatrician's waiting room.

There are two titles available -- I Love You, Santa Bear and I Love You, Little Bear.

Details: Publications International, Ltd., www.pubint.com. Price: \$25. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language. Entry date: 11/30/2011.



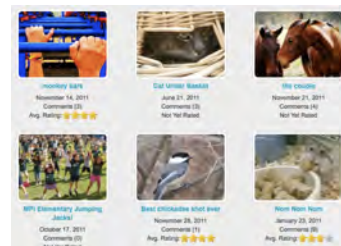
National Geographic Kids: My Shot

NG Kids My Shot is a moderated, online photo community located at <http://kids-myshot.nationalgeographic.com/> where kids can create a portfolio, upload their favorite photos, get photo tips, rate photos, and comment on other members' pictures.

It's a place to share a love of photography and inspire other kids to care about the planet. Kids must have parental permission in order get a screen name and password. We looked at some of the examples, and have to agree that kids take some amazing photos.

According to Michelle Sullivan, the creator, "the simple user interface makes it super kid-friendly and the photographic results are both stunning, innovative and sometimes hilarious!" Coming soon: caption contests, on assignment photo award badges and custom puzzle maker.

Details: National Geographic Kids, <http://kids.nationalgeographic.com>. Price: \$free. Ages: 12-up. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX, Internet Site. Teaches/Purpose: photography, art, creativity. Entry date: 11/22/2010.



Nomad Play

Tired of using a finger on your iPad? Nomad Play is a paintbrush stylus with soft nylon bristles. The handle is made from maple and the bristles are held in place by a soft, rubber ring (or ferrule) that poses no risk of scratching the screen. The brush works on any Apple or Android capacitive touch screen, including the iPad. Testers were mixed about this brush. It seems fun at first, but the bristles sometimes divide and the paint line gets confused. In addition, there's a learning curve -- you have to learn not to push too hard. Your fingertip, on the other hand, has no such learning curve. Nomad Play comes in four designs and colors.

Details: NomadBrush LLC, www.nomadbrush.com. Price: \$18. Ages: 3-up. Platform: paintbrush stylus for iPad, iPhone and Android. Teaches/Purpose: a stylus peripheral for capacitive screens. Entry date: 11/30/2011.



Playbase

This is a 7 inch Android tablet for both kids and adults designed by Singapore-based Karuma. It comes wrapped in a silicone cover for protection against drops, with a built in kick-stand. It is powered by a 1.2Ghz processor with 1 GB of onboard RAM.

The capacitive 4 point multi touch is glass. According to Karuna, "there is no Bloatware...you decide which apps you want straight out of the box." To assist, two Android market places (Soc.io and Applibs) are included, providing access to 40 thousand apps. The children's interface, called PlayUI, has simplified icons for easy navigation, and provides direct access to media like video, books and music.

Details: Karuma Innovations, www.karuma.sg. Price: \$250. Ages: 4-up. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: an android computer. Entry date: 11/22/2011.





Popar Books

This is a series of traditional-looking hard cover printed picture books, but the pages have codes on them that can be recognized by a traditional web camera. When the page is "seen" by your Windows computer web camera, objects, such as bugs or trucks become animated, or appear to jump out of the page. We've seen a technology similar to this in The Search for Wondla, and Mattel also released a set of Avatar toys with the technology (called Instant Immersion). But according to the developer, "this is a completely different technology and Digital Tech Frontier is not affiliated with Total Immersion."

You can either hold the book up to the camera or use an included iPaddle that shows printed codes. The technique, called "augmented reality" uses a special plugin. After a ten minute one time installation using the included disk, you must launch the program that starts your webcam. After you see yourself on the screen, you find one of the images on the page and show it to the camera. Presto, the objects come to life. The effect is amazing the first time, but how long until the novelty fades? There's also the added hassle of starting up your Windows computer. Perhaps there might be an app version?

This technology was used two years ago in a line of Mattel Avatar toys and Topps playing cards.

Details: Popar Books, www.poparbooks.com. Price: \$27.99. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Windows. Teaches/Purpose: science, reading. Entry date: 11/30/2011.

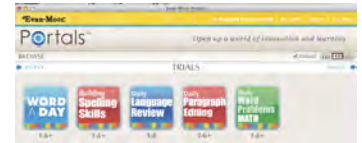
Portals

Like iTunes for education content, Portals is a system designed to manage content sold by education publisher Evan-Moor, from any computer that can run the Adobe Air plugin.

Once you sign up, you download and install a small Adobe Air application on your Mac or Windows computer. Next, you can sample from five "apps." If you already own one of the apps, you can get updates.

This sample-as-you go method is nice because you can see if the modules will work as advertised, before you spend \$200 for the entire package. Because most Evan Moor content is supplementary to existing curricula, you can also determine if there is a good pedagogical match. The activities are designed to support existing language art and math skills for grades 1-8, with focused daily practice that can be managed from the cloud. Learn more at www.evan-moor.com/portals.

Details: Evan-Moor Educational Publishers, www.evan-moor.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX, Internet Site. Teaches/Purpose: math, reading, general curriculum support. Entry date: 11/29/2011.



Professor Layton and the Last Specter

Professor Layton and the Last Specter for the Nintendo DS is the fourth installment in the Professor Layton puzzle adventure series. It begins a new trilogy that is a prequel to the original games, set three years before the events in Professor Layton and the Curious Village. In the story, Professor Layton receives a letter from his old schoolmate Clark Triton, telling him that a mysterious giant is destroying his town. The professor heads to the town of Misthallery to investigate, along with his new assistant Emmy. Players move the story forward by solving brain teasers, riddles and conundrums. The game contains more puzzles than any in the series to date. In addition, free downloadable puzzles will be available weekly after the games' launch (internet connection required). Also, as a North American exclusive to the overall Professor Layton and the Last Specter package, a bonus role-playing game called Professor Layton's London Life™ containing more than 100 hours of additional content will be available to players from the start of the game. Developed by Level-5 for Nintendo.

Details: Nintendo of America, Inc., www.nintendo.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, memory, strategy. Entry date: 9/14/2011.





Record a Memory Books

See also Record a Song and Record a Story books.

We've all grown used to the idea of a recordable greeting card, where you hold down a button and talk into a tiny microphone. Record A Memory books take the concept a step further. They are designed to function like a scrapbook but with the ability to add recorded sound. They are available in different versions, so you could record your family's own voices from a holiday celebration or baby's first year, your child's own words on their first day of school, and so on.

The books feature a button module on the right hand side of the book, with instructions printed inside the book, and the narration can be re-recorded over and over again. The books' recording function operates on three AAA batteries (included) and recordings are not erased when batteries are replaced.

Titles in the Record a Memory Pocket Full of Memories line (\$22 each) include School Years, Baby's Firsts, and Disney's Winnie the Pooh: Baby's First. Each of these features 10 illustrated spreads with guided prompts to encourage you to write down your memories, in addition to die-cut photo openings to hold pictures and pages made up of storage pockets to hold items such as artwork, locks of hair, and report cards. Titles in the Record A Memory Guided Photo Journals (\$16 each) include Grandmother, Tell Me Your Story, Mom, Tell Me Your Story, and Our Family Christmas Memories. These titles features 48 pages and places to attach photos.

Details: Publications International, Ltd., www.pubint.com. Price: \$16 / \$22. Ages: 2-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: reading, creativity. Entry date: 11/30/2011.



Record A Song Books

See also Record A Story Books.

Further stretching the definition of "ebook" the Record A Song Books are hard cover songbooks that let children record their own singing voices by way of an embedded microphone.

Each book comes loaded with pre-recorded songs, which can be listened to by opening the book and pressing one of the seven buttons on the panel to the right of the text.

The buttons match up with icons next to each set of song lyrics on the pages. At the bottom of the button panel is a switch to toggle between the pre-recorded song mode (indicated by musical notes) and the record-it-yourself mode (indicated by rec). When you switch to record, your child hears a simple background melody that they can sing along to, karaoke style.

Songs can be recorded and re-recorded. Titles include: Old MacDonald and Other Animal Songs; Thomas & Friends Sing-Along; Christmas Songs; Dora the Explorer Superstar Sing-Along; and Mickey's Christmas Songs.

The books' recording function operates on three AAA batteries, included, and recordings are not erased when batteries are replaced.

Details: Publications International, Ltd., www.pubint.com. Price: \$18. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: music, singing. Entry date: 11/30/2011.





Record A Story Books

See also Record a Song Books.

Originally released in 2010, the Record A Story Books (\$20) let you narrate a story, which plays instantly when the page is turned.

The books come with pre-recorded master narration. To record your own voice, you use a toggle switch.

Each Record a Story book has a switch in the battery panel that locks the new recording to prevent accidental erasure. And since each page is recorded separately, more than parents could narrate a story together. The books' recording function operates on three AAA batteries, included, and recordings will not be erased when batteries are replaced.

New titles available in 2011 include: My Grandpa is Special; My Grandma is Special; Good Night, Sesame Street; The Day You Were Born; Thomas Good Night, Little Engine; I Love You So Much; Ten Little Pumpkins; The First Christmas; and Frosty the Snowman. Older titles from 2010 are also available including: Guess How Much I Miss You; 'Twas the Night Before Christmas; Sesame Street Together at Heart; and Dora the Explorer Exploring Memories. Also new this year is the 9 Button Record a Story (\$18), Sesame Street Adventures in Storyland, which allows children to choose whether to listen to the pre-recorded story or record their own narration. For the listening mode, readers simply open the book and press one of the nine buttons, which match up with icons on the pages. At the bottom of the button panel is a switch to toggle between pre-recorded and record-it-yourself mode. When you switch to "R" mode, you or your child can record your own narration, which can be locked when completed.

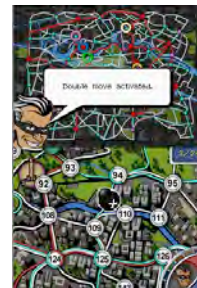
Details: Publications International, Ltd., www.pubint.com. Price: \$18 / \$20. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: reading, narration. Entry date: 11/30/2011.



Scotland Yard

This puzzle, board game for the DS features true to life city maps of Amsterdam, Paris, New York, Berlin and London. In the game, Scotland Yard is searching for Mister X. You can play as either Mr. X or the Detectives trying to find him, using Mr. X's leftover transportation tickets as clues. Multiplayer features different options (multi and single-card, hot-seat), and you can send secret notes to teammates by writing on the screen. Developed by Sproing for Mentor Interactive.

Details: Mentor InterActive, www.mentorinteractive.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Entry date: 7/21/2011.



StickerYou.com

Design and print your own glossy stickers using an online library of licensed images and text options. Then, using Make+Print Your Own Stickers (available at retailers for \$14 per set) you can print your stickers using your inkjet printer.

The stickers come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Or, if you don't have the Make+Print sheets, you can still create and print your stickers and StickerYou.com will ship them to you.

Charges are based on the number of stickers ordered, ranging from \$8.99 per sheet for one sheet to \$3.49 per sheet for one hundred sheets. Also available are labels, bumper stickers, iron-ons, and more.

Details: StickerYou, www.stickeryou.com. Price: \$14. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Internet Site. Teaches/Purpose: creativity. Entry date: 9/1/2011.





Toca Hair Salon

Update December 2011: Just released is a free Christmas version of Toca Hair Salon that lets you cut, color and style Santa Claus' beard and hair.

Here's a theme that works especially well with 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.

Details: Toca Boca, <http://tocaboca.com/>. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: creativity. Entry date: 6/9/2011.



TriOviz Inficolor 3D Glasses

These 3D glasses have two colored lenses, so that you can play games in 3D on regular HDTV screens, providing the game has an Inficolor setting. Games with this feature include Assassin's Creed Revelations and Batman: Arkham City. Unlike the red-green anaglyph glasses, these glasses are lightweight and claim to "ensure a visualization without discomfort." In addition, the displayed image is easily visible with or without glasses.

Details: TriOviz, www.trioviz.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 7-up. Platform: PlayStation 3. Teaches/Purpose: a gaming peripheral. Entry date: 11/30/2011.



YouTube for Schools

Let's face it, most teachers don't like YouTube, or Facebook for that matter, seeing them as major distractions. That's sad, because YouTube contains some of the best educational content.

Google (who owns YouTube) wants to make amends with educators, with YouTube for Schools, at <http://www.youtube.com/schools>. The idea is to expand the already existing YouTube Edu into K-12 and Lifelong Learning.

A key part of the service is a no-cost network setting that you can put into your router, that re-directs any and all YouTube searches into the School section of YouTube. This buttoned-down Schools portal can be customized, so that comments are removed and teacher-screened recommendations are made while a video is playing. Also missing -- the ads.

Another key feature is the ability to search by common core standards, making subject- and grade-based searches possible. Finally, YouTube is sweetening the deal with exclusive content, such as the TED channel. Want a sample? Visit <http://www.youtube.com/schools>.

Details: Google, Inc., www.google.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX, Internet Site. Teaches/Purpose: video, all subjects. Entry date: 12/8/2011.