

Children's TECHNOLOGY Review

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Amplified Reality?

.. and other curious discoveries at they year's Toy Fair. Watch this cover, at <http://youtu.be/f5FBD5r8III>

Children's Technology Review

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



Welcome to the 21st Century NAEYC!

NAEYC -- the organization that once banned the use of computer presentations in its sessions -- can now be classified as a thought leader when it comes to understanding technology and young children. Yesterday (March 6) it released a fresh, new position statement called "Technology and Interactive Media as Tools in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8." In a nutshell, it admits that "technology is here to stay" and "not all screens are created equal." In fact, this is the first time the term "interactive media" has been clearly defined (as opposed to just "screen media or screens" in previous articles). It tightly summarizes the sometimes conflicting research on the use of technology with young children, and helps you better understand the things that you really do need to worry about. For example, issues of equity and access is a real concern; things like radiation exposure, less so. In full disclosure, I was one of the working group members which gave me a first hand look at various drafts over time. So I can tell you that this wasn't an easy document to create. The heavy lifting was done by Chip Donohue of the Erikson Institute, and Roberta Schomburg of the Fred Rogers Center, under the watchful eye of NAEYC's Madhavi Parikh. Download the PDF <http://www.naeyc.org/content/technology-and-young-children>. Welcome to the 21st Century, NAEYC.

"The Big Apple" Gets a New Meaning During Toy Fair '12

Apple doesn't have a booth at Toy Fair, and it never has to my knowledge. But at this year's Toy Fair, the Apple logo was omnipresent, as toy companies showed off their app-related toys. CTR Contributor Scott Traylor walks us through the key trends on page 4, or watch the Toy Fair YouTube playlist, at <http://bit.ly/Ap8xc5>

The Latest Sites and Videos on Man's Best Friend

In this month's LittleClickers we take a closer look at web sites and videos about puppies and dogs. You'll learn how to find the right breed of dog for your family, how to take a dog for a walk, and laugh at some of the funniest dog videos on the Internet. Don't believe me? See page 3.

Coming in April: the Best Children's eBooks in the World

The Bologna Children's Book Fair and CTR are working together, once again. You may recall that we once coordinated the Bologna New Media Prize, from 1997 to 2002. This time around, we're working as part of an international jury to find and recognize excellence and innovation in the category of children's digital publishing. The contest is called the BolognaRagazzi Digital Award (<http://bit.ly/8pchZs>) and it is now integrated with the fair's BolognaRagazzi book prize. We'll announce the winner in the next issue. I'm thrilled to be going back to Bologna, and will do my best to share my discoveries, with you, our loyal CTR readers.



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Your paid \$30 or \$120 subscription to CTR includes exclusive password access to the *Children's Software Finder (TM)* database—a collection of reviews going back to 1985. If you've lost or forgotten your password, please call 800-993-9499 between 9-3 PM EST.

Sites and videos about

DOGS



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A hhhh.... there's nothing like a little puppy breath to brighten your day. Puppies and dogs are fun, but they can require a lot of work. Here are some links and videos on one of our favorite subjects -- dogs:

1. How do you teach a dog to shake hands? Have a look at <http://youtu.be/sfv9DvEDlpo>, (in the YouTube playlist, below). You'll learn how to use treats to get your dog to do just about anything. Here's some tricks for dog walking <http://bit.ly/Hd0w>.

2. Help! I'm afraid of dogs! They sometimes growl, and scare me. Go to this Australian site <http://bit.ly/zAC8tj> and you'll learn that many times, dogs are just as afraid of you! Don't pet a strange dog unless a parent and the owner say it's ok, and never try to take a dog's food.

3. I want a dog. Which breed is the best? Do you have a big backyard? Will you be able to give it a lot of attention? According to the American Kennel Club, at http://www.akc.org/breeds/complete_breed_list.cfm there are 174 types of dogs! Use Animal Planet's Dog Breed Selector, at <http://bit.ly/Asyflj> to find the best match for your family.



4. What is the smallest dog in the world? At http://www.oddee.com/item_96492.aspx you'll find a yappy short-coat Chihuahua that is about the size of a shoe.



5. How many times more powerful is a dog's nose than yours? Bloodhounds are called noses with dogs attached, for good reason. At PBS <http://to.pbs.org/wy19Y4> you will learn that a bloodhound's nose is 40 times stronger than yours. It can also follow the same scent for up to 130 miles!

Stuff you can do:

1. Raise a Seeing Eye Dog. Visit <http://www.seeingeye.org> and you can learn how you can adopt a puppy, and raise it to become a helper to somebody who had trouble seeing.

2. Teach a Dog a Trick. Materials needed: One dog -- young or old -- and some dog treats. You'll also need a lot of patience. Now go to <http://www.loveyourdog.com/tricks2.html> and pick one of the tricks. Start with something simple, like "shake" or "lay down" and then move on to "stay" and "roll over."



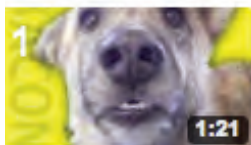
Q. Can you name this dog?
Extra credit: Name his breed.

A. Does the house in the background give it away? His name is Bo, and he lives in the White House. You can learn more about Bo and the other Presidential Pets, at the White House pets page. <http://1.usa.gov/6WkCkO>. (by the way, he's a Portuguese Water Dog).



YouTube™ LittleClickers YouTube Playlist: Dogs

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL46B34855C96B83E2>



2012 Toy Tech Trends (With Commentary)

By Scott Traylor (with commentary by Warren Buckleitner & Chris Crowell)



Watch this article! We've created a YouTube playlist <http://bit.ly/Ap8xc5>

Every February, Toy Fair fever comes to New York City. What's great about Toy Fair is that you get to see the birth of many new and different products for the very first time, and this can be very revealing about the state of play, technology, ideas, and business. Good or bad, expensive or cheap, plush or technology, licensed or original, they're all mashed together for five busy days in and around the Jacob Javits Convention Center in mid-town Manhattan. What was visible on the showroom floor, in secluded office spaces, or in invitation only press rooms fell into one of a handful of different categories. Here's our attempt to sum it up.

The Big "Apple" Redefined

While apps appeared on the toy scene last year in hit-or-miss fashion, this year's show was app crazy. Most of the big name toy companies formally launched an exclusive line of app related toys, and the accompanying toys and the app puns were thick. There was Mattel's apptivity toys, Hasbro's zAPPed games, Spin Master's AppFinity, and WowWee's APPgear, to name a few. Many app-related toy products felt hurried -- a forced combination of a physical toy with an iPad screen; as if some Vice President suddenly said "just make it happen."



AppDrive from Spin Master

Among the various app-toy mashups were a foam ball that you wedge your iPhone into and kick around the room (your phone's accelerometer counts the kicks), a trampoline with an iPad holster, and a mother's apron with a clear display pocket so that a baby can play with an app during mom time. There were iPhone/iTouch steering wheels such as Spin Master's AppDrive, iPhone controlled air planes and a fishing reel. The pitch for each was similar: download the free app, and then buy the toy in your toy store for \$10 to \$40. So which products stood out? During this year's Dust or Magic huddle (CTR's annual Toy Fair debriefing) one of the most



Scott Traylor is President of 360KID (www.360KID.com). He's a frequent contributor to CTR and speaks each year at Dust or Magic. Disclosure: In the past, Scott Traylor has business relationships with some of the toy companies mentioned in this article, specifically LeapFrog, Disney, Hasbro and NukoToys. Instances where his objectivity may have been compromised have been noted.

Join a small group of smart people to explore children's interactive design for multi-touch tablets.

When? May 20-22, 2012, Sunday to Tuesday

Where? Asilomar Conference Grounds on the Monterey Peninsula, CA



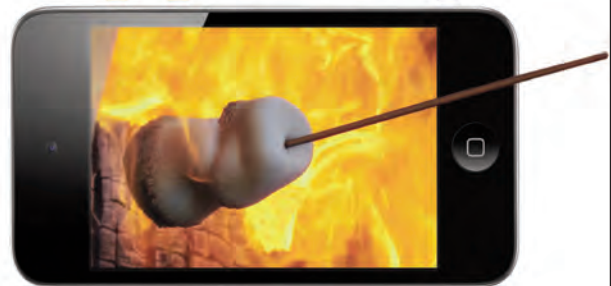
The Sunday feature presentation will be by Theo Gray of Touch Press

Who? Designers, reviewers and researchers in the children's app space, including **Lorraine Akemann** of Moms With Apps; **Daren Carstens** of Carstens Studios; **Barbara Chamberlin**, Director of the University of New Mexico Learning Lab; **Ingrid Moon**, Disney; **Carolyn Hu Flexor**, Duck Duck Moose; **Theodore Gray** of Touch Press and others.

Cost & Registration: \$1290, (\$990 each for 2 or more), not counting Asilomar housing (~\$136/night) or optional UPENN Graduate Credit (\$100).

Don't Miss the Third Annual

Dust or Magic **2012**
AppCamp



www.dustormagic.com

Hey kids — Download our free* app!

(*\$19.99 toy and 2 AA batteries, required).

discussed product lines was the AppGear line by WowWee (the same folks as the PaperJamz music products). It wasn't that the other big company apps were shoddy. It was just that the AppGear line was so slick. It made me wonder about the costs involved to make their games, and if those costs could be recouped at the checkout isle. Remember that the return on investment (or ROI) for an app can be very thin. For example, if you invest \$40,000 in the creation of an app, and that app sells for \$.99 a pop, you'll need to sell 57,800 apps in short order to make up the cost of the investment alone, after Apple takes their cut. A "successful" toy product typically will sell a million units, but can an app and physical toy product combination reach that kind of volume? If so, you can bet you will see many more similar products later this year. If not, this is likely to a passing trend.

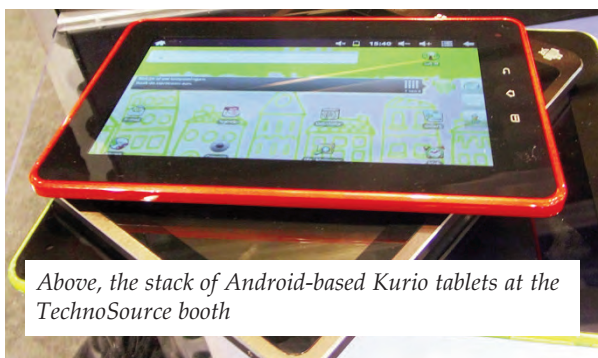
Warren and Chris: Apple has never had a booth at Toy Fair. But Apple's logo was omnipresent, starting with our trip into the city, as we drove under three giant iPad 2 billboards at the mouth of the Lincoln Tunnel (the photo on top of the previous page is from last year in Wikipedia Commons, dated April 11, but you get the idea). The "Big Apple" had a new meaning for this year's Toy Fair. One can't help but thinking that Apple is making a fortune by leveraging the marketing of the giant toy companies, who are experts at selling to kids and families.

Augmented Reality: Defined, then Sliced, Diced and Bundled

Out of all the apps announced at Toy Fair, a smaller number took advantage of augmented reality (AR). AR is a new space that is rapidly defining itself. For those that are wondering what it is, let me explain. Virtual reality (VR) creates an imaginary visual space that only exists on a screen. Augmented reality takes some kind of real world object using a camera, in real time. The footage is digitized and sent through a software mixer, perhaps layering software-generated items over it. The original scene plus the digital frosting is shown on the screen. The handful of AR products seen at the show included WowWee's Foam Fighters flight simulator (on the cover, and at <http://youtu.be/f5FBD5r8III>), Spin Master's AppBlaster gun, Jay at Play's AR plushes called Mushabellies, and a real surprise, Ravensburger. Until this year, Ravensburger has known for being un-technology, creating one of the most traditional types of toys -- the jigsaw puzzle. At this year's Toy Fair however, the giant German publisher released four types of 1,000 piece jigsaw puzzles along with an app, called AR Puzzle. After your app is downloaded you point your camera at your completed puzzle (you can use the box cover, too) to see visual effects layered over the image. The puzzles cost \$20, the app is free, but you still have to put them together. See the demo at <http://youtu.be/ji9gwP-8O6A>.



Warren: Tablet and smart phone devices can also deliver old fashioned video, including TV and movie content — within an app. Apps give the TV and motion picture producers a new portal to your child's playroom. For example, in Hasbro's new game of Life, you can watch segments from America's Funniest Home Videos (see the example, at <http://youtu.be/vHi9-3RdMhM>).



Above, the stack of Android-based Kurio tablets at the TechnoSource booth

More Tablets

"Tablets?" you say to yourself? At Toy Fair? Yes indeed, new tablet devices were on display at TF in force. Three newcomers to watch include Oregon Scientific's Meep tablet (<http://youtu.be/snfm2RiguW8>), the Kurio suite of tablets (<http://youtu.be/coov40IJ200>) being displayed at TechnoSource, through a partnership with another technology company called Kidz Delight, and



Above, Foam Fighters, below an iPhone acts as the brain for the latest rendition of Monopoly.



Above, one of Ravensburger's puzzles. Below the Meep from Oregon Scientific. Below that, the Kurio (in the yellow frame) was on display in the TechnoSource booth.



the French/Hong Kong **LexiBook** with several kid-based tablets on the floor (<http://youtu.be/d1Lhd3WciFM>). Each of these tablets features a 7 inch screen. Many have SD slots, micro USB ports, microphone and speakers, and in some cases, HD ports to display on a television. These tablets had all the features of consumer-grade tablets. Could the toy world establish future price points for the consumer electronics world when it comes to tablets? We'll see. Of course, this is Toy Fair, so there are two other tablets to keep in mind. One is VTech's InnoTab, but VTech suggested waiting for an April announcement. LeapFrog decided a few years ago not to set up booth space at Toy Fair. They also had no news on the future of their LeapPad tablet, other than the fact that it has a very successful holiday season, in part due to the on-board camera. Both of these tablets are becoming the un-Apple, un-Android option.

WB: I met with Leapfrog, who was hosting meetings offsite in their New York PR office. They had no Toy Fair related announcements. We'll make sure CTR readers are the first to know the news.

Fewer Virtual Worlds

Three years ago, I counted twelve unique virtual worlds launched during Toy Fair. That number has dropped year after year, but reached its lowest level this year. Another change from last year -- no more Engage Expo (a collaborative event that ran alongside Toy Fair, focusing specifically on the virtual world and MMO space). I did see Sqwishland.com, Cozmix, and NukoToys (Editor's note, see Scott's disclaimers). Sqwishland.com was promoting numerous tangible gum ball sized collectable figurines (see <http://youtu.be/UjXUaT4cl0Y>). Cozmix, another new startup, was promoting a free online HTML5 gaming destination for kids, along with specialty clothing and collectable badges. NukoToys has created a few 3D Unity-driven Nat Geo and Ology-based virtual worlds that can be experienced through an iPad. The NukoToys product also has collector cards that can be used in the virtual world game.

Moshi Madness

What about Moshi Monsters? Weren't they at the show? Mind Candy, creator of Moshi Monsters, did not have its own booth, but Moshi logos could be seen everywhere. We even spotted Moshi Monster's creator Michael Acton Smith playing with his new Bobble Bot toy that was made in partnership with Innovation First (maker of Hexbugs) See <http://youtu.be/ej79BKBOuEw>. In the last year there have been numerous Moshi licensing deals. Toy companies are hoping to see similar sales success with Moshi here in the US. A TechCrunch article about Mind Candy's Moshi business plans stated that Moshi owner, Mind Candy, set a goal for itself to reach \$100 million in new licensing deals within one year. That goal was broken and its results were visible everywhere at the show.



Apps and toys— Facts or Hype? (both)

We spotted some interesting statistics being used by WowWee to justify their investment in apps. We asked Scott to take a closer look.

WowWee PR: "Last year there were over 100 million apps downloaded resulting in sales of more than \$5.2 billion dollars. This year that number is expected to increase to \$15 billion dollars. By 2014 experts expect to see the numbers grow exponentially to \$185 billion dollars."

Scott Traylor: *Are these US or global numbers? What 2014 experts? Whose numbers are these? Past sales numbers couldn't be coming from Apple, they don't release that stuff, do they? Where did these numbers come from?*

WowWee PR: "In the 4th quarter of 2011 Apple sold 37 million iPhones and 15.4 Million iPads."

Scott Traylor: *No dispute here.*

WowWee PR: "Kids of today are now getting the original iPads and the iPhone 3GS or possibly even the iPhone 4 as hand me downs from their parents."

Scott Traylor: *Perhaps. I've heard it applied to Nintendo DS lines as well over the years, hand-me-downs from older siblings. Not sure if there's any research on the concept though.*

WowWee PR: "iPhone handset and accessory sales were \$24.4 Billion, as a result sales of new videogames, consoles, and accessories at U.S. stores dropped 21 percent in December."

Scott Traylor: *The only way you could piece this together is by starting with NPD video game sales numbers. Then it has to be correlated to another source's data for handset and accessory numbers. Not sure who covers that space. Theoretically you could claim this growth to be true based on what was on the show floor starting during CES 2011 (continuing into 2012). An interesting correlation to the above claim: television viewership according to Nielsen in the kids space dropped in 4th quarter as well. Nielsen does not offer a reason why, though apps in the hands of kids could be the reason. Just theory though.*

WowWee: "What that means for toy companies and retailers is big business! Companies large and small are trying to tap into a newly created category called AppCessories. In fact, many of the nations leading retailers have created a new aisle in the store for these products that take advantage of the iPod phenomenon."

Scott Traylor: "Sounds like bravado. It could also be called 'dealing with an 900 lb. gorilla called Apple.'"

Too Much and Not Enough

A technology product that seems to have exceeded its fifteen minutes of fame were remote controlled helicopters. There were many companies pushing RC flying toys. Companies on the "hard-to-find" list were of the electronic "maker" kind. The Maker movement can be found in a lot of places and at more and more conferences, but I thought their visibility at TF was sparse. One company that was a perfect fit with Makers was littleBits, a young group that sells magnetic, snap-together electronics kits. Think of the online software product Scratch mashed up with Radio Shack and you get the idea behind littleBits. See the demo, here <http://youtu.be/oQRzd8FBSE0>



Now You Watch Me, Now You Don't

The number of "watch me" toys appeared to be in decline, and I wondered if maybe this sector was morphing into something new. For years we've seen watch me toys like Tickle Me Elmo, Elmo Extreme, and the like. You know, toys that do an awful lot of nothing for a big price. This year it's Master Moves Mickey (M3), an animatronic toy with some mega dance moves through numerous internal motors, counter balances and pulleys, but still, you have to watch it. (Manufacturer's note: Mattel, the maker of M3, claims this toy speaks to kids to participate and join in on the dancing with Mickey. With that definition, maybe it's not a watch me toy. You decide. <http://youtu.be/0y285nwnT00>).

In the world of play, the cost to buy M3 could also buy 30 - 60 game apps. The length of play time through apps alone ups the ante considerably for this and similar watch me toys. However, watch me toys are changing. With the inclusion of sensors of all kinds, the toy world is on the doorstep of a sensory revolution. Fijits by Mattel (<http://youtu.be/2fbSWU0SfAo>) has sound activated sensors and what appears to be some kind of voice recognition to activate these little creatures. Baby Butterscotch by Hasbro makes a reappearance and also has light sensors and touch sensors. These are but two examples, and there are more, but here's the lesson learned: Watch me + sensors - price = longer play time + happier parents.

WB: Another interesting example of smaller, cheaper, smarter is Baby ButterScotch (<http://youtu.be/88FwuMC7mx8>) which Hasbro says is it's most sophisticated FurReal pet ever.



The Dogs That Didn't Bark

What was missing from Toy Fair this year from prior years? Three things caught my attention after the show ended. While reading my observations on virtual worlds above did you notice anything? Ganz, the creators of the Webkinz virtual world, was nowhere to be seen. I was sad not to speak with them this year. I was looking forward to hearing the latest about the two new worlds they announced last year at Toy Fair.

GeoPalz, a young company who encourages physical activity and sells a digital device which captures motion points that can be traded for family defined prizes via a website were not in attendance. I did see them a few weeks earlier at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, but they skipped TF this year.

I also noticed geocaching and RFID related motion products were no where to be found. Maybe the play pattern or cost of components or both need a little more time to evolve before they start to appear again.

Warren and Chris: or perhaps these features are built into smart phones, scaring the innovation away from this category? Another company that didn't formally exhibit at Toy Fair was Microsoft, with their Kinect system. Like Hasbro, they hosted off-site demos. See <http://youtu.be/o2gAB9ICzSY>

There are many more stories to share about Toy Fair. All in all, it was another great year of innovation and play on display. Too bad it only comes once a year.





Feature Reviews

MARCH 2012

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.

A Jazzy Day

Designed to introduce young children to Jazz music and it's instruments, this app follows two children as they explore the Jazz Big Band, where they discover the sounds of each instrument.

We appreciated the realism to this app -- especially the instrument sounds -- there are no cheesy synthesizers here. In addition, there's a full jazz Big Band arrangement that can be mixed and matched, making it fun to play with various parts of the band to hear how they turn into a "conversation." On the last of the 15 pages, children can test their knowledge with an un-timed quiz that asks children to match a phrase (or a lick) played by each instrument, with the correct picture.

Instruments include the saxophone, trumpet, trombone, bass, piano, guitar and vibraphone. As with many ebook designs, there is both a read to me mode or a read it myself option. All in all, this is an excellent addition to your app library.

Details: The Melody Book, www.themelodybook.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: music, jazz. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 2/21/2012. [WB]

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

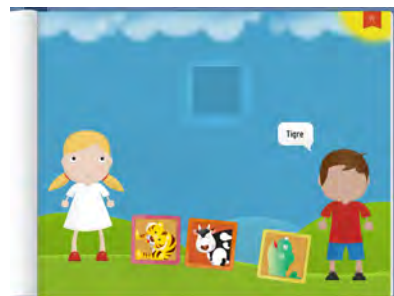


Bilingual Child

Designed to expose very young children to Spanish and English, this well designed, responsive app lets you build basic Spanish vocabulary as you interact with Lucy (who speaks English) and Carlos (who speaks Spanish). Your goal is to drag and match picture blocks with their spoken English or Spanish counterpart. The starter app is free to download and features Animals. Two additional books, Colors and Numbers, are available as in-app purchases for \$1.99 each. Once your child has mastered each book in English and Spanish, they'll unlock a new book in Spanish only.

Details: Tiny Factory, www.bilingualchildapp.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 1-3. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: language, English, Spanish. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 1/23/2012. [WB]

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



Booksy - School Edition

Elementary teachers, take note: here's a noble attempt to use the iPad to take reading assessment to a new level.

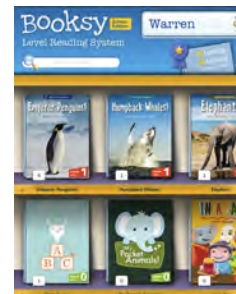
Booksy presents a select group of leveled readers (sold separately) to children and then keeps records. It also records their voice on each page, so (in theory) you could use Booksy for part of a digital portfolio. Besides capturing the audio files, Booksy tracks each word pressed, and generates a list in an email format.

Combining these features makes sense, and in this case it almost succeeded until we tried it in the classroom. Teachers didn't like the voice that was used to read the words, finding it mono-toned and lacking inflection. "As a teacher I would not use this with my students." However, they did like the graphics of the non-fiction titles and the content is strong. The quiz at the end of the books was "useful." Other rough spots: controlling the recording and getting to a child's sound files is less than intuitive, and a child is locked inside a book once the reading process is started. There should be an easier way to jump back to the main menu.

All things considered, this is a good start. We'll hope for further improvements.

Details: Tipitap Apps, www.tipitap.com. Price: \$11.99. Ages: 4-7. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.6 stars. Entry date: 1/26/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	72%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	5	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	5	





Cars in Sandbox: Construction

What child wouldn't want to play with a road grader? This app turns your iPad into a limited construction scene, with eight vehicles that start up with a touch, and move forward or backwards with a swipe. Each comes with a specific challenge. For example, with road grader, you have to find some giant tennis balls and push them into a tube. To do so, you have to touch the blade to move it up down, and move the grader forward. Other challenges ask you to pick up a set of marbles and dump them into a box, using a hydraulic bucket. No reading is required. Vehicles include a dump truck, rock handler, hauling tractor, grader, crawler-mounted excavator, telescopic handler, loader, and truck crane. This is a fun app for about 30 minutes, but after you've completed all the challenges you can loose interest. Testers especially liked the sounds, and the way you can adjust the hydraulics on each vehicle. From Thematic Kids.

Details: Thematica Kids, www.thematica.info. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 2-5. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: representational play, social play. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 12/22/2011. [WB]

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



DaGeDar

Want to play a racing game that's fun, fast paced, and intuitive? Well then you probably want to avoid DaGeDar. According to our Chris Dunn (CTR Intern) "this game feels like one long ad for a line of toys."

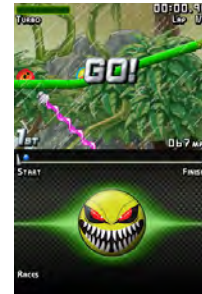
This virtual racing game lets you battle against friends or evil spirits. Content includes 100 DaGeDar racing balls to unlock, collect and trade, as well as special limited edition characters. Each ball carries abilities of acceleration, top speed, defense and attack modes. There are 30 tracks and DeGeDar points at the end of each race for rewards and bonuses.

The controls are clunky and hard to control, and the graphics are weak.

Details: GameMill Entertainment, LLC, www.game-mill.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: racing. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 1.4 stars. Entry date: 11/30/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	4	28%
Educational	N	
Entertaining	2	
Design Features	3	
Good Value	2	

ESRB Rating: Everyone



Disney AppClix

Powerful but small, this well-designed iPad peripheral expands your iPad's ability to take surprisingly clear 7 megapixel pictures, without your iPad. While you won't win any photography contests with it, the tiny aluminum-body comes with a self-installing photo-editing app that starts when you plug the camera into the iPad's 30-pin adapter port (this also charges the battery, pulling power from the iPad). So why get one, if your iPad already has a camera? You might use it to give an iPad 1 the ability to take still shots, or extend your iPad 2's photo-taking ability into a tiny, pocket-sized gadget. Features include a micro-SD port, flash, and preview screen. The camera is made by Saker (known for less than powerful technology cameras) for Disney Consumer Products.

Details: Disney Consumer Products, www.disney.com. Price: \$60. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: photography. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 2/29/2012. [WB]

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





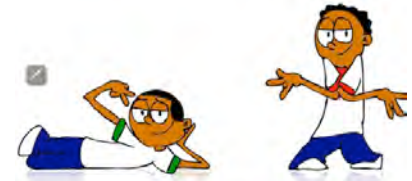
Doink

Doink is an easy to use, fairly powerful (given the constraints of finger drawing), vector-based animation experience for iPad.

Originally designed as a Flash-based website, the iPad app makes it easy to create simple cartoons, one frame at a time, by progressively layering (or onion skinning) the next drawing over the last. If you'd like to introduce a child to the principles of animation, this app is definitely worth the download.

Details: DK Pictures, www.doink.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: art, creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 11/10/2011. [WB]

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



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



Don't Let The Pigeon Run This App!

Innovative and very well-designed, this language experience/creativity app puts a children's book author (Mo Willems) inside his own app. It also invites you (or a child) to serve as the co-author/co-illustrator. The result is an entertaining Mad-Libs style experience where you can draw elements of the story, and insert your own favorite favorite parts in the narrative.

There are two primary modes from the main menu: Create Your Own Story (choose parts of the story and at times record your own voice) and Draw the Pigeon (a free-drawing experience, where Mo Willems gives you art lessons).

Features include the ability to see the narration (like captions), and the ability to record your own voice, to hear it woven into the story.

Willems is incredibly entertaining, and it is fun to hear the children's voices responding to his story telling. One drawback is that once the story starts, it is presented page by page -- you can't skip the narration or move at your own pace. You can, however, jump back to the main menu.

The app is based on the "Don't Let the Pigeon" Book Series. In the story, the long list of things the Pigeon can't do—drive the bus, stay up late, eat a hot dog—grows and grows, as children decide what the Pigeon will try to do next. This app version contains three variations and Willems provides the writing, voicing, and illustrations in each. This includes a first person appearance in the app's drawing tutorial. Stories can be saved. So, is any app these days worth the price of a hardcover printed edition (about \$8?). In this case, the answer is yes, because of the ways it lets children put their ideas in the story. Published and developed by smallplanet for Hyperion Books for Children and Disney Publishing.

Details: Disney Publishing Worldwide, www.DisneyDigitalBooks.com. Price: \$6.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, creativity, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 11/22/2011. [WB]



Draw and Tell

The title says it all with this exciting new creativity app for young children -- the first to successfully mix a full featured drawing program with narration, by way of the iPad's microphone. Now you can think of your iPad or iPhone as a drawing/flannel board and story telling machine. The drawing is just one part of what this app does well. It is paired with a narration feature that makes it easy to do a "color commentary" on the picture you just made. The end result is a powerful language experience. After you finish your picture, you tap a microphone, and are told to "record your voice -- 3-2-1-Go!" As a recording light flashes, you can describe your work. Note that this is a very different process than apps like Doodlecast, where you redraw your picture and talk in real time. With this app, an innovative highlighter is layered over your drawing, letting you highlight features as you talk; a nice touch.

Once you have a picture and a highlighted soundtrack, your work is saved automatically in your photo library, making it possible to share by email. This works backwards as well... you can import images and sketch or talk over them, with a glow in the dark marker, if you like. For pure creative punch, this title offers more than any app we've reviewed, with 22 varieties of paper (including blank), a set of crayons, paints and fine-point pencils. The 156 item sticker library has non-branded, resizable items that can be dragged, dropped, or erased by moving them off the screen. We noted that it is possible for it to become "stuck" under a menu bar; a frustrating problem. In all other cases, there is an undo feature.

Weaknesses include some overbearing cello music -- that is nice -- but on by default. Fortunately you can turn it off, but that requires finding the icon that is only on the home screen.

In the short history of children's apps, Duck Duck Moose (DDM) has more than it's share of home runs, but this one is the most important. It stands a good chance of becoming the "KidPix for the iPad" providing a few bugs are worked out.

Details: Duck Duck Moose Design, www.duckduckmoosedesign.com. Price: \$.99. Ages: 2-12. Platform: iPad, Android. Teaches/Purpose: language, creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 3/1/2012. [WB]

FIFA Soccer (Vita)

This portable version of EA's FIFA Soccer did not impress our testers, who cited "tiny graphics," "hard to read messages" and "complex controls" as reasons not to invest the \$40 needed to own this soccer simulation.

At points in the game, you can use both the front and back multi-touch screens to navigate. Content includes 30 licensed leagues and 500 licensed clubs in 11 v 11 matches in authentic stadiums from around the world.

Online features are available which we were not able to test. This version looks like it was designed for a game console, but shoehorned into the Vita's small screen. For diehard players, perhaps; otherwise stay with EA's well designed console versions of these games.

Details: EA Sports - Electronic Arts Canada, www.eagames.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Vita. Teaches/Purpose: sports, soccer. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2.4 stars. Entry date: 2/17/2012. [WB]

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



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

ESRB Rating: Everyone





Finger Math

What to learn a little "chisenbop?" Here's your app. This app teaches you how to turn your fingers into a calculator. You start by learning how to count to 99. Next, you learn addition and subtraction. The better you do, the harder it gets, by way of leveled challenges. Features include: the ability to save up to five players; 60 levels that increase in difficulty; 10 touch points on the iPad where you hold your finger down to have it counted.

One small glitch -- on the iPad 2, it is possible to confuse the screen by touching all five fingers to the glass simultaneously, which causes the program to switch. You have to be very careful in order to avoid accidentally switching apps.

Details: Our House Interactive LLC, <http://ourhouseinteractive.com>. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 5-12. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: math facts, math, counting, addition, subtraction. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 12/9/2011. [WB]

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



Game Changer: Game Board for iPad

Confusing and hard to use, GameChanger is an electronic game board that plugs into your iPad, essentially extending it's touch surface beyond the area of the screen, into a folding board. It is one of the first toy / app combinations.

You start by downloading the app, and then connect your iPad to the board. Then you can touch the board, which consists of 48 pressure fields. When you move your playing piece, the screen shows a video and plays a sound so you know whose turn it is. In addition, the GameChanger asks questions and assigns tasks.

There are two board game apps, both free. Animal Mania deals with animal facts. Magic School Bus features Ms. Frizzle, and takes you through a human body, with videos from the animated series.

Each GameChanger kit includes 25" x 11" game board, 4 game skins and 4 flexible multi-game playing pieces. New app games are being released including Kaboom and DuckDuckGoose.

Details: Identity Games, <http://boardgamechanger.com>. Price: \$80. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 1.5 stars. Entry date: 11/16/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	2	30%
Educational	3	
Entertaining	4	
Design Features	3	
Good Value	3	



I, Trixie Who Is Dog

This is a tribute to a golden retriever owned by famous mystery author Dean Koontz. Like many ebooks, this one follows the familiar three mode autoplay, read myself, and read to me format. A unique feature is the ability to add your own narration, and color the pages using Auryn's set of tools. This process has potential, once you figure it out. But children will need some help with these extra features. To add value as a reading experience, Auryn used a word/object labeling system commonly used by Oceanhouse Media.

The text and excellent watercolor illustrations (by Janet Cleland) provide some insight on how the Koontz family dog spends the day, a topic that is less than compelling. This type of book is incredibly meaningful, to one family.

Details: Auryn, Inc., <http://auryn.com/>. Price: \$.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.4 stars. Entry date: 12/14/2011. [WB]

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





Inside the World of Dinosaurs

This dramatic dinosaur encyclopedia contains a library of 60 animated, roaring dinosaurs, as well as biographical facts on a set of famous dinosaur hunters. Testers noted that some of the objects don't look as clear as TouchPress references, but "they still look cool." You can either explore the screens, one at a time, or listen to each page read aloud by British actor Steven Fry.

Every dinosaur and object can be spun around in 3D motion, allowing you study the visual details such as skin texture and color. You can also view fight sequences from any angle. The dinosaurs feature "real" sounds and animation. Content includes 310 3D models, 60 realistic dinosaurs and 40 recreations of dinosaurs fighting. There's a total of 200 pages of text, and five hours of narration.

All in all, this is a beautiful, dinosaur rich resource. Note that it takes up nearly a gigabyte of storage.

Details: M5859 Studios, . Price: \$14.99. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad (uses 891 MB). Teaches/Purpose: science, dinosaurs, dinosaur facts. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 2/22/2012. [WB]

It's A Small World

Beautifully illustrated with narration by children, accompanied by fully orchestrated background music, the iPad edition of the famous Disney theme-park ride lets you touch-and-explore 16 watercolor scenes depicting various parts of a happy, exotic world where everyone seems busy and happy. And yes, one scene does actually show what could be a cruise ship. Cynicism aside, this is a rare Disney production that is completely free of mouse ears. Walt would, most likely, be pleased.

Each scene contains related hot spots that are well designed and help the story along. Even subtle items, such the rings of the sun shown in the African scene, can be spun with a swipe. As they move, they give off a rattle sound that fits nicely in the background music. These nice touches help children feel part of these story. Print is used sparingly, one sentence at a time; when touched, the sentence is read aloud, contributing to the value as an informal language experience.

If you're expecting visuals from the famous ride, you may be disappointed. This app is rendered in stylized watercolor drawings. In a refreshing touch, the ever familiar "read to me" and "let me explore" navigation options have sidestepped. Instead, each page advances slowly, automatically, or it can be hurried along either with a bookmark -- in case you want to jump directly to a page -- or with a swipe, that puts the whole production in the context of a balloon ride. The last page includes the famous song, follow the bouncing ball style, and you can tap on the screen to control the fireworks. If you're looking for a nice bedtime book with exposure to quality art and music, this is a good choice.

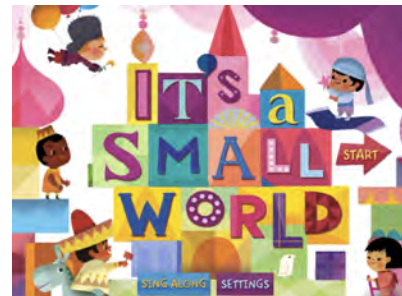
One word of caution -- make sure you download a current version and use a recent version of the iOS operating system. According to the iTunes reviews, this app can crash. It is also a large download -- at 133 MB.

Details: Disney Publishing Worldwide, www.DisneyDigitalBooks.com. Price: \$7.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPhone 3GS, iPhone 4, iPhone 4S, iPod touch (3rd generation), iPod touch (4th generation) and iPad. Requires iOS 4.3 or later. Teaches/Purpose: Geography, causality, language, music. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 2/19/2012. [WB]

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



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





Kids Fun

Sure, there's no shortage of jigsaw puzzles, games of concentration and mix / match games in the app store. But this app takes the genre up a notch by offering the "two Q's" (quality and quantity), in a highly responsive interactive setting that makes it easy to land in a game that presents a quick challenge.

The app starts with 10 clearly marked icons, each leading to a set of five or so games. Each has a nature or animal theme. Activities include puzzles, matching, coloring, concentration, hide-and-see, dot-to-dot, and spot the differences. It is easy to get out of any activity instantly, and there's plenty to discover. Features include the ability to adjust the sounds.

This is an excellent general purpose preschool app.

Details: phillieandrevon, <http://philippe.andrevon.com/>. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: matching, causality, shapes, logic, memory. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 2/21/2012. [WB]

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



Kinectimals (for iPad)

This pet sim isn't as fun or well designed as Nintendogs, but it still has a lot going for it, including very realistic-looking lion and tiger cubs, according to our testers who had logged time on both. Note that some of the games can be a bit clunky to control, and younger children can become frustrated.

With a look and feel that is nearly identical to the Kinect edition of the game, Kinectimals for iPad lets you pet, bathe and teach your large baby cats. The more you play, the more parts of the island of Lemuria that you unlock. There are five total, each with different challenges. For example, you can flick a ball to see how many times your cub can catch it, or swipe up to make your cub jump, in time to a jump rope. You can also transfer your pet to the Kinect, by holding your iPad in range of the Kinect camera. Once it recognizes your cubs pattern, your cub "jumps" into the Kinect game. Finally Apple and Microsoft are playing together. Visit www.xbox.com/Kinectimals.

Details: Microsoft Corporation, www.microsoft.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 6-12. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: timing, logic, memory. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 12/18/2011. [WB]

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





Kumon Uppercase ABC's - Learn to Trace Letters

Carefully constructed and very didactic (controlled) this letter tracing app contains two activities specifically designed to teach children to write uppercase letters as well as recognize the sound of each letter.

Letter Tracing has three steps: Stage 1 - Inside an outline of the letter, your child traces each numbered stroke in the order shown, starting with the circle, along the dotted line, and ending at the star; Stage 2 - the circle and star disappear, but the dotted line remains for your child to trace; and Stage 3 - the dotted line is removed, and your child writes the letter on their own within the outline.

In the Letter Sounds Game, your child can practice matching the sound of each letter with its written symbol. The app asks aloud, "Touch the letter that makes the sound R" and your child chooses from 3 on-screen letters. If they tap the wrong letter the sound will repeat until the correct letter is chosen. When they select the correct letter, its sound and name are repeated to reinforce learning before the next letter is shown.

The app also features three modes: alphabetical, random, or Kumon. The Kumon method shows letters to your child in order of complexity so your child can master the easier letters first, such as L and T, before moving on to more difficult letters with diagonal or curved lines. Each letter features an interactive illustration. For example, when the letter D is correctly traced, the app will show a dog that can be moved and played with. When your child successfully completes all of the letters, they will receive a Certificate of Achievement that you can customize with their name and print.

So is the app worth the \$4 download? Perhaps. There are many well constructed letter tracing apps, but few that keep records like this one, or that provide instant feedback for errors. The praise and raspberries for wrong answers can grow tiring, and there's not much joy in this title. Given the Kumon branding, this is no surprise.

Details: Kumon Publishing North America, Inc., . Price: \$3.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: letters, phonics. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.8 stars. Entry date: 1/23/2012. [WB]

LEGO Harry Potter Years 5-7

The TT games tradition of excellence continues, with this follow-up to last year's LEGO Harry Potter Years 1-4.

Based on themes in the last three Harry Potter books and the final four films, this single game, for nearly every platform, takes you through Harry Potter's adventures in such places as Privet Drive in Little Whinging to Diagon Alley, Hogsmeade and Hogwarts, as well as new locations like Grimmauld Place.

As you explore and collect LEGO parts, you prepare for the ultimate battle against Lord Voldemort. The game builds upon the gameplay, lessons and potion-making skills learned in LEGO Harry Potter: Years 1-4 to equip you with the tools necessary to challenge new and old enemies (including He Who Must Not Be Named).

The Nintendo 3DS version has three game-save slots and a street pass feature. There is no worrisome content, and the "LEGO-ized" animated video segments were much appreciated by our testers. The regular DS version has 2 game save slots. As with past games, the console editions are ideal for two players because they feature "drop in, drop out" socialization. The handheld versions are also excellent, although there are obvious control differences. In general, however, you won't go wrong with any version of this excellent title. Created by TT games for Warner Bros.

Details: Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, Inc., www.warnerbros.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Wii, Nintendo DS, Nintendo 3DS, PSP, Windows. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 6/7/2011. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	76%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	5	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	7	



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



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





Letter of the Day Interactive Activities

Here's a set of dry, animated lessons designed to cover letter formation and letter sounds. The design is simple and direct, with four multiple-choice activities per letter, a chant, plus the ability to trace the letters on the screen, following a model.

You start by choosing a letter from a pull down menu. The letter name is announced and a "letter chant" appears in the center of the screen, surrounded by four smaller rectangles designed to look like picture frames. Each is empty, with a question mark. Children can press the "play chant" button which enlarges the box. A female voice immediately recites the chant while a yellow text box highlights each word as it is read. It would be nice if the child could interact with the words individually after the chant is completed.

To complete the activities, children are prompted to "find the word that starts with the /u/ sound" and must then select the correct picture, from three options (eggs, umbrella or butterfly). The pictures are clear and easy to decode, plus the printed label appears with each. Correct answers result in a "Good Job!" Incorrect answers cause the picture to disappear, leaving the other options. We noticed some instances where the pictures had letter sounds that were similar such, as in letter x (children are asked to distinguish between "fox" and "rabbits"). This can be confusing for beginning reading but can also lead to a discussion on the importance of sight word development as well as phonetic decoding.

The more useful feature of this app is found on the second page, where children can trace the letter in both upper or lower case. The use of the sentence strip which is appropriately lined to match the style of writing paper used in a classroom, a nice touch. Teachers who tried the app were very excited as this makes the transition from working with the app on the iPad to actual paper and pencil writing easy and connected. Use of a stylus with the iPad is highly recommended in order to get the most out of this feature.

Overall, Letter of the Day Interactive Activities is a worthy app that early childhood teachers and parents can find valuable for helping children develop language skills in and outside the school setting.

Details: Lakeshore Learning Materials, www.lakeshorelearning.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 4-7. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: letter identification & letter sound discrimination. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 2/4/2012. [CC]

Ease of Use	8	82%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	6	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	9	



Little Deviants

Designed specifically around the unique attributes of the Sony Vita handheld game system, Little Deviants is a collection of thirty games that provide a good test of your problem solving abilities and reaction time.

In Hole Roll Control, you touch the back of the Vita (the back side has a sensitive, capacitive screen, like the iPad) to see the "bump" of your finger on a floating landscape. By moving the bump around, you push one of the deviants (they roll) toward a hole. It's as if you could reach underground, say, under a golf course, and push the ground up in order to move the ball. Other games include House of Whacks, Depth Charge, and Botz Blast -- the latter an augmented reality game that uses the outside-facing camera to let you target bad guys who are floating around the room. This game demonstrates that the Vita can act a lot like the Nintendo 3DS (see Face Raiders). According to Robert Shaer, one of the game designers, "Little Deviants was built from the ground up to take advantage of the Vita."

We found the game to be less than straightforward as a pick up game (a lot of introductions) but potentially very addicting. It also forces you to learn some new gaming mechanics, for the very first time. Our advice -- approach Little Deviants with an open mind, and get ready to try something completely new.

Details: Sony Computer Entertainment America, www.scea.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Vita. Teaches/Purpose: logic, problem solving, fine motor control. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 6/29/2011. [WB]

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

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





Love You to the Moon & Back

Beautiful illustrations meets so-so interactive design, in Love you to the Moon & Back, an ebook designed with "art from the heart" from Sue Shanaha.

The 25 screen app is a collection of love-inspired portraits that feel unrelated to one another (a favorite is on page 8, that shows a boy and a dog sharing an ice cream cone). But they all do have general parental love themes. There are three ways to read the book. Read to Me lets you listen to the narrated story while the text is displayed, one word at a time. After the narration finishes, you can touch objects to see and hear them labeled. Auto Play also lets you listen to the narrated story, but the pages automatically advance once the narration is finished. Read Myself lets the child read the story on their own, but they can also touch a word to hear it being spoken aloud.

Unfortunately, there's little relation between the text and the illustrations, so very few of the items being narrated are shown. In addition, the page turning process misfires on occasion. We were hopeful by the personalize tab, that lets you record your own voice and type your own text. But we were not successful getting this feature to work.

Details: Auryn, Inc., <http://auryn.com/>. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 3-12. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.8 stars. Entry date: 1/19/2012. [WB]

Motion Math Hungry Fish

Ideal for helping a child conceptualize addition, subtraction, multiplication and division math facts, but anchored down by a business model that depends on in-app sales, Motion Math Hungry Fish lets children practice skills like "instant addition" in a fun, highly compelling undersea setting. We reviewed the free portion of the app -- the first of six levels.

The center of the show is a fish who eats number bubbles (e.g., addends). You help by dragging the correct bubbles to the fish as quickly as possible. This might involve combining bubbles such as 3 and 4, to make 7. The better you do, the harder the problems and the more points you earn. These points turn into magic pearls that can be used to customize your fish, with different colors or fins (a nice touch). There are six sets of problems, but only the first can be played with the free version; the other five are available as in-app sales. Weaknesses include an inability to toggle off the sound from any screen. We also noticed novices (e.g., first time users) tend to try to feed the bubbles to the fish, which won't work, so there's a small learning curve.

All in all, this is an excellent addition to any early elementary math program, as long as you are aware of the in-app sales features.

Details: Motion Math Games, www.motionmathgames.com. Price: \$6.99 for whole app. Ages: 5-12. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: math facts. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 12/8/2011. [WB]

Oh Say Can You Say Di-No-Saur?

The second in the The Cat in the Hat's Learning Library series, Oh Say Can You Say Di-No-Saur is an improvement on the last, with more carefully crafted interactive routines that a child can control. While dinosaurs is not typically a subject we recommend for younger children as a "science" topic (they can't conceptualize the abstract time/size relationships), this is an excellent high interest reading title.

Cat in the Hat is the host (and the narrator) who takes us on a fictional expedition to find dinosaur fossils. This includes a trip to the modern day Super Dino Museum, where animated dinosaur visuals are hidden on each page. Each page has developmentally appropriate content for both younger children as well as capable readers, making this a good all-purpose app. For example, hidden information cards from Thing One and Thing Two provide more facts such as "Ankylosaurus: This 30-foot-long dinosaur had an armor-covered body and a club tail it could swing from side to side. A well-placed blow with its tail could break the leg of a T-Rex!"

Note that there are 2 step links to Oceanhouse Media products on both the main menu and the last page.

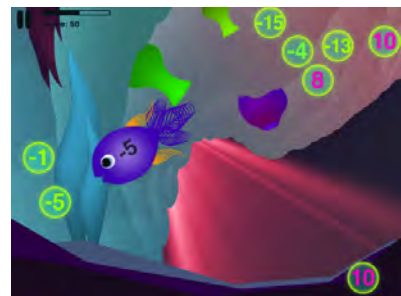
Details: Oceanhouse Media, www.oceanhousemedia.com. Price: \$4. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: reading, science, dinosaurs. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 2/22/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	10	75%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	N	
Design Features	4	
Good Value	8	



My love is like a prayer at night

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



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





Peek-a-Zoo

Here's another solid Duck Duck Moose app that is fun, for a while. The idea is to present younger children with a no-fail language experience, by presenting them with a narrated question such as "who is upside down." They then try to find the correct answer, from eight possible choices. There's a nice variety of questions and the names of different animals are used (e.g., alligator, cat, chicken, cow, dog, elephant, giraffe, hippo, lion, monkey, mouse, panda, penguin, pig, seal, skunk, walrus, and zebra, as well as an imaginary "squurple"). Children are also introduced to emotions such as smiling, surprised, crying, angry, and sad; actions such as winking, waving, yawning, eating, wagging his tail, and sleeping; positions of backwards and upside down; activities of listening or having a party; sounds such as meow and woof; and attire including wearing a hat, sunglasses, or bowtie. As children play, they can listen to jazz versions of nursery tales. Compared to previous Duck Duck Moose apps, this one loses its joy after 20 or so screens. While the content is there and the animals are fun, there's not enough surprise in the presentation. Still, this is a solid language experience, and a wonderful informal exploration of printed language. It would be good for preschool use.

Details: Duck Duck Moose Design, www.duckduckmoosedesign.com. Price: \$.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: language, logic, classification, language, vocabulary. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 11/16/2011. [WB]

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





PlayStation Vita (PSVita)

Clunky but capable Sony's new portable gaming system offers some exciting new ways to play games, and in some cases, learn. But there's a lot of drawbacks to consider.

Some designers, like those at Apple, like to take buttons away. Others, such as the people behind the \$250 PlayStation Vita (PSVita) added them on. There are more buttons -- 19 total, not counting two multi-touch surfaces and the accelerometers. By comparison, the 3DS has 16, the iPad has 5. As a result, the PSVita can be a frustrating experience for children, and sometimes for adults. Other observations:

- The large 5 inch diagonal front screen is clear and strikingly roomy compared to the PSP. The size, a full width of a sandwich, would be great for watching a movie. Ironically, however, with several games I reviewed, such EA's FIFA Soccer, the print is microscopic. It's as if the game were ported over from the PS3, without regard to the font size.

- This is the first multi-touch screen from Sony (so why all the buttons?). The surface on the back is also multi-touch, providing designers with some unique new "push up from the back" control options. In other words, the PSVita is making some interface history. So, for a game like ModNation Racers, you can mold the landscape with your fingers, pushing up from underneath to make mountains, or down on the the front screen to make valleys; a very cool new game play mechanic. This non-Apple innovation is nice.

- You'll need special cables and cards. There's just one standard port -- the audio jack. Everything else is non-standard. You need a Sony-format micro-SD card (+\$30), and the specialized power cable to plug into your computer.

- Yikes -- weak batteries! About on par with the 3DS, which also isn't so good. This is a serious problem, especially considering the battery can't be swapped.

- A clumsy browser, and a frustratingly complex Wi-Fi login process. If you think you're going to use the PSVita for such things as maps and YouTube, think again. The PSVita seems to be best for game playing.

- Yet another size and shape of jewelcase for libraries to store, and the smallest game cartridge in history. The PSVita jewelcase is 4" by 5" (compared to the square 5.25" Nintendo DS jewelcases). Inserting a game cartridge is not straightforward -- you have to unsnap a protective cover. It's as if Sony expected you to be playing the same game, for a long time.

- Please wait. I notice that loading times could be surprising long for a Flash-RAM based game. Chalk it up to Moore's Law I guess.

- Error messages only a programmer would love. When I tried to log into the Little Deviants' store, I got this "An error has occurred. (C1-2650-3)." A note to Sony -- These types of errors are scary to most people.

- Nickeled and dimed. The PSVita experience makes you feel like you're supposed to be buying something, signing up for a service, or upgrading to something better than what you already have. The PSVita comes already logged into the AT&T network for example, but only to get you to sign up for a free trial. Think of your \$250 as a down payment, for the chance to keep upgrading.

So, if you want to play games beyond Apple's app store, should you buy the \$170 Nintendo 3DS or this \$250 PSVita? Ideally you should buy both. For children, the DS still gives you the most bang for the buck in terms of hardware, and the 3DS, despite being a year old, still has sizzle. But if you're looking for a rich, all weekend game experience, and you don't mind pushing some buttons, the PSVita is worth considering despite all the glitches.

Details: Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc., www.us.playstation.com. Price: \$250 (\$300 for 3G). Ages: 3-up. Platform: Vita. Teaches/Purpose: a new handheld game system from Sony. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 6/7/2011. [WB]

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





PokéPark 2: Wonders Beyond

A cross between a Pokémon game and Animal Crossing (with a bit of "Carnival Games" tossed in), PokéPark 2: Wonders Beyond is fun, with plenty of opportunities for reading practice, and informal learning.

The game is easy to learn, with tutorials built in, although the pacing can be slow due to the fact that the frequent dialog sessions can't be skipped. You can play as one of four different Pokémon, including Pikachu, Oshawott, Snivy, and Tepig, as you make your way through PokéPark and try to save the missing Pokémon. Once you get to the Park (an exotic theme park) you can try your hand at different game attractions that can be played with up to four players using the Wii Remote. These include a shooting gallery, dancing, and flying through space in a race around the stars. As you explore, you can make friends with other Pokémon by playing games such as Chase or Hide and Seek. All in all, there's a lot to do and discover in this fun game, with no worrisome content. If you like Pokémon characters, you'll like this game.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Wii. Teaches/Purpose: logic, reading, fine motor coordination, language, memory, maps, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 2/23/2012. [WB]

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



ESRB Rating: Everyone, Cartoon Violence
Comic Mischief



Putt Putt Saves the Zoo (iPad)

He's back! Nearly 20 years after the first Putt Putt tile (1993) this iPad rendition of Putt Putt Saves the Zoo is just like you remembered it, with a great story line and good music.

This title has been rereleased several times over the years (this is the 16th Putt Putt title in our database). In 2008, it was sold at retail computers.

In case you missed it the first time around, this is a cartoonish scavenger hunt-style program that lets you drive Putt-Putt (a car) around the paths in three zoo regions (the jungle, the arctic and the grasslands) in search of six missing baby animals. As you explore, you find special items necessary to help the animals. For example, a rope found in an arctic snow bank must be taken into the jungle and lowered down a waterfall to rescue a trapped lion cub. Freeing a stranded hippo requires building a bridge of uniquely shaped icebergs and finding a shovel to clear away an avalanche. Unless the necessary special items are found, the animals remain lost and the zoo cannot open. Testers aged three and four became frustrated in their first few plays, and required adult assistance. Older children (and adults) loved the program.

Especially enjoyable are the multilevel activities found around the zoo. In Animal Tag, kids must pay attention to detail as they match special animals that pop up at random from the Savannah. Other activities include six different information stations offering interesting animal facts like "hippos eat 100 pounds of grass for five hours each night". There's also a water-slide maze game that's just for fun. The zoo program was first released in 1995, setting a new standard for excellence in interactive design. Today, this game still makes a welcome addition to any home library, although the graphics are bitmapped on the iPad. In addition, multi-touch gestures don't work. To move to the next screen, you have to touch arrows that were obviously made to be clicked on. All in all, this is a nice blast from the past, and it works on the iPad. Created by Nimbus games for Atari, who now owns Humungous.

Details: Atari, www.atari.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: logic, problem solving, music, memory. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 11/14/2011. [WB]

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





Puzzling Plates

Dry but efficient, this app turns the tectonic plates into a jigsaw puzzle that you can drag and drop into place. There are three types of puzzles; all hard, in part because the parts aren't shown in proportional size. Each consists of a timed challenge along with a bonus round.

In Level 1, you learn how tectonic plates fit together by moving them into position like a jigsaw puzzle. You must get it right on the first move or you lose points.

In Level 2, you will see where earthquakes and volcanoes form on the Earth's surface and explore the Earth's interior.

In Level 3, you first see how plate boundaries collide and split apart and then you move tectonic plates in different directions to find out what type of boundary is shown. The puzzles are dry and hints are vague. However, the app is effective in helping you visualize how the plates fit together. It is, after all, a giant jigsaw puzzle. Middle and high school earth science teachers, take note of this app.

Details: Tasa Graphic Arts, Inc. , www.tasagraphicarts.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 12-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: earth science, tectonic plates, geology. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.7 stars. Entry date: 12/22/2011. [WB]

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

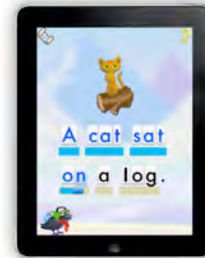


Reading Raven

Scripted and didactic, this iPad app provides step-by-step reading lessons designed to help young children learn to read. It features the Reading Raven companion, who guides children along as they encounter fly-eating frogs, caterpillars that turn into butterflies, circus acrobats, ball balancing seals, underwater sea creatures, snow monsters, and more. The phonics-based approach is designed to guide children as they learn to read, and to help them become both independent readers and capable spellers. Each lesson is self-paced so children gradually progress through a variety of reading sub-skills. Activities include: letter matching, tracing and recognition, as well as word matching (age 3+); vocabulary, word beginnings, word building, and word spotting (age 4+); reading aloud using voice recording; word tracing; and word groups (age 5+). The app features five lessons with hundreds of individual activities which can be individual activities in total. The activities can be customized to each child's age or reading level.

Details: Early Ascent, LLC, <http://readingraven.com/>. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 3-7. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, phonics. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.4 stars. Entry date: 2/15/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	7	68%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	6	
Design Features	6	
Good Value	7	



The Bippolo Seed and Other Lost Stories

Here's a rare collection of seven short stories written and illustrated by Dr. Seuss in the 1950s for Redbook magazine. It is being released along with the hardcover book from Random House.

This is the first time the stories have been published in book or digital form, and as a result, you notice that they lack some of the polish (some of the images are pencil sketches). Stories include The Bippolo Seed (the story of a mischievous, greedy cat who leads an innocent duck astray); The Bear, the Rabbit, and the Zinniga-Zanniga (the story of how a single eyelash saves a rabbit from an insecure bear), Gustav the Goldfish (a boy overfeeds his pet fish, causing it to outgrow its bowl), Tadd and Todd (about twins in search of their individuality), Steak for Supper (a Seussian creature follows a boy home hoping for a steak dinner), The Strange Shirt Spot (a boy can't seem to get dirt off of his shirt and everything else around him) and The Great Henry McBride (the story of a day-dreaming boy who fantasizes about his career choices). All the stories are narrated and employ Oceanhouse Media's excellent text/picture labeling, throughout, making this a strong title for early readers.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, www.oceanhousemedia.com. Price: \$6.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 10/12/2011. [WB]

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





Tick Bait's Universe

This is a power of 10 app, that lets you explore the really big and the extremely small.

You start with a view of a back yard, with a dirty dog named Tick Bait. You can zoom in or out by powers of 10. If you zoom out, you see views of the earth's atmosphere, then the Earth itself. From there it is out to the solar system's sun and planets, the Milky Way galaxy and beyond to the universe.

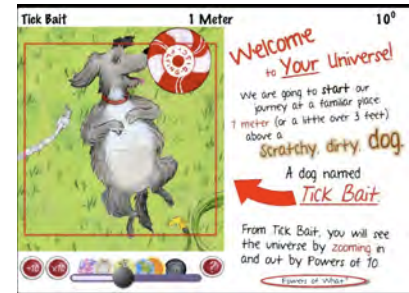
At any point, you can also start zooming in, back to the back yard, and then down into the ticks on the dog's skin, and down into the microscopic world to explore bacteria, viruses, DNA, atoms and protons.

Each screen contains facts about the current level, along with a multiple-choice question. For example, "True or False: The space shuttle flies above the Earth's atmosphere." or "Can humans live on Venus?"

The design and art is simple, but the app does a good job presenting an abstract concept; and the dog is a meaningful hook. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VbVaxG3PZw>

Details: You University Apps, www.youuapps.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: science, math, space, atoms. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 2/21/2012. [WB]

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



Toca House

This "app toy" (Toca Boca's approach to app design) takes place in a house where five zany friends live, one on each floor. You help them with their chores, by washing the floor (move the mop with your finger), ironing (move over a shirt to get rid of the wrinkles), sorting the trash (by color), mowing the lawn, and so on. According to Chris Crowell, "Toca House showed up this morning on the iPod Touch, so I handed it to the first child in line as we waited to enter the class. It took her a few minutes to figure out the details of how to play (just as a child uses trial and error to build with blocks) but she never went for the home button. Later in the morning one of my ESL students had some time exploring the app and she gave it a thumbs up as well. A male student I handed it to stayed on the laundry floor the longest. He got a kick out of ironing the clothes. Overall, from one morning with it in my kindergarten class, Toca Boca seems to have another hit. The artwork is very pleasing and children are extremely receptive to all facets of the app." This won't go down as a Toca classic. The random nature of the activities diminishes the level of child control, but still, there's a lot to like about this app, making it well worth the download.

Details: Toca Boca, <http://tocaboca.com/>. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone Universal. Teaches/Purpose: sorting, logic, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 2/22/2012. [WB]

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



Touch My Katamari

Katamari comes to the touch screen for the first time, due to the new capabilities of the PlayStation Vita. The idea is the same -- roll a sticky ball around a course, collecting items and growing more powerful, in order to unlock the next levels. You have your choice of using either the Vita touch screen controls or dual analog sticks in conjunction with the rear touch pad to squeeze, stretch and roll your Katamari ball. There is a colorful storyline -- you play as the King of All Cosmos' son, the prince, and will travel to the four corners of the earth to complete your missions and restore Katamari order. Along the way, you can collect candy and use as money to buy items for the King, get extra music tracks and unlock new game modes including the King's Bonus Mission. The PSVita's "near" virtual communication system lets you exchange information with other players and receive "Buddy Requests".

We've played Katamari on different platforms over the years, and found this one to be interesting. However, the game play is slowed by excessive instructions and complexity. There are simply too many options. If you have the time to figure them out, you'll enjoy this game, otherwise pass. See a sample of the game play footage here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLgr1O5uR5k>

Details: Namco Bandai Games America Inc., www.namcobandaigames.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Vita. Teaches/Purpose: logic, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 2/16/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	5	78%
Educational	N	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	9	

ESRB Rating: Everyone 10+, Comic Mischief, Fantasy Violence, Suggestive Themes





Ultimate Marvel vs. Capcom 3

Full of action-packed fighting, this game earns every bit of its Teen rating for action-packed bloody brawls. You first choose one of 48 Marvel and Capcom heroes and villains, including 12 new selections. You can fight as Capcom's Strider for example, or Marvel's Ghost Rider and Hawkeye. The fighting is leveled and there are eight stages that range in difficulty, giving experienced players something to look forward to. New features include the fan-requested Spectator mode during the online experience.

According to Chris Dunn (CTR Intern), this is the sort of game that is fairly easy to pick up and play, but takes a lot of skill to master. The "teams" system is an interesting new take on the fighting game genre. The game is colorful, dynamic, all around fun to look at.

Details: Capcom Entertainment, Inc., www.capcom.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 13-up. Platform: Xbox 360, Vita. Teaches/Purpose: fighting, strategy. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 11/23/2011. [WB]

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

85%

ESRB Rating: Teen, Violence, Partial Nudity, Suggestive Themes, Mild Language



Van Gogh and the Sunflowers!

Based on the book by Laurence Anholdt, this app layers two types of interactive activities onto the pages, along with some scaffolding features (narrated text, and touch-and-hear words). The end result is a useful way to help children explore the work of one of the world's most famous painters -- Vincent Van Gogh.

There are 30 screens, plus a 360 degree art gallery, where you can explore the ten photos featured in the book. And this, of course, includes those famous 15 sunflowers.

As a part of your mainstream app library there are several design weaknesses to note. Page turning is clumsy on some pages (you touch to explore an item, but accidentally flip back a page), and testers noted the music, which consists mostly of somber saxophone etudes, can grow repetitive. While there is an option to mute the sound, this also turns off the excellent narration.

The two activities also have quirks. One asks you to rebuild the complex machinery of the pop-up book mechanism. This is a timed challenge, and the parts can be frustratingly small, and the mechanics are removed from reality. The most relevant are the coloring activities, which let you color in key parts of the story. We liked how you can reset the coloring image, showing Van Gogh's original illustration. But you lose your work. And if you zoom in too close, the images become bit mapped.

This app fills a gap for art education. If you currently teach art and Van Gogh's style of painting is on your lesson plans, definitely download this app. You won't find biographical information about Van Gogh, but you will walk away with an introduction to his paintings.

Details: Aurnyn, Inc., <http://aurnyn.com/>. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: art, art history (Van Gogh), reading, word recognition. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 11/16/2011. [WB]

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

78%





Future Releases & Updates

MARCH 2012

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.

Active Life: Magical Carnival

This latest game in the Active Life series (note that the Active Life Mat controller is required and sold separately, and that DDR mats are not compatible), this two-player game lets you explore five carnival attractions. These include a haunted house, a circus tent, a pirate ship, a parade and a fantasy zone.

Each areas contains whole-body activities that use the mat peripheral, as follows: Circus - tame lions, walk the tightrope; Haunted House - capture ghosts; Pirate Ship - steer the ship, find lost treasure; Parade - carnival games including hammer challenge and frog hop; and Fantasy - learn magic and save the princess.

The Party at the Park mode supports up to 10 players in cooperative or competitive challenges, with multiple difficulty levels. There is also a Free Play mode for access to individual attractions, a four player Dream Attraction mode, and a two-player Let's Go Out mode.

All in all, this is a nice expansion to the Active Life series. Just make sure you have the specialized controller mat.

Details: Namco Bandai Games America Inc., www.namcobandaigames.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Wii. Teaches/Purpose: social play, gross motor skills. Entry date: 11/15/2011.



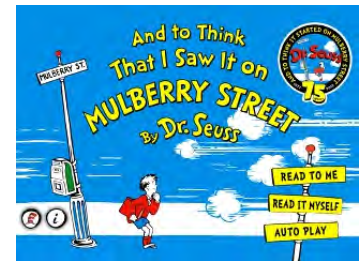
And to Think That I Saw It on Mulberry Street

Here's yet another Oceanhouse Media Dr. Seuss title. But from a Dr. Seuss history perspective, this is noteworthy, not so much for the design, but because this was Theodor Seuss Geisel's first published children's book. According to Oceanhouse Media (the publisher of this app), the manuscript was rejected by 27 publishing houses for being too fantasy based and different (the original title of this book was "A Story That No One Can Beat").

In the story, a boy named Marco walks to school along Mulberry Street looking for interesting sights to share with his dad. When he doesn't find anything exciting, he envisions more exciting things. For example, instead of a horse and wagon he imagines a zebra and charioteer, then an elephant with a sleigh.

As with other ombooks, there are three modes: Read to Me lets you listen to the narrated story with words highlighted as they are read; Read it Myself lets you read the book in its traditional form; and Auto Play plays like a movie. Features include excellent text/picture association (great for beginning readers), quality narration, background audio for each scene, and pages that pan & zoom. While the story isn't our favorite, the features are certainly noteworthy.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, www.oceanhousemedia.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Entry date: 1/26/2012.



Appfinity AppDrive

Compatible with iPhone 4, 3Gs and iPod Touch 4th Generation (with Android coming), Appfinity AppDrive turns your device into a steering wheel for either flying or driving. Your phone's built in motion detection abilities are tapped (by way of the the gyros) so the the app can simulate turning. Four control buttons pass information to the screen. Comes with the app 2XL ATV Offroad.

Details: Spin Master Ltd., www.spinmaster.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad, Android, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: driving. Entry date: 3/1/2012.





Appfinity Appfishing

Compatible with iPhone 4, 3Gs and iPod Touch 4th Generation (with Android coming), Appfinity Appfishing turns your device into a fishing rod. Your phone's built in motion detection abilities are tapped (the gyros) so the the app can simulate casting and jigging. For \$20, you get one Appfinity Appfishing game. The app is a free download.

Details: Spin Master Ltd., www.spinmaster.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad, Android, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: fishing. Entry date: 3/1/2012.

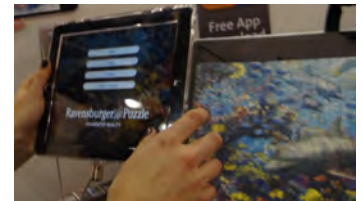


AR Puzzle (app)

Discover hidden surprises lurking within one of four special 1000 piece Ravensburger jigsaw puzzles, by pointing your iPhone, iTouch or iPad's camera at the completed scene.

Once the app matches the image, it can trigger animated features. It might turn a daytime image of Paris into a 360 degree night view, so you can look around, touching landmarks to pull up historical facts. In the puzzle called "Colorful Underwater World", you'll see fish swimming around. The app works with select 1,000 piece puzzles and will be available starting "Spring 2012." Puzzles will include Above the Roofs of Paris; Colorful Underwater World, African Animals and Lofoten, Norway.

Details: Ravensburger Digital, . Price: \$free, puzzles \$20. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: facts about puzzles . Entry date: 3/6/2012.



Child Pad

Weighing in at just \$130, here's yet another 7 inch Android tablet for kids: the Archos Child Pad (www.archos.com). Powered by Android 4.0, the tablet specs are familiar: a 1GHz processor, 1 GB of RAM and a special app store powered by AppsLib, which filters apps down to 14 categories, with "10,000 games, entertainment, communication, multimedia, books, comics, sports and more." The device comes with 28 kids' apps pre-loaded. On the list: Angry Birds, Pig Rush and Flight Frenzy.

ARCHOS has also designed the Child Pad to comply with both CIPA and COPPA regulations. The web browsing experience is filtered by Editions Profil's "Mobile Parental Filter." Coming the end of this month.

Details: Archos, www.archos.com. Price: \$130. Ages: 3-6. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: An Android Tablet for Children. Entry date: 3/5/2012.



Codee

Trying to explain DNA to junior just got a little bit easier, thanks to Codee, a new type of block puzzle coming this fall from Techno-Source (www.technosourceusa.com).

Each \$8 kit comes with a foot-long strand of 64 hinged blocks. Each block is marked with a set of codes that can be aligned with the next block in the series. The key to making one of the six characters, such as a scorpion, is to follow a printed set of codes, one-at-a-time.

According to Techno-Source, Codee was inspired from a project by Saul Griffith and Jonathan Bachrach while they were at MIT (see Otherlab for their current work). Codee has no business connection with MIT. In addition, it should be noted that while conceptually similar to DNA, this toy is not the real deal. Here's how it works.

The blocks are numbered -- one through 64, and each has letters, A through J on the sides. A third set of symbols (>), (+), (-) or (·) tell you when to twist or rotate. So a sample bit of code might look like 1 + E, 2 > A. If you follow the instructions, needlepoint-style, your four inch plastic creature will slowly take shape. Or you can just let your mind wander and create a genetic mutation.

Details: Techno Source, www.technosourceusa.com. Price: \$8. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: math, logic, patterns, science, DNA. Entry date: 2/27/2012.





Disney Pix

Disney Pix is a free app that works with the 7 MP 30-pin Disney AppClix Digital camera on the iPad (see the review). Children can capture and customize photos and add Disney-themed frames and stickers to their photos. It is also possible to type and color over photos, which are saved to the iPad's regular photo library. The app was developed by Disney and Vivitar. The AppClix camera was made by Saker and is sold separately for \$60. See also Disney AppClix Digital Camera.

Details: Disney Consumer Products, www.disney.com. Price: \$free app/\$60 AppClix. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: art, creativity. Entry date: 2/29/2012.

Foam Fighters

Part of the APPgear line from WowWee, Foam Fighters is one of the most innovative new apps/toy combinations released this year. How it works: The Foam Fighter kit comes with a small suction cup holder that you attach to your iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch or Android device, right under the camera. The camera picks up the wing pattern of the particular plane you're flying, and displays it on the screen. Each airplane will trigger a unique WWII battle scenario, as long as it is lined up so the camera can see it. After it is configured correctly, the camera images (e.g., the room around you) are pulled into the flying. WowWee calls this "Amplified Reality." Once the game starts, the plane "flies" and "takes damage." There are several plane models that you can purchase to collect, and yes, they really fly as a glider.

Other titles in the AppGear line include ZombieBurbz, Elite Command AR (\$20), Mysterious Raygun (\$10), Akodomon (\$10) and Alien Jailbreak (\$10). Each comes with a toy that is required to unlock the gameplay within the free app. See the video <http://youtu.be/f5FBD5r8III>.

Details: WowWee USA, Inc., www.wowwee.com. Price: \$10. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad, Android. Teaches/Purpose: flying, gross motor control, strategy, timing. Entry date: 2/15/2012.

Glow Crazy Distance Doodler

Glow Crazy comes in two parts. The main element is a laser flashlight with LEDs that can be pointed at the second part -- light sensitive sheets of fabric.

In a dark room, children can "draw" with the light, to create designs or light shows. The special Glow Cling canvases can work from distances up to 15 feet. Children can use stencil sheets to create glow scenes, and make silhouettes using their hands, toys, or even their friends (hold your hand to the fabric, flash the light, and you'll see your hand's "shadow.") The focused laser beam makes it easy to doodle from a distance and a wide LED beam can be used for the silhouettes. A regular flashlight works, also. The marks fade quickly, and can be redrawn, forever. The Glow Clings won't harm walls, and react to any form of light. One kit includes laser Dual-Action Magic Lightwand, 4 Super Glow Clings, 4 Crazy Color Glow Clings, 4 stencil sheets and glue squares. The wand requires 2 AAA batteries (not included).

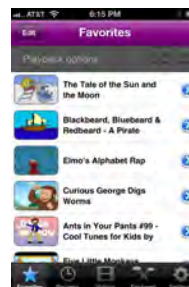
Details: Techno Source, www.technosourceusa.com. Price: \$25. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: art, creativity. Entry date: 2/27/2012.

Gube

This universal iOS app was designed to provide parents and children with a catalog of pre-screened, safe and educational YouTube videos, a claim that we did not check.

The videos can be filtered by age (infant, toddler, pre-school, and grade school), added to a favorites list, and automatically re-played with the continuous play function. Videos are added bi-weekly and based on user suggestions through the app and on the company's Facebook page. If you want a video added to the app, you can post in on Shacked's wall and it will then be screened and added.

Details: Shacked, <http://shackedapps.com/>. Price: \$3.99. Ages: NA. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: parent and teacher utility. Entry date: 2/22/2012.





Highlights Buzz Blast (and others)

Here's the latest news from Discovery Bay Games as of February 2012. Most of the games are free, but require the extra hardware sold for \$20

Duo Plink (formerly called the Duo) works with the iPad to let multiple players answer questions by placing tokens on the Duo Plink device. The "Plink" rotates and drops the winning tokens into the bank. See Yoomi for Duo Plink, already reviewed. Other apps include: Artifact or Fiction - trivia about historic exhibits and Smithsonian artifacts, for school-aged kids; Highlights Memory Mix-up - a memory game, where players look at a silly picture, then answer questions about what they saw. This game is tailored to young players—some reading required; and What on Earth? - players guess between two possible answers in this trivia game about natural history and world wonders. For all ages—reading required. (Free, additional content packs \$1.99 each).

Discovery Bay Game's newer iPad peripheral is a set of IR buzzers that players can hold in their hands, called Duo Pop. Games include: Highlights Hidden Pictures Countdown - compete to find the hidden objects in the picture by waiting for a spotlight to hover over an item before they can pop in to win. Free, additional puzzle packs \$1.99 each; Guesstimation - a trivia game where every answer is a number. You don't have to know the exact answer—close enough wins, and reading is required. (Free, additional content packs cost \$2.99 each); Swoop - players compete with each other to build words on a crossword style grid. (Free); Saturday Night Live - players form teams and take turns answering trivia questions as fast as they can to earn the most points. (Free, additional content packs \$1.99 each); Highlights Buzz Blast - a hot-potato style game where reading is required. Players complete one of four challenges (Tongue Twister, Brain Play, Silly Sentences, or Check—Double Check) before popping in and passing play to the next player. (Free, additional content packs \$1.99 each); In the Know - pop-culture trivia game designed for game-night entertainment. Questions consist of a series of hints leading to the correct answer. Players form teams and compete to pop in their answer first for the most points. (Free, additional content packs \$1.99 each).

The Atari Arcade - Duo Powered game lets you connect your iPad to Atari Arcade, download Atari's Greatest Hits for Duo, and use the joystick and buttons to play arcade favorites. The app features 100 arcade classics including Missile Command, Asteroids, Centipede, and Lunar Lander (\$9.99).

Details: Discovery Bay Games, Inc., www.discoverybaygames.com. Price: \$20, apps are \$2. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: memory, timing. Entry date: 2/27/2012.

Kurio (Android Tablet)

This is a full-featured seven inch Android tablet with a suite of parental controls designed to let you create customized profiles for each family member. You can choose to turn off specific apps or Internet access, plus you can pre-load specific web sites if you like. The management features include a marketplace for children's apps. Ports include a mini-SD slot, HDMI out, USB and a headphone jack.

Kurio comes in three sizes -- 7 inch (\$200), 8 inch (\$250) and 10 inch (\$350). Peripherals include headphones, and a car holder is designed to convert the tablet into a mobile media center that attaches to the back of a seat rest. Kurio was made in France by Kidz Delight. See the CTR preview video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=coov40IJ200>

Details: Techno Source, www.technosourceusa.com. Price: \$199.99. Ages: 4-12. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: an android tablet for children. Entry date: 3/4/2012.

LexiBook Tablet

This is a \$150 seven inch Android tablet for children. It comes with parental controls, and apps that include a "school curriculum for ages 6-12." Ports include a headphone jack, HDMI out, a micro SD card and a peripheral port that can work with an external keyboard.

Other features include a camera with morphing software, and access to a special app store called the "Lexibook Market" with "3,700 applications." According the spec sheet provided at Toy Fair (Feb 2012) "batteries last for 20 hours." If so, this is significantly longer than competitors. See the CTR video at <http://youtu.be/d1Lhd3WciFM>. Lexibook is an established French company.

Details: Lexibook, <http://group.lexibook.com>. Price: \$150. Ages: 6-12. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: An android tablet for children. Entry date: 2/17/2012.





Mario Party 9

Mario Party 9 -- one of the original "party games" (great for a small group of up to four players, in the same room, simultaneously) contains 80 minigames that include stages and boss battles. The game launches on March 11. A "boss" (a bad guy) crashes the party and challenge players to compete and defeat a common enemy. You work with up to four other players to try to defeat the boss together collecting Mini Stars. For the first time players ride across stages together in special vehicles, taking turns as the driver by hitting Dice Blocks to move the party forward. The vehicles streamline game play and keep everyone involved in the action. Created for Nintendo by NDCUBE Co., Ltd. See <http://marioparty9.nintendo.com>.

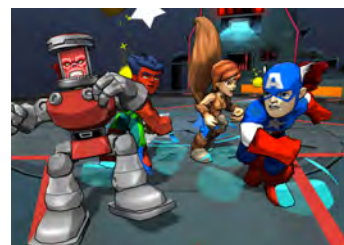


Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Wii. Teaches/Purpose: socialization, problem solving. Entry date: 2/29/2012.

Marvel Super Hero Squad: Comic Combat uDraw

Using the uDraw GameTablet (sold separately) stylus, you can become a Marvel artist and command your favorite Super Heroes including Captain America, Thor, Iron Man, Wolverine, and the Hulk.

For the first time in a video game, Squirrel Girl joins the fight. The game relies primarily on movement-based commands using the uDraw GameTablet. For example, you can draw a curved line to indicate the trajectory of Captain America's shield, or a circle to drop a boulder into the environment. You can also pinch with your fingers to create a zipper rift that sucks enemies into an alternate reality.



Content includes six comic book issues set all around Super Hero City. The title art has a comic book feel, with a cell-shaded art style and a range of varied environments around Super Hero City, including The Helicarrier, Baxter Building, The Vault and Sanctum Sanctorum; and progression and success in battle that allows players to earn hero points and unlock new costumes, ink meter upgrades, etc. Developed by Griptonite. Prices are \$40 for the Xbox 360 and PS3 versions, and \$30 for the Wii version.

Details: THQ, Inc., www.thq.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Wii. Teaches/Purpose: art, creativity. Entry date: 11/17/2011.

Master Moves Mickey

Coming in August, Master Moves Mickey knows 15 crazy dances. You squeeze his nose to start a dance. A set of spinning legs give him the ability to "break dance" and a hinged waist lets him do a handstand. Content includes 15 dance moves, 8 original songs and lots of wisecracks. Requires 6 "AA" batteries, 3 in each leg.

Details: Fisher-Price, www.fisher-price.com. Price: \$70. Ages: 2-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: dancing, music. Entry date: 2/13/2012.





Mechatars

Mechatars are robots with interesting wobbly wheels that walk/roll, and can be driven around with a infra-red remote control. They use 4 AAA batteries each, not counting the remote batteries.

Mechatars attempt to combine two play patterns -- real and virtual. The real world, called Earth, lets you drive your robots around and play games like tag. Online is called the Mechaverse, located at www.mechatars.com. To connect the toy with the virtual, you need to connect the robot to your Mac or Windows computer with the included USB cable. This also requires a software download and install. There are three versions of the robots - Alpha, Wrex, and Kodar - with different behavior sets.

Access to the online world is free. You can trade experience points by using a USB cable to plug into your Mac or Windows computer, creating an evolving and personalized robot. Our testers were not impressed with the driving abilities of these vehicles, calling them "battery burners." Compared to other driving toys, Mechatars are slow and hard to steer. The overall idea -- sort of like chicken fights with robotic cars, is fun. But technically there are some issues with this toy, so proceed with caution, and a lot of fresh AAA batteries.

Details: Bossa Nova Robotics, www.bnrobotics.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: steering, remote control robots. Entry date: 11/17/2011.



MEEP! Tablet

MEEP! (\$150, Oregon Scientific) is a cartridge-free, Wi-Fi enabled Android tablet that comes with its own app store. The idea is to give children some power, without access to worrisome content. In creating this tablet, Oregon Scientific seems to be following a familiar path. Five other similar tablets are either on the market or they have been announced. See, for example Nabi.

The modified operating system attempts to make it easy for a child to get to their music, movies, e-books, and apps. Features include a 7-inch color touch screen, Wi-Fi, an SD card slot, motion sensing, HDMI and parental controls that are adjusted remotely. Coming "Fall 2012." CTR video <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snmf2RiguW8>.

Details: Oregon Scientific, www.oregonscientific.com. Price: \$150. Ages: 6-9. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: an Android tablet for children. Entry date: 2/20/2012.



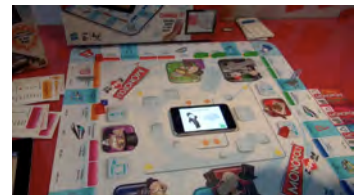
Monopoly zAPPed

Place your iPad or iPhone in the middle of this new type of Monopoly board, and let it take care of the menial tasks, such as rolling the dice or banking.

In the traditional game, if you land on Chance, it used to be that you picked a random instruction card. Now, you might play a hot potato type of game to learn what you need to do. When you land in jail, you can get out by trying your luck at a game that lets you "break" out of jail, by catapulting Mr. Monopoly over a fence and into a getaway car.

To buy property or pay the rent, you use the new touch banking cards that use conductive ink that extends your finger into the iPad. By aligning the bottom of the card with the screen glass, you can add or subtract money. The free App, which must be downloaded and installed, also has a memory, keeping track of the up to 20 players, including how many times you've played and how many times you've won. Content includes 20 mini-games in all. The app was produced by the French company Volumique for Hasbro. Coming June 2012. See also Battleship zAPPed (September 2012) and The Game of Life.

Details: Hasbro, Inc., www.hasbro.com. Price: \$30.00. Ages: 9-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: business, math, logic. Entry date: 2/17/2012.





Order Up!! To Go

This is a free mobile version of the Wii game, updated for touch-screen devices. Your mission is to prepare each dish to perfection while managing your time and resources as you learn about the business side of running a restaurant. Developed by SuperVillain Studios.

Details: Chillingo Ltd., www.chillingo.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: timing, business, cooking, food. Entry date: 1/23/2012.



Penguins of Madagascar, The: Dr. Blowhole Returns - Again!

Fun and fast paced, this game features Dr. Blowhole, the diabolical dolphin, who has a new plan for world domination. It's up to you to assemble Team Penguin for a super stealth mission to stop him and his lobster minions.

Content includes 12 levels over three brand new episodes, which culminate in an epic confrontation with Dr. Blowhole in his underground lair. You must navigate hazards, overcome obstacles and rescue the penguins' friends as you try to save the world. The game also features minigames including Ninja Knowck-Down, Mort Bowling, and a dance-off with King Julien. Developed by Griptonite. Prices are \$50 for Xbox 360 Kinect, \$40 for PS3, and \$30 for the Wii and DS/DSi versions.

Details: THQ, Inc., www.thq.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Xbox Kinect, Wii, PlayStation 3, Nintendo DS, Nintendo DSi. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Entry date: 10/13/2011.



SpellShot zAPPed

Part of Hasbro's new zAAPed line of iPad/iPhone toy products, SpellShot is in ways like an elemental version of "Magic: the Gathering." After you download the free app, you put the game pieces on your screen (capacitive sensors tell the iPad information about the piece). This is a turn-based game. You then select spells to cast on your opponent. The app download is free; the toy parts cost \$18.

Details: Hasbro, Inc., www.hasbro.com. Price: \$18. Ages: 10-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: logic, strategy. Entry date: 3/5/2012.



Switch & Go Dinos

This combination toy transforms from a dinosaur to a vehicle. Each toy features an LCD screen for customized animation, both dinosaur and vehicle sound effects, and dinosaur facts. Toys can also be personalized by selecting the animated dinosaur eyes in dinosaur form and the driver faces in vehicle form. There are seven varieties, including Brok the Brachiosaurus, Span the Spinosaurus, Attila the Ankylosaurus, Sliver the T-Rex, T-Don the Pteranodon, Tonn the Stegosaurus, and Horns the Triceratop. Each has a different price, and they are meant to work together. For example, the largest dinosaur, called Brok the Brochiosaurus (\$50) turns into a car carrier truck, which can hold some of the smaller dino/vehicles. The idea here is to merge two play patterns -- cars and dinosaurs (and fighting). While the amount of imagination involved is debatable, we can attest to the fact that there is a lot of fine motor coordination involved when making the transformation. When in dinosaur mode, the action play buttons also deliver dinosaur facts.

Details: VTech Electronics North America, www.vtechkids.com. Price: \$16. Ages: 3-8. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: pretend play (according to VTech), dinosaur facts, fine motor coordination. Entry date: 2/16/2012.





TableTots

Designed for a teacher who is working individually with a child, this app lets you turn your iPad into a flannel board, where stickers can be freely moved around.

Content includes 200 letters, numbers and objects designed to support spelling, counting, math and classification and 12 table layouts in different colors. Because it is completely open ended, you could use it to see if a child can sort by one attribute (e.g., "can you move all the red objects to one part of the screen, and the blue objects to the other?"). Or you could use the letter blocks to spell words. The library contains the numerals 0 to 100; all 26 letters in both lower and upper case; 26 common "things" to represent letters from A to Z; a decimal point and all of the operators they need to add, subtract, multiply, divide and understand concepts such as less than and more than; dollar and cent symbols for teaching financial lessons; 16 common shapes, each available in your choice of 8 colors; basic American coins from the penny to the quarter; 28 dominoes for counting practice; base-10 blocks representing 1, 10, 100 and 1000; 20 Speed Sets that allow you to quickly place multiple letters, numbers and objects on the table; and 200 sounds, including every letter (by name and sound), all the numbers from 0 to 100, and an object for every letter in the alphabet. There are no structured activities.

Details: Spinlight Studio, <http://spinlight.com/>. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: classification, working. Entry date: 10/19/2011.



The Game of Life zAPPed

This version of the Game of Life (there are many available) pulls in elements of network TV into a board game. As you move around the board, you can watch clips from America's Funniest Home Videos, to match each stage of life. The videos (over 125) include such things as a funny golf cart wipe-out that is integrated into a legal situation. There are also mini-games to keep the players engaged when it isn't their turn.

Details: Hasbro, Inc., www.hasbro.com. Price: \$25. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad only. Teaches/Purpose: strategy, reading, logic. Entry date: 3/5/2012.





XO-3

One Laptop Per Child is back only this time, minus the laptop. The lime-green XO-3 is a solid 8" multi-touch tablet. It represents a lifeline, or perhaps a life preserver, for Nicholas Negroponte's famous OLPC (www.laptop.org) movement (aka the \$100 laptop). Besides the XO-3 tablet, two older XO models, the XO-1.5 and the XO-1.75, have been upgraded, although the familiar green clamshell exteriors remain.

Back in 2005 when Negroponte first pitched his OLPC idea, laptops were in vogue, as was the idea of using them as a vehicle for delivering digital content to rest of the world. But Moore's law intervened. Cheap, mainstream netbooks, iPods and mobile phones offered other routes to the web, and the actual cost of the \$100 laptop was closer to \$200. Critics, including me, chastised the clumsy membrane keyboard and unconventional operating system.

The XO-3 appears to have fixed most of these problems, although the price has yet to be defined, because it is tied to the quantity ordered.

Designed with Marvell Technology Group's <http://bit.ly/yAPIIo> 1 GHz Armada processor, the tablet is not only durable, but it has a slippery, responsive multi-touch screen that can run on just 2 watts of power. That's less than an iPad by approximately two-third, according to Edward McNierney, OLPC's Chief Technology Officer. McNierney gave me a guided tour of a nearly complete prototype, which I recorded <http://youtu.be/Bk5Q4HwJ0c0>. Here are some key points.

DURABLE. While it has much more heft than an iPad, the XO-3 has a smaller form and is easier to hold. The rounded rubbery edges provide impact protection, and a cover seals the ports against dirt when tossed in a hand bag.

SPEEDY. Programs loaded quickly from the 4 GB of Flash ROM, and the multi-touch screen felt crisp and responsive, easily on par with a typical Android tablet for children. So far, so good.

EQUIPPED. Adding to its versatility, the XO-3 has accelerometers for tilt sensing, Wi-Fi, two cameras (front and back), a microphone, an ambient light sensor, a headphone & microphone jack, a mini-USB port, and a full sized thumb-drive-friendly USB port.

OPEN SOURCE. The XO-3 model I tried was running Linux (Fedora Linux, to be exact) with Sugar (www.sugarlabs.org <<http://www.sugarlabs.org>>) over that. If you want to make your own app, you use the programming language Python <http://python.org/> and you can download free apps from <http://wiki.laptop.org>. According to McNierney, "we're offering Android as an option, but it's an either/or situation. You can be running Sugar or Android, but not both at once."

WORKS ON THE GRID, OR OFF. If Tom Hanks had an XO-3 during the movie *Cast Away*, he could have converted sunshine into computing power using the special lid lined with solar cells, that doubles as an extra 4 watt battery. So 10 minutes of sunshine equals 20 minutes of operation time, a feature I couldn't try. For faster charging, there's a crank charger, or an AC adapter. For areas with no Wi-Fi, the tablet can make it's own mesh network providing there are enough tablets within range.

NO ANGRY BIRDS. The XO-3's unconventional screen size (4:3) and preferred Linux/Sugar-based operating system may be great for programming in languages like MIT's Scratch or Python. But young programmers won't be able to take their project to the big show (iTunes), and Android will only be an option if their country decides it wants that configuration.

YOU CAN'T HAVE ONE. The XO-3 won't be manufactured until OLPC gets enough orders to start production which is key to keeping the cost low. Even then you won't find it stores. You'd have to be a child in a country with a government who has invested in a large number of the machines, and the tablet you'd get would be configured to your specific power and language requirements. And chances are, that would not include Angry Birds.

Details: One Laptop Per Child Foundation, www.laptop.org. Price: \$180. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Sugar. Teaches/Purpose: a laptop for developing countries. Entry date: 1/8/2012.

