



## —eBook Libraries—

### *Booksy, FarFaria, Ruckus Reader, Storia & More*

On the cover: FarFaria, one of eBook libraries reviewed on page 5.

#### Children's Technology Review

May 2012

Vol. 20, No 5, Issue 146

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





## Low Ratings & Sad Faces... But It Has To Be Done

We're always sorry to give any product a less-than-glowing-review, but like a doctor that tells you need to loose a few pounds, our job can't involve hurt feelings. Will our rating of a product change? Not unless the product does, and that leads our readers to a question we think about a lot. "How can a product earn five stars?" We feel that a valid reviewer should be able to provide a clear answer, especially when serving up a less-than-favorable review. In an effort to bring transparency and fairness to our review process, we've turned on our camera and recorded two of the testing sessions for two important products in this issue. The first is **Elmo's Birthday Bash** on page 5 It isn't such a bad app (it earned a 4.1 star rating), but it could be much better. See if you agree at <http://youtu.be/l135P7QHZU>. The second, the **Hatch iStartSmart** (page 7) system was hard to review because it involved both hardware and software. You can see what we saw as strengths and weaknesses here <http://youtu.be/m8nDZmZQIWA>. We're quick to remind our readers and disgruntled publishers that we're not the only source of reviews, and our ratings have a constructivist slant. We understand that not everyone views the world in this way which is why we have to fully disclose our evaluation process.



## Tablet-Based eBook Libraries with Funny Names

We're all familiar with the process of buying eBooks on iTunes or Amazon.com. In the past month, however, we've notice a dramatic increase in the number of tablet based book collections that specifically target children. Each uses the same script: download a free app, try some samples, and then pay up with an in-app sale. Which is best? If you study the ratings, you'll see that while each has specific strengths and weaknesses, Scholastic's *Storia* comes out on top.

## Robots

Since the days of "Lost in Space" and R2D2 Robots have captured our imaginations, which is why we've done this month's LittleClickers on the topic.



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# Sites and videos about

## ROBOTS

Even before there was electricity, there were robots. Want proof? Go to <http://bit.ly/KIs008> where you can learn about a famous robot made by Leonardo da Vinci. Here are some more links and videos about these amazing inventions.

### 1. Does the army use robots? If so, how?

It sure does! Take for example the Warrior, a tiny tank-like robot used in Japan during the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant disaster. About the size of a large dog, the small tank could go inside areas that could kill a person. See [http://www.irobot.com/us/cool\\_stuff/iRobot\\_DNA.aspx](http://www.irobot.com/us/cool_stuff/iRobot_DNA.aspx)



### 2. T/F Could a robot weed your garden?

At a company called Yanko Design, they think so. They imagine, and try to design robots for everyday jobs. For example, the Botan could pull weeds, trim the grass, and vacuum up your leaves <http://bit.ly/mk771>. If they only could make one to do your homework!



### 3. Explain: What do robots have in common with lizards?

A lot, at least at UC Berkeley <http://bit.ly/xX3JGq> where they watch reptiles jump in slow motion to figure how robots can move.



### 4. Can a Robot Play Basketball?

You bet. At the year's First Robotics Competition ([www.usfirst.org/](http://www.usfirst.org/)) teams will compete to see who can build a robot that can make the most baskets. <http://youtu.be/nOXsdhZZSdM>



### 5. What comic book character inspired the Honda Asimo robot?

At <http://bit.ly/IUcu3Q> you can learn the story of Masato Hirose, who was given the job of his dreams -- to design a robot based on Astro Boy. Did he succeed? Perhaps. You can find out by taking the controls of an Asimo, at <http://bit.ly/IFeJu7>



River Net Computers in Frenchtown New Jersey



**Application: Make a Pretend Robot** You want a robot but can't afford one. Why not make a cool robot creation made from old electrical parts? If you have an old computer laying around, turn the keyboard into a mouth, like they did at River Net Computers in Frenchtown NJ (right). Mix in some nuts and bolts and some parts from your hardware store, and you have a life-like robot. It is easy to find ideas. See, for example <http://machineslikeus.com/subject/robotics>. For extra credit, leave some room in your robot's head for a walkie talkie, cell phone or baby monitor, so you can supply the voice from a distance.



## LittleClickers YouTube Playlist: Robots

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLC009918FB6C5E997>



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**COMPUTER EXPLORERS**

Thanks to Deborah Ricard, who is a Technology Instructor for **Computer Explorers** at [www.computerexplorers.com](http://www.computerexplorers.com) for this month's topic. The web-based (html) version of this page is at <http://www.littleclickers.com> with live links, plus a place to report any errors. Note that CTR and COMPUTER EXPLORERS do not have commercial interests in the sites listed on this page. Librarians and teachers are permitted to copy this page for non-profit use. To suggest a future topic or to report a bad link, please contact the editor, Warren Buckleitner [WB] [warren@childrenstech.com](mailto:warren@childrenstech.com), or call 908-284-0404 (9 - 3 PM, EST).





# Feature Reviews

MAY 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.*

## Arcade Stereo Headphone

Durable but quirky, these headphones feature a compact, adjustable headband and soft ear cushions that greatly reduce outside sound. They come with a noise filter called Automatic Volume Reduction (AVR) technology which, according to Aerial7's website, "reduces the maximum volume or sound pressure, without compromising sound quality." In our out of the box experience, however, the volume was almost completely removed due to a dead battery. We suspect that one of our testers tried the headphones without turning the filter off; a process that requires finding a tiny switch on the battery pack. In other words, there is no auto off, so you will need to switch your headphones on and off each day. Once a fresh AAA battery was installed the headphones seemed to work as advertised, although we noticed strange surges in the volume (the headphones are supposed to limit volume to 85db, in compliance with OSHA regulation standards). The headphones can be used with any standard music device.

Details: Aerial7 Industries, Inc., . Price: \$35. Ages: 7-up. Platform: headphones. Teaches/Purpose: a music peripheral. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.3 stars. Entry date: 3/30/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	6	87%
Educational	N	
Entertaining	N	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	7	



## Builda the Re-Bicycler

Designed in typical ebook fashion, this app is part of the Tales of Midlandia series. It tells the story of what happens when the town of Midlandia goes bicycle crazy and creates a dump out of discarded bikes.

Builda, the factory owner, comes up with a plan to reduce, reuse, and recycle. Each word of the story is highlighted as it is read in the read to me mode. There are three modes: Read-to-me – listen to the narrated story with words highlighted as they are read; Read-to-myself – read the story in its traditional form; and Auto-play – story is narrated, with automatic page turns.

The original music, which is different on every screen, is very interesting, but it comes on strong. The interactive features are limited but in general relate to the story. Pages pan and zoom, and there are Easter eggs in the pages. The story is narrated by the author.

Details: Midlandia Press, [www.midlandipress.com](http://www.midlandipress.com). Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, environmental issues, ecology. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 5/3/2012. [WB]

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





## Elmo's Birthday Bash -- A Step Into Reading

The first in a planned series of early reading apps (a Step Into Reading) from Random House, *Elmo's Birthday Bash: A Step Into Reading* combines a 30-screen story with three leveled letter recognition activities. This is a solid app, but has some areas that could be improved, which we documented online at <http://youtu.be/l135P7TQHZU>. These include some cluttered screens (some objects look interactive but they're not) and some of the bobble-head style interaction grows repetitive and is not related to the story and/or the concepts.

The images and sounds are excellent -- right out of a Sesame Street episode, with narration by "Bob" (Bob McGrath) plus the voices of Big Bird, Elmo, Cookie Monster and others. In the story, Elmo is getting ready for his birthday party, which includes making invitations and mailing them to his friends. Children can touch any word to hear it read aloud and hear definitions. This process works, but we feel it could be better focused. Features include the ability to record your own narration to any page, plus three structured, responsive multiple-choice style activities that gradually increase in difficulty (e.g., from upper case to lower case). There are three modes. In the first, a child can watch and listen as words are highlighted while the text is read aloud and pages turn automatically. The second lets children turn off the narration and read at their own pace (with individual words spoken with the tap of a finger). A third option lets readers record their own voice to play on each page. The bottom line? This is a solid app and a nice story, but it could be better.

The app was created by Seattle-based Smashing Ideas for Random House Children's Publishing, in partnership with Sesame Workshop.

Details: Random House Children's Books, <http://www.randomhouse.com/kids/apps/>. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 4-7. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, phonics, sight words. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 4/26/2012. [WB]

## FarFaria

Gorgeous graphics are combined with hastily displayed blocks of un-narrated text, in this subscription based "endless digital library" for children who have iPads.

Here's how it works. After you download the app (free), you purchase a one month (\$3.99) subscription as an in-app sale. You can cancel at any time, however, you must pay the remainder of your term (at least \$3.99) and the app auto-renews. So be careful -- this is like an automatic book of the week.

We liked the overall ease of use and variety in the stories that we tried, but the standard eBook features are limited. Moving around in a book is not easy and the horizontal and vertical screen views don't always transition well. In addition, you can't resize the images or text. In terms of reading support, we didn't spot any scaffolding features, and the ability to touch and hear words is not used, which lowers the educational value. But that may not be the point of *FarFaria*. Many of the stories are pleasant surprises, with beautiful illustrations which makes it easier to overlook the chopped up and over-abridged text. Because the stories are theme-based rather than leveled, children are more likely find something they are interested in, and that interest will keep them engaged.

Details: Intuary, . Price: \$4/month. Ages: 2-9. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.7 stars. Entry date: 4/20/2012. [WB]

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



Ease of Use	9	74%
Educational	6	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	7	





## FIFA Street

EA's "most authentic street soccer game ever made" features both music and environments that are part of the street soccer culture.

The game lets you compete in parking lots or prestigious 5v5 futsal-style tournaments in the world's biggest cities. You can play with and against both players from the most popular clubs in the world and real-life street players. Features of the game include: Street Ball Control; Standing Dribble; Street Dribble; New Skill Moves; and Aerial Moves. The game also features a World Tour that lets you create yourself in game, build your own team, and progress to become the best street team in the world by competing in local tournaments and advancing to the Street Football World Championship. Testers loved it.

Details: EA Sports - Electronic Arts Canada, . Price: \$40. Ages: 8-up. Platform: PlayStation 3, Xbox 360. Teaches/Purpose: sports, soccer. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 3/21/2012. [WB]

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



## Fly Plane

Fun but limited, this app takes a theme children love -- flying airplanes -- and puts it at their fingertips.

You start by touching one of four planes (one is a helicopter), and one of three flying themes (country, city and winter). You then use your finger to fly, moving up or down to control the altitude. The best part is the real look and sound to the airplanes, including radio chatter. Each plane can do one trick, such as a flip or a very unrealistic spin. There's not much to this app, but kids like it.

Details: Ricky Vuckovic, . Price: \$0.99. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: flying, airplanes, fine motor coordination. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 5/3/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	10	80%
Educational	5	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	9	



## Foam Fighters Pacific

Foam Fighters Pacific is a set of three-inch styrofoam gliders that suction cup just under your iPhone's outside camera with a special clip. Once the wings are aligned, the app's augmented reality abilities superimpose a WWII dogfight over your living room.

Here's how it works. After the free app <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/foam-fighters/id481595868?mt=8> is installed, you can try a training battle, no plane or purchase required. The real fun, like taking out a battleship floating by your lamp, requires scanning the wing of a plane (sold for \$10). This unlocks one of six missions, based loosely on historical WWII battles. During the demo at this year's Toy Fair, up to eight other players could join the fight over local Wi-Fi connection, a great feature, but one that wasn't working in the version I tested.

If you get tired of the app, the planes really fly, thanks to the weighted nose and durable construction. See the video <http://youtu.be/f5FBD5r8III>.

Details: WowWee USA, Inc., . Price: \$10. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad, Android. Teaches/Purpose: flying, gross motor control, strategy, timing. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 2/15/2012. [WB]

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





## Goodnight Safari iPad App

Beautiful graphics are paired with a peaceful story, in this seven screen narrated adaptation of Goodnight Moon.

In the app, children help the giraffe eat her dinner, the monkey climb to bed, and the elephant kiss goodnight (there is one theme per screen). The story is slow paced and beautiful, although there are some flaws with the interactivity. The app features textured artwork by children's illustrator Luciana Navarro Powell. The art is worth the price of admission alone.

Details: Polk Street Press , [www.polkstreetpress.com](http://www.polkstreetpress.com). Price: \$2.99. Ages: 2-4. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, bedtime book, art, animals. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 1/9/2012. [WB]

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



## iStartSmart Mobile System by Hatch

Hatch's iStartSmart system now uses both tablets and desktop computers. The management system has potential, but the activities are poorly designed. We reviewed Version 2.0.11 in April 2012 on a tablet supplied and configured for us by Hatch.

At the core of the mobile configuration is the tablet; an ASUS 10.1" TF 101 running a version of Android (called "Ice Cream Sandwich"). This tablet would cost about \$380 in stores. The tablet has all the features you'd expect, including front and back cameras, Wi-Fi, bluetooth, good batteries and an iPad sized multi-touch screen. The customized Hatch version includes the Hatch software, a sturdy, heavy green rubber bumper with a classroom friendly hanger. A sturdy Califone headset is also included for each tablet, which significantly improves the audio, but blocks out external sound, socially isolating the child.

It is important to keep in mind that the tablet is just one part of a larger information ecosystem; which is a cloud-based management system, called the RMS, or Report Management System. This makes it possible to monitor student activity from any remote Mac or Windows computer. It can also track individual devices, so an administrator could see exactly how many tablets each teacher had, and which have been used. After a teacher sets up his or her class, it is possible to customize which of the Hatch activities an individual child can use.

Once you start the tablet, you see 11 icons. Three are Sandra Boyton ebooks by Loud Crow, two are off the shelf sorting and/or matching apps and one, called iStartSmart, has the management features.

The Hatch-specific apps are clumsy and unresponsive by current design standards. For example, they don't use multi-touch features so you can't drag and drop, and the pedagogy is on the most structured and scripted end of the pedagogical spectrum. As a result, "wait and listen" replaces opportunities for exploration or for a child to move through the content at their own pace. This decreases the value of the management system. We suspect that the reason for the low quality is that the activities were originally designed for a mono-touch Windows based system and ported into the Android tablet system. Because we understand that not all educators value responsiveness and child control as much as we do (and this has influenced the ratings), we've posted the raw footage from our review with comments, <http://youtu.be/m8nDZmZQIWA> so you can judge for yourself.

The system is marketed specifically toward early childhood programs -- Hatch says "Head Start, Preschool & Toddlers, Kindergarten, At Risk Children, Special Education and RTI." Call for special pricing.

The bottom line? The protective case is heavy but nice, the non-Apple hardware has potential. But the software design is very clunky and poorly localized; good in theory, but weak in practice.

Details: Hatch, Inc., . Price: \$1011.42 and up. Ages: 3-6. Platform: Windows. Teaches/Purpose: early learning. Rating (1 to 5 stars): .9 stars. Entry date: 6/30/2010. [WB]

Ease of Use	2	18%
Educational	2	
Entertaining	1	
Design Features	3	
Good Value	1	







### Medieval Moves: Deadmund's Quest

The PlayStation Move version of this game is a one or two player adventure that features sword fighting and archery.

In the story an evil Sorcerer has invaded Prince Edmund's Castle. Players fight to restore order to the kingdom.

The game features multiple pathways, unlockables and modes, along with power-ups and secrets to discover. There are both single player story modes and multiplayer modes, with online, competitive and co-op play.

Our game testers liked the story, especially the illustrated cut scenes. The game design uses an "on-rails" technique where the game moves your character around for you, making it possible to focus on Deadmund's sword swings, shield movements, arrows, and so on. This feels "weird", but the overall game is fun.

Details: Sony Computer Entertainment America, . Price: \$40. Ages: 10-up. Platform: PlayStation 3, PlayStation Move. Teaches/Purpose: logic, cooperative play. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 10/17/2011. [WB]

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



### MeeGenius

Here's another iPad delivered ebook library. See also Storia, Booksy and Rukus Reader. The library contains mostly adapted royalty free books, such as Rapunzel and The Jungle Book. Most books download quickly, and cost between \$1 and \$4 which is less than other library-based systems. But the books that we looked at (Rapunzel and The Jungle Book) are lacking in features, such as the ability to touch to jump to a page, touch a word to hear it read, or zoom in for a close-up. The art and narration seems hurried in places. Finally, we never like titles of products that have the word "genius" in them.

Details: MeeGenius Inc., . Price: \$free, books are \$1 to \$4. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad, Android. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.7 stars. Entry date: 3/14/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	74%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	6	
Good Value	8	



### ModNation Racers: Road Trip

Racing games abound; what's special about this one? In terms of the racing, not much. The controls "aren't bad" and the Vita's controls bring new twists to car control that you won't find with the PS3 version. What ModNation Racers for Vita does do is let you make your own track over a landscape that you shape by pushing up with second touch screen.

Features include the ability to turn photos taken with the Vita camera into your track background, and the ability to share your track with others. You can also now draw your screens by using the front touch screen. Weaknesses include long load times of your track, and an overall level of complexity in the experience. Created by WWS San Diego Studio for Sony.

Details: Sony Computer Entertainment America, Inc., . Price: \$30. Ages: 10-14. Platform: Vita. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, racing, fine motor coordination. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 2/17/2012. [WB]

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







## Motion Math: Wings

Fast paced and engaging, here's yet another excellent example of how touch screen and motion sensors can pull children into a concept.

If you've ever played a game like Doodle Jump or Scoops, where you lean the iPad screen from side to side in order climb higher, you get the idea of Motion Math Wings. In this case, you're a bird, soaring from island to island. To make progress, you must quickly choose between two sums that might be represented either as a numeral or as a set of number cubes. In order to avoid getting pushed back, you must choose the larger numeral, at least in the level I tried.

At the easy level, which is free, you start with sets of dots -- a challenge preschoolers can handle. Next, you fly into labeled grids and finally symbols like (4 x 5). There are ten levels to unlock, and eventually buy as an in-app purchase. If you were to buy all the content, it would cost \$6.99. The more you fly, the more swag you can earn for your bird. This game contains beautifully orchestrated music, a nice touch. The bottom line? This is an excellent app to have in your learning toolkit. The engaging format pulls kids in. Just be aware that you'll eventually hit a wall where you need to pony up some in-app money.

Details: Motion Math, . Price: \$free with in-app sales. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: math, logic, counting, quantities. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 5/13/2012. [WB]

## Number Bonds

Conceptually interesting, but very slow paced, this app consists of a set of virtual Cuisenaire rods, which must be arranged properly in order to unlock the next level. The design is clean and there are some nice management features, such as the ability to remember progress and toggle the sound (nice for classrooms). But the pacing slows you down.

Based on research by Diana Laurillard and Hassan Baajour at the London Knowledge Lab.

Details: Thinkout, . Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: math, counting, units of ten, Cuisenaire rods. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 2/16/2012. [WB]

## Old MacDonald

Sing-along with the famous Old MacDonald as your iPad or iPhone plays your background music. Your voice is recorded and saved, so the next time you start the app, you can hear your own recording. While the graphics are mediocre, the recording feature is easy to figure out. Content includes seven medium quality images and 35 touch activated surprises to discover. This app is part of the Nursery Rhyme Karaoke series.

Details: Dot To Dot Productions Ltd, . Price: \$0.99. Ages: 1-4. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: singing, reading, music. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 12/7/2011. [WB]

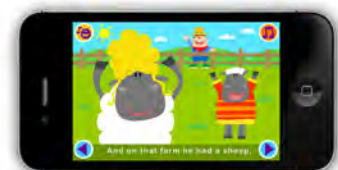
Ease of Use	9	92%
Educational	10	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	9	



Ease of Use	10	80%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	8	



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





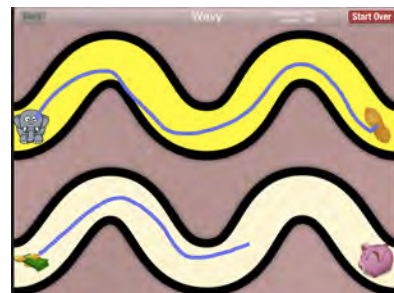
## Ready to Print

Teachers, take note of this app. Ideal for helping a child practice the fine-motor skills needed to make letters, this is a set of nine leveled touch screen exercises that was created by an Occupational Therapist. The idea is to use the iPad's multi-touch screen to replace, and improve upon, tried and true paper-based exercises.

The activities are nicely leveled, progressing from pre-writing skills to letters. You start by touching objects (e.g., butterflies to make them fly or bubbles to make them pop) and move up to tracing within lines. The final levels consist of upper or lower case Zaner-Bloser letters, and, as a treat, an open-ended free drawing activity. Visit <http://www.ReadyToPrintApp.com> for more details.

Details: Essare LLC, [www.ReadyToPrintApp.com](http://www.ReadyToPrintApp.com). Price: \$9.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: letter recognition, upper & lower case, handwriting, fine motor development, special needs. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 4/23/2012. [WB]

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



## Sarah, the Little Fairy: Grandma Gets Lost!

The first app in a series of fictional stories funded by the Spanish Ministry of Culture, this ebook is about a little fairy named Sarah who is trying to better understand Alzheimer's disease. Other stories cover water conservation, and the economic crisis.

In this e story, Sarah has a secret, a magic doll named Mina who she turns to when she needs answers. She just tickles her, says the magic words, and the doll comes to life. We learn that Sarah's grandma Mary is coming to live with them since she is not well and forgets things.

One day hundreds of stars appear in Sarah's bedroom and Mina uses them to show Sarah how to understand her grandmothers illness. Features include the ability to toggle between five languages (English, Spanish, French, German, and Catalan). It is also possible to turn on/off the background music and/or the narrator. While the design leaves something to be desired, this app could be useful for bringing up a tough subject.

Details: Sanoa, . Price: \$2.99. Ages: 5-9. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: health, Alzheimer's disease. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 12/30/2011. [WB]

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



## Scoot & Doodle

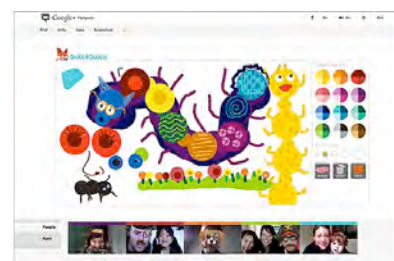
Collaborative and creative, here's an example of how technology can enhance interpersonal relationships. By now we're all familiar with services like Skype or Facetime, where one or more people can share the same video call. These services can be wonderful for children, as a way to stay in touch with remote grandparents. But talking heads can get a bit dry.

Scoot & Doodle works specifically with Google Hangout (you need a G+ account to use it) so that children can draw and doodle, with up to ten other people -- at the same time. The shared screen can consist of either a drawing area, for realtime shared scribbles, or a set of props, such as a hat that morphs itself onto the head of whoever is on the screen using Google Effects.

Scoot & Doodle gets access to your Google + contacts, so yes, be suspicious. When I asked "how do you make money?" there was a pause. Learn more about Scoot & Doodle's Google+ Hangouts App at <http://scootdoodle.com>.

Details: Scoot & Doodle, . Price: \$free. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX, Internet Site. Teaches/Purpose: drawing, communication, socialization, collaborative play, creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 5/16/2012. [WB]

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







## Storia

Scholastic's answer to Amazon.com is Storia (<http://www.scholastic.com/storia>), a book-centric leveled children's ebook store targeting a variety of screen types and sizes, both computer or tablet. Current versions run on Windows and iPad (Android is planned).

For the iPad version, which we tested, you first download the app, which includes five free books including a Goosebumps, although every opportunity is made to get you to sign up for a Scholastic account. We tested the samples and found all aspects of the Storia experience to be solid and easy to use. Features include the ability to quickly jump between shelf and list view, so if you have a lot of books you can browse your titles alphabetically. Other nice touches include the ability to switch skins. The books look as if they are scanned versions of the printed pages, right down to the "don't buy this book if the cover is torn" warning. Once a book is downloaded, it lives within the app, along with a customized dictionary. Features include some excellent navigation features, silky smooth page turning and a no-frills dictionary system. Some of the books are marked with a lightning symbol, which means they have been enhanced with word puzzles or some other type of comprehension game. The design is clean and responsive throughout.

The books are digitized directly from the printed version, complete with the warning not to buy this book if the cover is missing (good luck with that one).

Other features include the ability to highlight sentences or take notes that are saved with the book. Of course, the strength of any ebook delivery system is the library. In that department, few can match the resources of a company like Scholastic. We counted well over 1,000 books, sold for about \$7 each.

Limitations include an inability to search the text within the books. Record keeping features include the ability to track the amount of time a child spends with each book, see how many pages they've read, and how many minutes they spent reading each day. Parents can set up individual bookshelves for each of their children and purchase new eBooks. In order to make this product Scholastic Book Club friendly, the system rewards teachers with points. Disclaimer: Warren Buckleitner, CTR's Editor is a paid columnist for a Scholastic Magazine (Parent & Child).

Details: Scholastic, [www.scholastic.com](http://www.scholastic.com). Price: \$free not including books. Ages: 3-12. Platform: Windows, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, comprehension, spelling, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 5/12/2012. [WB]

## Teddy Tennis Sticker & Stamp Book

One of the strangest apps we've reviewed, Teddy Tennis is "a system that is designed to encourage children to get active and learn to play tennis by combining music, pictures and teddy bear characters." This is achieved by letting children make their own tennis-related scene, by dragging and dropping stickers in place.

Content includes Teddy Tennis tunes and sound effects, eight background scenes, 11 bears and other clip art items. Children can place as many stickers on the background as they want. Pages can be saved to your photo album.

Details: Nyx Digital Ltd., [www.nyxdigital.com](http://www.nyxdigital.com). Price: \$free. Ages: 3-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, tennis. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 1.4 stars. Entry date: 5/2/2012. [WB]

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



Ease of Use	5	28%
Educational	2	
Entertaining	2	
Design Features	3	
Good Value	2	





## The Going to Bed Book

This is one of our favorite Sandra Boynton apps, in part because the popup-book animated routines each work so well with the story. In addition, Loud Crow Interactive put a bit more variety in the interactive component of this book.

For example, in one scene, children help all the animals brush their teeth at once, which is a very nice touch. Features include touch and hear narration, and the ability to toggle on/off the narration (by Billy J. Kramer). We looked at the iPad version. All in all, this is an excellent early reading addition to your iPad library. It would make a nice app for a bedtime routine.

Details: Loud Crow Interactive Inc., . Price: \$3.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad, Android. Teaches/Purpose: reading, causality. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 3/15/2012. [WB]

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



## Tillie's Time Shop HD

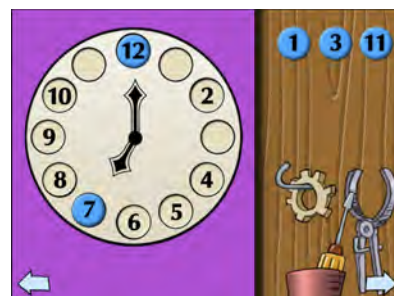
The graphics aren't flashy, but the design is solid, in this time telling adventure for iPad. In the 11 screen story, Tillie the Cat and a wise-cracking mouse serve as hosts, introducing a variety of time puzzles. These include informal clock exploration, where you can move the clock hands to change the time of day, and a clock sorting game where you try match the time with the clock. Children can see how a 12 hour dial relates to the 24 hour cycle.

Content includes 11 screens with hidden surprises; animation and characters; interactive analog and digital clocks; and all narration also appears as text on the screen.

Each clock can be freely manipulated, and the background images change, making this one of the few time-telling apps that makes the symbols meaningful.

Details: My Turn Mobile, . Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: telling time, clocks, reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 1/23/2012. [WB]

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



## Trucks by Duck Duck Moose

Playful yet powerful, here's another easy, solid app from Duck Duck Moose.

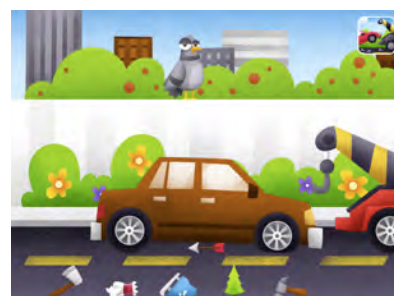
Weaknesses to note include a confusing first screen that shows you a parade of the interesting trucks in the app, but doesn't let you play with them right away, and the choice of a Christmas song (Jingle Bells) which seems strange in July. All the music is excellent. These are minor issues: children quickly learn to follow a large arrow to get to the main menu, and it is easy to mute the music.

The five activities give you plenty to do. You can wash a car after a trip through some mud, sort trash with the recycling truck, make a car have a flat tire by placing items in the road (our favorite), followed by a tow ride to the garage to put on a new tire. All in all, this is another very solid app that children will want return to.

Each activity pulls you into the activity by letting you spray the hose in the car wash, or operate the lift in the garage. The final activity, the Car Parade is interesting -- children use a stop light to adjust the speed of traffic -- a nice prop for bringing up a very important topic (how traffic lights work). All in all, this is another solid app from Duck Duck Moose that nicely capitalizes on a common play pattern.

Details: Duck Duck Moose Design, [www.duckduckmoosedesign.com](http://www.duckduckmoosedesign.com). Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-7. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: vehicles, transportation, recycling, ecology, sorting, science, traffic lights. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 5/17/2012. [WB]

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







# Future Releases & Updates

MAY 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.*

## Beauty and the Beast HD

This iPad app retains the authentic text of Walter Crane's 1874 adaptation of Beauty and the Beast. It also contains the original illustrations, combined with tilt and touch controlled physics elements, touch animations, some character cutouts and sound effects. There isn't much new about the interactive component, but the story is the original version.

Details: Little Phoenix Interactive, <http://littlephoenixinteractive.com>. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 10-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, literature. Entry date: 2/15/2012.



## Big Nate Comix for U

Complicated but cool (and potentially powerful), this is a drag and drop flannel-board style comic strip creator featuring Big Nate, aka 6th grader Nate Wright, aka the "king of detention." Big Nate is the creation of Lincoln Peirce, author of the Big Nate book series.

You can drag and drop from a library of characters and backgrounds. Backgrounds include the P.S. 38 school gym, lockers, library, Nate's bedroom, the neighborhood, and Mrs. Godfrey's classroom. There are three modes: Story Starter—begin with a few finished frames and then fill in the rest; Fill in the Blanks—fill in the speech bubbles on an already designed comic; and Start from Scratch—create a comic from scratch. It is also possible for you to share your comics with a friend, or save them to a gallery. We didn't have much time to spend with this, but on first glance it seemed rather complicated and the frames looked small. But that was without a thorough test.

Details: Night & Day Studios, . Price: \$2.99. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: art, logic, creativity, writing, language. Entry date: 4/3/2012.



## Fancy Nancy Dress Up

Based on the Fancy Nancy children's book, this app lets you dress up Nancy by dragging and dropping different design elements into place. There's a nice variety of combinations.

You can mix and match outfits, hear Nancy encourage you to make her fancier, choose backgrounds and decorate them with stickers from the Fancy Nancy books, and create original pictures for an all-new Fancy Nancy storybook. You can also save and share your creations, and insert Fancy Nancy into your own photos.

Details: Bean Creative, <http://www.beancreative.com>. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: creativity. Entry date: 12/8/2011.





## Getting Started with Arduino kit V3.0

Ready to get your hands busy with a real circuit board? With roots in Italy, Arduino (the name is an Italian first name) is an Italian open-source physical computing platform based on a single, small circuit board. Because the parts snap together, no soldering is necessary. Visit <http://www.arduino.cc/> for the main site.

This particular \$65 kit bundles the board with a starter book plus some parts to make such things as a flashing LED or a sound sensor. The boards can be assembled by hand or purchased pre-assembled (there are about eight officially recognized Arduino boards made by commercial companies); the open-source software is available as a free download and can run on just about any type of computer.

The least expensive version of the Arduino kits start in the \$50 range. Note that you'll also need a computer with a USB plug, to communicate with your Arduino board. The software, which can be downloaded, runs on Windows, Mac or Linux, although the Windows version has the most capacity.

Getting Started with Arduino kit V3.0 from Maker comes with an Arduino 2nd Edition book by Massimo Banzi. Once upon a time, Steve Jobs played with Heathkit computers. It's most likely that future inventors are playing with something like Arduinos.

Details: Maker Shed, [www.makershed.com](http://www.makershed.com). Price: \$65. Ages: 12-up. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: logic, science. Entry date: 5/10/2012.



## Hot Shots Golf: World Invitational

The PS Vita edition of Hot Shot Golf lets you use the touch panel controls to make your shot. Features include the ability to walk the course to discover new areas and obstacles with six-axis movement; access to new courses, characters and costumes; and the ability to stay connected with your friends latest scores by way of a leaderboard. You can interact with up to 30 players.

Details: Sony Computer Entertainment America, Inc., . Price: \$30. Ages: 12-up. Platform: Vita. Teaches/Purpose: sports, golf. Entry date: 2/17/2012.



## Interactive Telling Time

This app is designed to teach children how to tell time with analog clocks (with hands) and can be played independently or used by parents as a guide. Content includes five games and quizzes that teach young children how to read the time, learn about different clock components, and switch between analogue and digital clocks. There are also five difficulty levels to choose from, a choice of eight clock designs with various uses and difficulty levels, and a scoreboard function for parents to keep track of their child's progress, as well as a tutorial mode. It is available in six languages including English, French, Spanish, German, Japanese and Chinese.

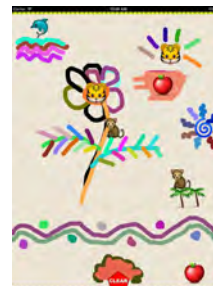
Details: GigggleUp Pty Ltd, [www.gigggleup.com](http://www.gigggleup.com). Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: telling time, clocks, language. Entry date: 12/30/2011.



## Just Scribble

This is a silent, free form scribbling app that rewards any touch of the screen with a randomly colored line, along with a shower of sparkles and animated stickers which appear every 10 seconds. Everything happens randomly, which makes it interesting, and a bit frustrating. There are no controls, other than "Clear". There are also no ads, links or in app purchases. Like a rattle, it could be good for younger children. The strengths are it's extreme simplicity ("highly causal, high in child control"). Weaknesses -- too random, which might be frustrating to a child trying to create something. It might be nice to have the choice of a less random mode.

Details: ambiApps, <http://www.ambiapps.com/>. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 1-3. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: causality, creativity, drawing, art. Entry date: 5/3/2012.







## KlabLab

KlabLab is a co-creation community designed to help children learn through community-created videos, or music that they create and upload.

Children can also submit their own content to share with others and earn "fame" if the community likes your stuff.

KlabLab's goal is to "create a new way to inspire today's tech savvy youth." Teachers or students could create educational songs (similar to School House Rock) based on the curriculum. Content can then be uploaded to KlabLab's library.

Details: KlabLab, [www.klablab.com](http://www.klablab.com). Price: . Ages: 5-up. Platform: Internet Site. Teaches/Purpose: . Entry date: 3/22/2012.



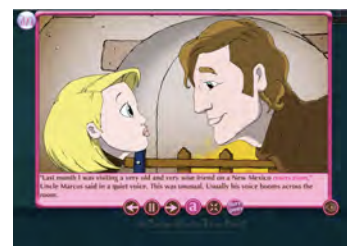
## Molly Moccasins

MollyMoccasins.com is a Flash-based ebook series, containing 70 stories, each with games for ages 4-8. Each book download costs \$.99, and can be purchased as an in-app sale from Apple's iBook store, as web based content, or in Android.

There is a no-advertising policy, and an all access pass costs \$30. Content includes stories by Victoria O'Toole, who combines "a blend of adventure, fun and solid storytelling to raise your spirit and promote good, solid life lessons."

Created by Urban Fox Studios at [www.mollymoccasins.com](http://www.mollymoccasins.com).

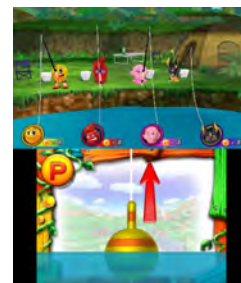
Details: Urban Fox Studios, . Price: \$.99/book. Ages: 4-8. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Entry date: 3/11/2012.



## Pac-Man Party 3D

Play with up to four players in various virtual game boards in this 3D version of Pac-Man. There are four modes: Story mode - explore all the game board worlds and retrieve a secret recipe that has been stolen by ghosts; Party Mode - play boards with your favorite characters; Collection Mode - review the conditions to unlock rewards; and Mini games. A bonus feature lets you play the original arcade versions of Pac-Man, Galaga, and Dig-Dug. Testers noted that the images on the screen were pretty, but very tiny.

Details: Namco Bandai Games America Inc., [www.namcobandagames.com](http://www.namcobandagames.com). Price: \$40. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: spatial relations. Entry date: 11/17/2011.



## Ready for School Elmo

This "interactive plush pal" combines concrete manipulatives such as zippers, snaps and fasteners with audio labels that emphasize colors, shapes and "school facts." Elmo also sings the alphabet song. Includes two "AA" temporary batteries. See <http://youtu.be/gUlroaTf-zo>

Details: Hasbro, Inc., . Price: \$30. Ages: 2-5. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: colors, shapes, fine motor skills, language. Entry date: 5/11/2012.





## Ruckus Reader

Ruckus Reader is one of several leveled ebook delivery systems for iPad (see also Booksy and Storia).

It is available both by subscription (\$25 for six months), or you can download books individually. The books are leveled, and a cloud-based management system helps you monitor general information about what your child does, including how much time he or she has spent on each book. This information can be reported by way of a weekly email message, if you like.

While the content is inspired specifically from print-based books, we noted that the books are more interactive, with more opportunities for a child to interact with the content. Content has been licensed from The Wiggles, Curious George, Hasbro's My Little Pony and Transformers. Other themes include Crayola, SeaWorld, Dino Dan and Cyberchase.

Content consists of "more than 24 iReaders" with 20 new titles and activities added each month.

There are three reading levels (emergent, beginning and independent). The Ruckus iReader bookshelf can be downloaded free from the iTunes App Store with some sample books.

Details: Ruckus Media Group, [www.ruckusmediagroup.com](http://www.ruckusmediagroup.com). Price: \$25 for 6 months. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, comprehension. Entry date: 3/28/2012.



## Sims 3 Showtime, The

This expansion pack for The Sims 3 lets your Sim perform for other Sims as a singer, acrobat, magician or DJ. You can create new Sims with new skills and traits, and a Lifetime Wishes option gives you more tools to tell stories. Just keep in mind that you need a full version of The Sims in order to use this expansion pack.

Content includes the world of Starlight Shores with new characters to meet. As you play you can increase your fame, earning props, lights, backgrounds, and special effects as you watch your Sims perform in sold-out arenas.

You can also use the optional SimPort features to send your Sims on tour to a friend's game to perform in their world, earn rewards and receive a review of your Sims show.

Details: Electronic Arts, . Price: \$40. Ages: 13-up. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: creativity. Entry date: 3/5/2012.



## Super Grover 2.0

This motion-activated plush figure responds to the motion of being "flown" around the room. His arms will rise as if he's flying and he will let children know whether he's "Going up" or "Going down." Grover comes with a set of flying sounds and Grover-phrases, and is powered by two AA batteries. This is one of these toys that critics say erodes a child's imagination (why not supply your own sound effects?). But it is another way to get children moving. See the preview at <http://youtu.be/uBtNmyXQXDw>

Details: Hasbro, Inc., [www.hasbro.com](http://www.hasbro.com). Price: \$30. Ages: 2-5. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: language related to motion. Entry date: 5/7/2012.





### Tablet Teddy Bears

Tablet holders come in all shapes and sizes these days, but this is the first teddy bear we've seen to be adapted for the job.

These plush bears have wire arms and legs that can be bent to hold most sized tablets (for most 10 inch Android devices, Kindle, Nook, and iPads).

The idea, according to the occupational therapist who designed it, is to "minimize neck and muscle strain" although we're not sure how.

We noticed that the hands and feet can slightly block the screen when bent to the holding position. In addition, the backpack, which promises to protect the tablet is lightly padded, not sufficiently to protect the tablet against a drop on a hard floor.

The bears are available in three styles including light blue with color swirls, pink with color swirls, and traditional brown plush.

Details: Dean Designs LLC, . Price: \$35. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad, Android.

Teaches/Purpose: a tablet holder. Entry date: 5/2/2012.



### Trickomatics

Trickomatics is a leveled supplementary math curriculum that blends interactive games with animated cartoons designed to put the math into context.

The software is sold the old fashioned way -- on CD-ROMs and DVDs. According to marketing materials, the program uses "an alternative approach of Hollywood entertainment and interactive technology for teaching children, ages 7 -11." The software covers place value, mental math and word problems. For \$130 you get a "beautifully packaged box containing a DVD of the animated Trickomatics movie as well as a CD-ROM containing the interactive technology-based program."

Details: Trickstar, . Price: \$130. Ages: 7-11. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX.

Teaches/Purpose: math, mental math, basic math. Entry date: 3/7/2012.



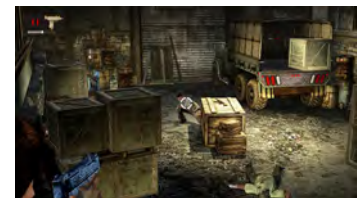
### Uncharted: Golden Abyss

The portable debut of the UNCHARTED franchise, Golden Abyss takes you on an adventure as you explore the secret behind the 400-year-old massacre of a Spanish expedition.

Using the Vita's motion sensing controls, you touch, steer, and tilt the Vita to swipe, swing and jump your way through environments using both front and back touch.

Traditional gamers can choose to use the dualstick analog/buttons. Developed by Sony Bend Studios.

Details: Sony Computer Entertainment America, Inc., [www.scea.com](http://www.scea.com). Price: \$50. Ages: 13-up. Platform: Vita. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Entry date: 2/17/2012.



### Xenoblade Chronicles

Our testers liked this one player Wii-exclusive RPG game. The story combines science fiction and fantasy, and involves a lot of fighting. You explore a vast open-world universe in a battle between the Homs (humans) and Mechons (robots), and uncover the secret of the ancient Mondao blade. You can customize and upgrade characters with additional weapons, armor, equipment and accessories Developed by Monolith Soft for Nintendo.

Details: Nintendo of America, [www.nintendo.com](http://www.nintendo.com). Price: \$50. Ages: 13-up. Platform: Wii. Teaches/Purpose: logic, reading, strategy. Entry date: 3/28/2012.

