



Children's TECHNOLOGY REVIEW

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Children's Technology Review

August 2012

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* Donotes an
"Editor's
Choice."



A closer look at the elusive 5 star rating

"What does a 5 star interactive media product for children look like?" At CTR, this question is our holy grail. Like the moving world record line that is superimposed over an Olympic swimming event, it represents the continually fluid yardstick for quality that we hold every app, game, toy or site against. This fuzzy line is certainly something every developer thinks about. After all, who wouldn't want a 5 star rating? We feel that the proper identification of a five star product is both a science and an art. To bring some science to the process, we use a non-perfect but standardized* instrument, online at <http://childrenstech.com/evaluation-instrument> that was designed at the dawn of digital media (1984) as an effort to capture such factors as the quality of the images and sounds, the amount of content, being high in child control and being free of gender and/or ethnic bias. This instrument is the DNA of CTR; it reminds our reviewers to look for specific attributes. However, because children's IM products vary greatly the process of assigning ratings that have external validity cannot be automated. This takes an in-depth knowledge of the current state-of-the-art. This knowledge is why we're so excited about the products we're reviewing right now. There has never been a time when children have had so many quality digital options, for such an affordable price, and our August issue is proof. Consider both **The Sonnets by William Shakespeare** and **Gems and Jewels** (by TouchPress), and the free **LEGO Creationary**; as well as the app on the cover, called **ABC ZooBorns** by Peapod Labs. But pay special attention to **Bugs and Bubbles**, an iPad app that has received one of our elusive 5 star ratings. To put this accomplishment into perspective, since 1993, just 44 out of 13,684 (.03%) of the products we've considered have received our "perfect" score. To help you understand our thinking behind this rating, we've made a video <http://youtu.be/IKsIFZdj1Ak>. If you'd like to see the 28 highest rated (>4.5 stars) products so far this year, visit <http://bit.ly/RhuV8i>

* meaning different raters have achieved inter-rater reliability on different products.



Is there a transmedia generation gap?

David Kleeman layers technology over culture, and considers how the next generation of 20-something children's media producers will make a dent in their world. Have a cup of good coffee and enjoy this essay, on page 4.

August LittleClickers: Learn more about the 2012 Olympics

Is an Olympic gold medal really made out of solid gold? (Nope). What age is the youngest Olympian this year (15-years old). Is Ping Pong an Olympic sport? (Yes, but they call it "table tennis.") See page 3.

Ed tech trends: ISTE 2012 as viewed through Twitter

Few people know how to watch Twitter like Scott Traylor. View his analysis of this year's ISTE on page 5.

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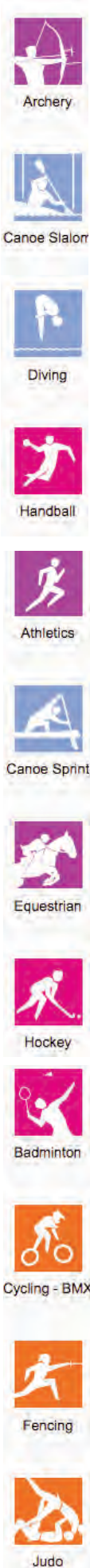
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Is an Olympic gold medal made out of gold? (Nope). How old is the youngest Olympian this year? (There are several who just 15). Is Ping Pong an Olympic sport? (Yes, but they call it "table tennis.") Here are some links to these and some other interesting Olympic facts.

1. How many Olympic sports are there?

According to <http://www.london2012.com/sports/> there are 36 sporting events in the 2012 Olympics. These include trampoline, Judo and table tennis.

2. T/F Is an Olympic gold medal really made out of gold?

False. According to About.com <http://bit.ly/PyxlcY> Olympic gold medals are actually mostly Silver! They haven't been made from solid gold since the 1912 Stockholm Games, yet they remain valuable in terms of their metal content. That's because they are 92.5% silver (sterling silver), plated with a thick coating (6 mm) of gold. The remaining 7.5% is copper. So how much is that in terms of dollars? The estimated value of a gold medal awarded at the 2012 Summer Olympics is \$620.82 (as of August 1, 2012). That's 6 grams of real gold coating (\$302.12) and 394 grams of sterling silver (\$318.70). See some gold medals, at <http://bit.ly/xNFXos>.

3. Which person has won the most overall medals?

Until last week it was Larisa Latynina of the Soviet Union who had 18. But USA swimmer Michael Phelps just won three more for swimming, bringing his total to 20. Wikipedia has a chart with the latest news http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_multiple_Olympic_medalists.



4. What's the youngest age of an Olympic athlete? What about the oldest?

The youngest was just ten years old! According to The Gaurdian <http://bit.ly/QXsD9H> the youngest participant in the Olympics was 10-year-old Dimitrios Loundras from Greece who competed in gymnastics in 1896. The oldest was Swedish shooter Oscar Swahn (72 years), according to <http://bit.ly/QXtKpM>. This year, there are several 15-year-olds competing, including British gymnast Rebecca Tunney (pictured to the right) and at <http://bit.ly/Sr3cOz> and USA swimmer Katie Ledecky, who was interviewed on the Today show <http://on.today.com/Ouo9XK>.



OTHER OLYMPIC LINKS

Help! I missed some of the television coverage.

No worries. At www.olympics.org, the official web site for the Olympics, you can find links to all the events as they happen, with a lot of ads. You'll find some amazing photos and a mini game (a plugin is required) at <http://www.olympic.org/official-london-2012-mini-game>

Make some funny faces

http://www.cbsnews.com/2300-33747_162-10013175.html you can see a photo gallery of the funniest faces made by Olympic divers.



LittleClickers YouTube Playlist: Olympics

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL83A75C02AA89F616>



Is There a Transmedia Generation Gap?

By DAVID KLEEMAN

When the frustrated imagination of a generation meets the opportunity to bring its dreams to life, will magic occur?

For some time, I've been bothered by malleable use of the term "transmedia"; it seemed that the term could mean whatever a children's media content creator wanted or needed for the situation, and therefore meant nothing. Transmedia got worked into every pitch, press release and request for proposals (even from the US Department of Education!). It was de rigueur across platforms, genres and age groups.

In part, that's exactly its purpose – transmedia should be ubiquitous. Still, the term teetered on the brink of buzzword, lacking the intellectual foundation to distinguish it from cross-platform, brand synergy, or simply "my TV show has a website."

I've always leaned toward Jeff Gomez' definition, that includes the proviso that content be developed and distributed in ways that "leverage the specific features of that platform." This ought to be self-evident; each medium's unique affordances should be front and center in the development process, but market pressure for "360 commissioning" too often resulted in content being sprayed out rather than cultivated.

I noticed at the recent Children's Media Conference in England, however, that conversations about transmedia seemed to have a new, more organic and natural flow to them. These presentations and discussions came from experts across mediums – publishing, broadcasting, games, virtual worlds, mobile media – and in sessions with varied themes – creative content, audience engagement, financial models. Their approach bespoke a coherent development process, in which pieces of the story were parceled out to the appropriate platforms from the start, rather than beginning from one device as the omphalos and tacking on other pieces. Even (or perhaps especially) the executives spoke of being in the business of developing immersive stories, not of filling a particular silo of content. Often, they didn't even use the term "transmedia"; their basic assumptions simply bespoke an internalization of its essentials. (It's worth noting that this was the case, too, before the term came into fashion – "Star Wars" was transmedia without even knowing it!)

I am engaging in conjecture, since I didn't check speakers' biographies; however, it seemed to me that most often, these were the working models for the newest generation of executives and creators. After all, who knows the unique potential and shortcomings of the varied places and devices where stories live better than those who've grown up immersed in them?

Today's young producer was a teenager around the turn of the century – let's say concurrent with the release of the PS2 in

2000, but before Xbox Live introduced networked gaming, in 2002. Online and on TV, people were waiting to see what extraordinary content synergy might result from the AOL-Time Warner merger; in Scandinavia, a very few teens were exploring the new Habbo; for others worldwide, bulletin boards were their "social network," supplemented by e-mail and instant messaging. Music was mostly still packaged, though Napster was already making waves with a file-sharing model.

In other words, teens of 2000 were cocooned in ubiquitous but discontinuous content. The stories they consumed were being made by the TV generation, raised on its linear and visual storytelling.

To be fair, this is a torch-passing that comes to every emerging medium. The TV generation had themselves revolutionized the small screen, wresting creative control from the film and radio generations, and inventing the fast-paced, mixed-media magazine show for kids, and much more.

Teens of 2000 were cocooned... the stories they consumed were being made by the TV generation....

Now these twenty-somethings are taking charge, with a previously-unimaginable technology arsenal with which to realize their vision.

It's easy to imagine teens of 2000 bouncing medium to medium, while longing for a connective thread – a TV-show website that goes deeper than cast bios and "printables"; magazines that explore the worlds of their favorite games; the book-based backstory to the film they just saw.

Over time, from that longing would have grown dreams – strategies – for "when I run the show." Now, not only are these twenty-somethings taking charge, they've been hand-

ed a previously-unimaginable technology arsenal with which to realize their vision: mobile smart media; broadband everywhere; affordable and easy-to-use production tools; social networks to extend and democratize storytelling; and much more.

Suddenly, it seems, the world of "transmedia" isn't just a buzzword, or even necessary to say. It has seeped into mainstream culture, not only surrounding the audience, but coming from the audience.

David Kleeman is President of the American Center for Children and Media, an industry-led creative professional development and resource center.



ISTE 2012: Sir Ken, Viewed Through a Mirror Called Twitter

by SCOTT TRAYLOR

Last month, 18,000+ tech-loving educators gathered at the San Diego convention center for ISTE -- an annual event that has become the Mecca of ed tech in the United States. Also known as the International Society for Technology in Education, the four day event always starts with an opening keynote address -- this year the headliner was Sir Ken Robinson, the English futurist.

But I wasn't going to be there.

Due to family commitments I needed to miss the first day, and Sir Ken's talk. So, I did what any valid data cruncher would do. I started collecting and analyzing the tweets from the one hour event. What I discovered was fascinating. The "big ideas" aren't necessarily what comes from the podium. If you don't believe me, you can watch the presentation yourself, at <http://youtu.be/LrVFCRy9yHg> (jump to 32:27 to see the keynote). The best ideas are the ones that are heard by a massive audience --collectively chewed and digested, and then captured in a collective mass of about 2,500 tweets, under a single hashtag (#iste12). It's as if Sir Ken were talking to a giant brain comprised of 750 busy tweeters, waiting to pounce on the next nugget.

Listening carefully to this brain at work taught me that trying to paraphrase Sir Ken based on Twitter information is a little like playing the telephone game, where you pass a secret phrase around a circle, only to end up with a different result at the end. Each spoken line from the original keynote was tweeted and re-tweeted at least 20 times, complete with some minor edits. I picked out, and in some cases merged together, some of the best tweets from the event. If you can forgive some editorial sanding, here's what seemed to resonate:

"No Child Left Behind is proof that Americans get irony. No Child Left Behind should be renamed to be millions of children left behind."

"If we know anything about children it is that they are not standardized. Yet we have a suffocating culture of standardization and we need just the opposite. Humanity is based on the principle of diversity, yet our education system is based on compliance and conformity. Our lives are not linear, they are organic, and school is based on linearity."

"One-third of all students drop out of high school. If doctors lost 1/3rd of their patients it would be unacceptable. If 1/3rd of airplanes dropped out of the sky there would be an uproar. Yet this is the reality in education."

"There are opportunities to personalize education. And while we may not be able to afford personalization, we can't afford not to."

"People on the planet today have more access to mobile devices than safe drinking water."



"It took 19 years for the color TV to reach 10 million users. The VCR took 12 years. CD players, 7 years. The iPad, 9 months."

A tweet made during this year's ISTE keynote. It didn't come from the podium.

Scott took his camera to this year's ISTE. Here's a directory of his videos.



Living Books by Wanderful: An Interview With Mark Schlichting
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAkzvp2jiaM>

P.O.V. App by Binary Labs Provides Spatial Reasoning Practice on the iPad
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zCq7MKiC5VY>

Matrix One \$99 Andoid Tablet at ISTE 2012
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jPMqCxbaGQ>

Polyvision's solution for BYOD: media:scape
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nbC9nLi1n2s>

Tribal Nova's "I Learn With" Apps at ISTE 2012
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tkj9Ue5Bg2c>

Planet 123 by Octopus Planet at ISTE 2012
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2vF168gMA4A>

Science Kit Demo at ISTE 2012
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wa4dN1xh9qM>

Gail Lovely at ISTE 2012
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDyZwfNvt64>

Kevin Hogan, Tech & Learning at ISTE 2012
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=011ZRVz1qAQ>

Cathleen Norris and Elliott Soloway at ISTE 2012
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i-75gDYWG5w>

Scott Traylor is a regular contributor to CTR. He is the founder and Chief Kid of 360KID (www.360KID.com), a youth focused business that consults in the kids digital world as well as develops consumer and classroom products. He has no direct commercial connections with products mentioned in this article.



"What will it take to truly engage students in their own education, and what role does technology play in this?"

These are inspiring and somewhat depressing words, but they were what this particular audience decided to capture. It seems that many educators view the US education system to be a flawed, broken process, and that the Department of Education doesn't have much to add to the conversation. During the lengthy live and prerecorded statements made by DOE personalities Karen Cator and Arnie Duncan, a brief moment of Twitter praise came when Karen Cator's comment "your work matters" was retweeted by many. However, the overall tone from the twittersphere during the DOE remarks was more snarky than pleased.

Was there any gold in the twitter stream? Sir Ken did challenge the audience to engage each student in a unique way, to empower the abilities of the individual, for the benefit of all mankind. The tweet read like this: "Great teachers don't take students to a destination. They give them the tools to get there on their own." Certainly this is a strong tweet from a smart crowd, and it is a good closing thought.

Apps for Diving Into the Olympics

by CHRIS CROWELL

As a former college basketball player and girls high school soccer coach, I have been fortunate to have played with and against Olympic participants, past and present. Some are still friends, and one even has a gold medal, as a member of the USA "Dream Team." Perhaps that's why I find it so easy to get excited every four years when the summer games roll around. In recognition of the London Games, we've mined the CTR database to find some apps and games that can help you extend a child's Olympic future, to promote some learning.

1. **Barefoot Books World Atlas** - Touch Press \$7.99 has great graphics as well as real-time links to every country's vital statistics.
2. **Stack the Countries** - Dan Russell-Pinson \$1.99 is a fun app to learn countries' physical shape.
3. **Bugs and Buttons** - Little Bit Studio \$2.99 Editor's Choice February 2012. Roach race and Bee archery anyone?



GOOGLE AND THE OLYMPICS

To dive deeper into the Olympics with children, visit LittleClickers on page 3, where you can find sites like the official Olympic web site (<http://www.olympic.org>). Or, you can jump right to Google <http://www.google.com>. Here are two of my favorite new Google search techniques.

Image search. First go to Google Image Search by clicking "images" at the top of the screen. Next, drag any picture from your desktop or photo album, and drop it into the search window. Google will look at your photo, and do a search.

Search Tools. Hunt around until you see "Search Tools" on the left side of the screen. If you're an information nut like me you'll love the way you can start to customize your searches, by date, topic or location.

These are my "App-lympic" recommendations for the London Games. In the spirit of the Olympics, enjoy some physical activities away from watching and technology. As for me, I will mostly read about and watch highlights of the Games. The only live events I plan to watch involve my friend and favorite Olympic athlete, Heather O'Reilly of the USA women's soccer team. Hey she's from New Jersey!



Feature Reviews

AUGUST 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 Tale Off the Top of my Head

Art meets interactivity in this interesting electronic story from France.

As you explore the screens you discover some interesting interactive techniques, such as on the last page, where the moon spells "The End".

We found the interactive areas of each screen to be innovative but hard to figure out. This is because they're not always responsive. This leads to exploration, but not always the way the author intended.

In the story, Ari Allistair Arx-Sorensen is just a little over a hundred years old. As he watches a fire burn down his family home he tells the story of his life and his childhood memories of the big parties they had on the grounds of the old family manor house.

Ari lives there as a recluse with his she-wolf Nimis and spends his time dreaming and reading. His father, Otto, holds concerts of silence while his mother, Mercy, paints a portrait of Ari that captures him in the most minute detail, until the day this idle and fanciful life is turned upside down by the arrival of Flowing-Water.

The app is available in both English and French and features both Read to Me and Read by Myself. The lite version includes only the first chapter of the story, for no cost.

Details: La Souris Qui Raconte, www.lasourisquiraconte.com. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 7/17/2012. [WB]

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



ABC ZooBorns

Here's yet another well designed alphabet-themed app from Peapod Labs (see also Music, Wildlife, Play, Food and Go).

ABC ZooBorns turns your iPad or iPhone screen into an alphabet-themed visual encyclopedia, based on beautiful photos from royalty free sources such as Flickr and YouTube. The result is an authentic presentation of letter-themed animal photos.

You start by touching one of the approximately 150 thumbnail images (156 as of July 2012), organized alphabetically. Each leads to a letter-themed animal item. For A, for example, you'll get a close-up view of an Aardvark. For E, you see an amazing baby elephant.

Adults can manage app features and create an online account for a child by "reverse pinching" on a parent icon. This involves registering, and makes it possible to sync program menus across different devices; which is a very smart feature.

As with the other Peapod ABC apps, each word appears, letter-by-letter, on the bottom of the screen. Touching any of the letters within the word sends you to another set of words; an excellent secondary navigation technique. Many of the photos include YouTube videos or rub-away images, both great ways to extend the meaning.

Note that you'll need an active Internet connection, both to keep the app updated and to view the YouTube content. The app will still function if not online although we would like a mechanism to buffer some of the YouTube content for dependable use during a lesson.

Design flaws include a direct link to the App store has been included next to the letter "A" in the main menu (not good) and an inability to jump back to an animal that you've just viewed.

Other than that, this is another outstanding early literacy app that can leverage a child's interest in animals to playfully introduces early language concepts, especially letter sounds, in the context of words. For \$2.99, you can't go wrong. See our video review at <http://youtu.be/LRfDE5XlgY>.

Details: Peapod Labs, www.peapodlabs.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: letter recognition, language, art. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 7/24/2012. [WB]

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





Boats (Byron Barton)

Similar to the earlier Oceanhouse Media ebooks that deal with transportation, Boats, based on the book by author Byron Barton, lets children interact with many types of boats including speedboats, fireboats, and fishing boats.

Many objects such as the dock workers or the clouds can be moved around on the screen, flannel board style. Our young testers were entertained by this feature and its responsiveness.

Features include animations and movable objects on every page; picture / word association — words that zoom up and are spoken when pictures are touched; individual words that highlight and are read aloud when tapped; all combined with high quality narration and sounds.

Missing is the ability to touch and hear the author's name on the title page of the app. Also the app is single touch as opposed to multi-touch. So, for example, you can't control two boats at the same time. It would also be nice if you could move the boats by tilting the device. This is a good value app for its target age group. See the video review at <http://youtu.be/5S2GWmM0k9g>.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, . Price: \$1.99. Ages: 2-5. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (requires . Teaches/Purpose: reading, decoding. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 7/18/2012. [CC]

Bugs and Bubbles

Fun, fast and good for building emerging math skills, Bugs and Bubbles is the second app we've reviewed from Little Bit Studio. The first, also excellent, was Bugs and Buttons (CTR Feb 12).

This app contains 18 leveled sorting, classification games set in Uncle Bob's Bubble Factory. Your goal is to collect stickers by harvesting bubbles. This requires a lot of low level math skill application, including counting, sorting, remembering patterns -- all concepts that have been part of educational software in the past. But never so beautifully and elegantly. The activities are designed so children drive the action, and the better you do, the greater the challenge. Because there are 18 games and 36 achievement stickers to collect, this app offers a lot to do for the money. You can also manage multiple player profiles, as long as you have "Profiles" turned on in your iOS settings. This lets you save a child's progress on a remote server ("the cloud") so he or she can continue playing on another device (as long as both devices are synced to the same account).

The aesthetics of this app should be noted. Each activity has a different musical background, and the graphics are beautiful, without sacrificing responsivity.

The bottom line. We don't hand out too many five star ratings, but this app has the right mix of fun, learning, and intelligent artificial intelligence that is rare and hard to create. Watch us talk about why we like this app, at <http://youtu.be/IKslFZdj1Ak>.

Details: Little Bit Studio, LLC, www.littlebitstudio.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad (85 MB). Teaches/Purpose: math, logic, fine motor coordination, classification, patterns, memory. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 5 stars. Entry date: 7/24/2012. [WB]

Chalk Walk

Billed as "a game of trace & chase for your hands" this strange app is designed to provide fine motor practice for holding a pencil.

To complete a series of progressively leveled mazes, you have to hold two fingers about an inch apart, and then follow a line. The more you play, the harder the challenge. If you complete the maze and stay close to the line, you hear letters that lead to a virtual sticker.

Management options include the ability to change between left and right hands. You can also toggle the music or sounds on or off.

The idea is that there is some transfer between finger position on the glass screen and holding a pencil (or chalk). We're less than convinced -- why not just use a stylus in the first place? As a fine motor skill alone, the app has more validity, despite the fact that your fingers block the path of the line. Created by KBooM! Games who worked with Francis Judd, a kindergarten teacher from Chicago.

Details: Mrs. Judd's Games, www.mrsjuddsgames.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 4-10. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: fine motor development, penmanship. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.6 stars. Entry date: 7/23/2012. [WB]

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



Ease of Use	10	100%
Educational	10	
Entertaining	10	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	10	



Ease of Use	8	72%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	6	
Good Value	7	





Elmo Visual Presenter MO-1

Need to show off an app to a large group, along with a live view of your finger on the screen? Then you need a good document camera.

This is made easier by a new line of projectors like the The Visual Presenter MO-1 from ELMO USA (www.elmoussa.com). The folding neck fits inside the base so that the entire camera can fit inside your handbag, not counting the power adapter. It also has a microphone, so it could work as a Skype station.

Features include a five megapixel camera, an LED document light, 8X digital zoom and high definition images, sent through the a micro-HDMI out port. Unlike previous ELMO cameras, there is no picture lag. The user-friendly device features an HDMI input/output, USB power capability, 5 Megapixel CMOS sensor, 30 fps (full-motion) when used in 720P, a 300° rotatable camera head, a 2 inch close-up projection and an SD card slot for image storage. The projector can work with a wireless tablet (<http://www.elmoussa.com/cra-1-wireless-slatetablet>).

Drawbacks include a tiny control panel that makes you wish you had smaller fingers and better eyes. In addition, the HDMI video out port uses a non-standard micro HDMI cable that is not included. You can purchase one online for about \$20. The VGA port worked perfectly. The MO-1 is available in pink, white or black and sells for \$400.

See also the Epson DC-06 Document Camera, for about the same price <http://bit.ly/LRT8y0>

Details: Elmo USA Corp., www.elmoussa.com. Price: \$400. Ages: NA. Platform: Document Camera. Teaches/Purpose: a presentation accessory. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 6/12/2012. [WB]

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



Explorer Game Cartridge: Phineas and Ferb

This arcade-style game cartridge is designed for new LeapPad and Leapster Explorers (both this year and last year). It will not work on the original Leapster.

In the game, Phineas and Ferb decide to build the ultimate water balloon launcher, but Dr. Doofensmirtz has other plans. Activities include: Experiment with Electricity - children can complete circuits with different materials that conduct and insulate electricity; Thwart Evil with Simple Machines - learn about different types of simple machines and use them to guide Agent P to Dr. Doofensmirtz' hiding place; Rebuild Engineering Blueprints - children must use logic and spatial reasoning skills to piece together blueprints for the ultimate water balloon launcher; and Get Ready for Launch with Math - lets children practice addition, subtraction and multiplication skills to power up the balloon launcher and to deactivate the stinkbots.

All in all, this is a fun cartridge with a variety of things to do.

Details: Leapfrog, www.leapfrog.com. Price: \$25. Ages: 5-8. Platform: LeapPad and Leapster Explorer. Teaches/Purpose: science, logic, reasoning, mathematics. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 7/25/2012. [WB]

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



"Build electrical circuits and simple machines!"

Futaba Classroom Games

Turn your iPad into a small Smart table with this quiz game, for up to four players at once.

Each player takes a seat around the iPad and taps in to start. A picture or math equation is shown on a spinning turntable in the middle of the screen. Each player is presented with a choice of four answers. The first player to touch the correct word wins a point. Win 3 rounds to get a Futaba (a small 'seedling').

The app features a number of learning sets, including Dolch Sight Vocabulary Words, Subtraction, Multiplication, Telling Time, Currency, Countries and Flags. You can also build your own game content. Our testers liked this app. It provides different challenge levels, and the action is fast. It is also possible to play with any number of players -- up to four.

Details: INKids Pty. Ltd., www.inkids.com.au. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 4-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: math facts, reading, money sight words. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 7/16/2012. [CC]

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





Gems and Jewels

Similar in design to "The Elements" (one of the first iPad apps, also by Touch Press), Gems and Jewels lets you explore the large collection of glittering treasures on display at the Field Museum in Chicago.

The app starts with a screen full of highly illustrated gems that slowly spin, 360 degrees, on a single access plane. Because the screen is black and the light comes from one direction (we think) the gems look extremely pretty as they turn. You learn that you can double tap any item to view it individually, or pinch to zoom in for a closer look at any item. There are two ways to adjust the angle -- either by swiping with a finger, or by tilting the screen, a new feature for Touch Press. When in the extreme close up view, rotation is reduced to 90 degree angles. Other features include swipe-to-flip text boxes (like looking on the back of the box to learn more) and a "life size" button that shrinks or expands the gems in proper perspective. The reference value of this title is enhanced by the searchable index and updated links to the WolframAlpha encyclopedia.

Content includes 165 types of gems, each with as many as six examples. While this title feels comprehensive, some features could be considered missing. There are no prices listed, so we have no way of knowing the relative value between quartz and diamonds (both look rather similar, after all). There are no game or application features. In addition, we were wondering why gold was included in a title called "gems and jewels." The answer is that the content in this app comes directly from a book by The University of Chicago Press by Lance Grande and Allison Augustyn, that features the gems on display at The Field Museum in Chicago.

As a specialized reference, this app is the best in it's class. It should be on any middle or high school science teacher's iPad.

Details: Touch Press, www.touchpress.com. Price: \$13.99. Ages: 10-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: science. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.9 stars. Entry date: 7/23/2012. [WB]

Great Cookie Thief, The

Featuring clever dialog, high quality cartoon-style illustrations with Sesame Street characters, and good honky-tonk piano music to boot, this is a 12 screen iPad-based retelling of the 1977 Sesame Street book by Emily Perl Kingsley (illustrated by Michael Smollin).

The setting is an Old West town plagued by a mystery bandit who steals cookies. When the town's citizens spot a new guy in town, who looks suspiciously like the cookie thief, they compare his characteristics to those features in a wanted poster. The app encourages the user to piece together clues and use evidence to solve the mystery.

The story is narrated well by David Rudman who is the voice of Cookie Monster on Sesame Street. Drawbacks include slow transitions between pages, and limited support for non-readers (e.g., there is no option to touch to hear specific words).

A "Create" mode allows users to create, print and share unique "Wanted" posters using a virtual photo booth and dozens of paintbrushes and stickers.

Other content includes 22 "quick tips" that are included in the Parent Notes section of the app, which is accessed by tapping the parent-child icon. While light on the learning, this fun story stays true to the original print edition of the story.

Details: Callaway Digital Arts, www.callaway.com. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad, iTouch. Teaches/Purpose: classification, language, reading, noticing attributes. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 7/16/2012. [WB]

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



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





Ice is Nice

Here's another solid addition to the Oceanhouse Media's "The Cat in the Hat's Learning Library." Ice is Nice is designed to introduce basic science concepts, and reading. In the story, you climb aboard the SS Ice Chopper for an expedition to the North and South Poles to explore Seussian depictions of geography and native animals. Children can touch interactive diagrams to explore topics including how the Earth moves around the sun and affects the seasons, or how specially designed hairs keep the polar bear warm.

There are two ways to read this omBook: Read to Me lets you listen to the narrated story with words highlighted as they are read; and Read it Myself lets you read the book in its traditional form. Other features include animated objects and instant glossary words; individual word highlighting (as the story is read) and words that zoom up when pictures are touched. Weaknesses include an inability to easily move around such a long book (e.g., to get to a specific page in the middle, you have to flip through every page). See the CTR review here: <http://youtu.be/qMWyB6JmcfY>

Details: Oceanhouse Media, . Price: \$5.99. Ages: 5-10. Platform: iPad.

Teaches/Purpose: reading, science, ecology. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 7/18/2012. [WB]

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



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

Jazzy ABC

Jazzy ABC turns an alphabet line into an introduction to jazz, where a A stands for accordion, and Z gives you a Zither. The hand-drawn graphics aren't real, but the music is. Children press a letter to see a related instrument (e.g., T = Trumpet) which is depicted via a hand-drawn graphic that is less than realistic. While the graphics are simple, the sounds are the real deal, with two musical phrases per instrument. This is especially important given the music-related orientation of this app. The graphics could be called a bit dry compared to apps like ABC music, which uses real photos.

Besides letting children freely explore the alphabet line, the app features two other modes of play: a dry letter quiz with the instruments, and the ability to take a photo with characters from the app. All in all, this is a solid app, minus the sizzle. See <http://youtu.be/mtNL1kRxU1w>.

Details: The Melody Book, www.themelodybook.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: music (instrument sounds and names), letter recognition. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 7/16/2012. [CC]



Ease of Use	8	76%
Battery Life	7	
Durability	6	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	9	

KRYOS Touchscreen Internet Tabet

Functional but clunky (compared to the iPad) the KRYOS Touchscreen Internet Tablet comes from a family of six Android 4.0 OS "Ice Cream Sandwich" tablets. On first glance, you'd think you were looking at an iPad, until you try to turn it on, which involves sliding a screen lock into place.

This is an affordable tablet (about 1/2 the cost of an iPad). The model we tested -- the \$279 9.7 inch MID9742 has 8GB of built-in storage, and can be expanded to 32GB by way of an SD card. The cost for expansion would be about \$20.

Drawbacks include a noticeable lag between loading videos from Youtube; uneven responsiveness while playing games; and excessive vibration when playing music. We also noticed that turning the tablet causes the entire screen to go black for approximately one second, before properly orienting itself. The feel of the device left our testers concerned about durability.

Nice touches include a camera that allows you to switch between 1 megapixel or 2 easily. Also the zoom control on the camera is clear and easy to operate. While the dual speakers located on the back of the tablet next to the camera did cause excessive vibration, they produced quality sound. We really liked that the tablet has HDMI, mini USB and Memory Card ports along with a single headphone jack and DC IN 5v efficiently placed. The battery life during our testing was average to above average based upon the number of apps open.

All in all, this could be a consideration for those in search of an Android viable entry into the market.

Details: Coby Electronics Corp., . Price: \$179 - \$299. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Andoid (MID9742) . Teaches/Purpose: An Android Tablet. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.8 stars. Entry date: 7/17/2012. [CC]





Left Right Pup

Well intended but poorly, designed this app is designed to provide timed practice on the concept and vocabulary of a common early childhood concept -- left and right.

There are two settings: a park and a beach. You are asked help a character go either left or right to collect a reward sticker. The instruction is presented verbally, and it is looped against background music. If you move in the correct direction, you have the chance to capture a reward sticker that floats by. You have to hurry, or it disappears. Sometimes the sticker earned for moving right moves left across the screen, confusing both the task and the concept (why not lean left or right, too, or at least have this option?). There are no control buttons on the home page for turning off the background music which would have been nice.

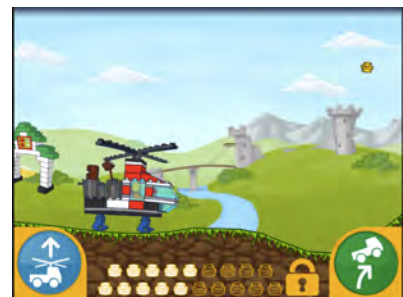
This product is a missed opportunity to teach an important concept. Created in Unity for iOS.

Details: Mrs. Judd's Games, www.mrsjuddsgames.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 4-7. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: left and right. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2.3 stars. Entry date: 7/23/2012. [CC]

Ease of Use	5	46%
Educational	6	
Entertaining	5	
Design Features	3	
Good Value	4	



Ease of Use	9	84%
Educational	6	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	10	



LEGO 4+

Build your own truck or helicopter of pre-combined LEGO parts, and then steer it over a maze-like side-scrolling scene to see how many points you can score. The more you score, the more parts (and attributes) you can unlock. There's a limited amount of content.

The catch? To build your child's interest in LEGO kit 6166, so that he or she will want one next time you're in the toy store. Think of this app as an appvertorial, or perhaps an appmercial.

Details: LEGO Americas, www.lego.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 4-7. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: some logic and timing. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 7/18/2012. [WB]

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



LEGO Creationary

This is a timed guessing game, that lets you earn points by correctly identifying which object is being constructed (out of Lego blocks, naturally) on the screen. The sooner you make a correct choice, the more points you earn.

There are six categories of items to identify -- creatures, places, things, costumes, random, and random with double points; the more you play, the greater the challenge. In addition, there are different "packs" of Lego that you can toggle on or off depending on the season.

Options let you turn on/off the background music. This is a fun social game because of the timed element. Testers said "I like the swipe to roll the die, and the depth perception effect used by the die." Because the app is free, what's the catch? To promote awareness in the LEGO kits that are used to make the models. See the video review at http://youtu.be/MPy_PCtMYII

Details: LEGO Americas, . Price: \$free. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: perspectives, logic, classification, memory, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 7/18/2012. [CC]





Little Digits

Here's an app that is worth the download, if for not other reason than to sample the innovative interactive counting method. It uses the multi-touch screen to help children think concretely about sums, using their actual fingertips.

Here's how it works. Little Digits displays numerals on the screen by detecting how many fingers are currently in contact with the glass. Lift up one finger, and the count goes down by one. Add three touches, get a numeral that is three greater.

The app features games that introduce addition and subtraction calculations where your child can work out the answer using multi-touch finger detection. While innovative in design, the app is limited in content.

Features include Counting to 10 with your fingers; Number order; 0 to 10 and back; Addition; and Subtraction. There are no in-app purchases, advertising, or external links.

Details: Cowly Owl, www.cowlyowl.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: numbers, addition, subtraction. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 7/17/2012. [WB]

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



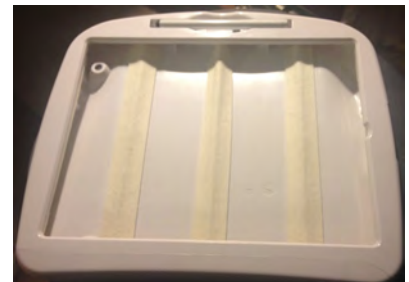
MOBI Case for iPad 2

Good in theory, but designed with one significant flaw, this hard plastic case is designed to protect an iPad in a classroom. The case is based on the Mobi mobile interactive whiteboard design from eInstruction. It has grips on the side and top and a magnetic stylus that snaps into a holder that is mounted directly above the tablet screen for quick storage.

Other features includes a Kensington Security Slot (cable not included) and openings to the camera and sync dock. Unfortunately, the case blocks the two volume control buttons, which can be frustrating.

Details: eInstruction, www.einstruction.com. Price: \$59. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: a peripheral for iPad. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.7 stars. Entry date: 7/26/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	74%
Durability	9	
Worry Free	7	
Design Features	6	
Good Value	6	





Monsters vs. Superheroes Comic Book Maker

This third creativity app from Duck Duck Moose lets you make your own animated, self-narrated puppet shows. Like Draw and Tell and Princess, this app is easy to use and powerful. The large collection of animated stickers that include noncommercial characters, cartoon-like items and open ended drawing tools.

The tool kits and features are similar to two previous Duck Duck Moose titles: Draw and Tell HD and Princess Fairy Tale Maker. As with these titles, this new app lets you record your own voice as you move the characters or objects around the screen. There's also a coloring-book-like set of pages where you can touch-and-fill line drawings with a rotating palette of colors.

Characters include Captain Banana Man, Super Dog and Big Foot, each with quotes and sound effects and a wide variety of objects that can be resized. We noticed some weapons that might raise concerns for some adults; these include some knives and a bow and arrow. Nearly all content is best described as playful super-hero themes.

There's plenty of content. We counted 27 background scenes (e.g., skyscrapers, a space ship, the moon, wild west), 170+ animated stickers with sound effects; 29 crayons and 29 colored pencils. These provide support for one of the most important features -- the ability to record your own voice. Minor drawbacks include an inability to rotate stickers, as well as a size limit. In addition there are no sound effects or background music options (you could record your own, if you wanted).

Projects can be saved and then combined into a single timeline, making it possible to stitch different projects together before saving to your photo gallery. The bottom line? This app offers a nice variety of stickers and art. If you don't mind making your own sounds, you can't go wrong for \$1.99. This is the fourteenth app released by Duck Duck Moose.

Details: Duck Duck Moose Design, www.duckduckmoosedesign.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: drawing, creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 8/1/2012. [WB]

Mulberry FingerPlays

Want to learn some fingerplays? Designed for parents, caregivers and teachers of young children, this app teaches 5 songs and corresponding fingerplays by way of video examples. The videos are by Kathy Reid Naiman, a Canadian children's entertainer. Note that the first five songs are free; additional songs can be unlocked for \$4.99.

While the app looks like it is for children, it is not. The idea is that a teacher could use this app to learn the fingerplays. It is limited in interactive features (hence the lower rating).

Features include two modes: Instruction or Demo. In Instruction you can watch the videos performing solo, or in a classroom setting with young children, respectively. Note that each video is downloaded the first time, which requires an internet connection and causes a short delay. Naiman's style includes plenty of physical expressiveness, to keep things interesting. While Mulberry FingerPlays is specifically marketed for adults, we can see teachers and parents using the app along with their children. We especially could visualize Early Childhood teacher training programs and parenting classes incorporating Mulberry FingerPlays to educate adults. An Android version is expected.

Details: Mulberry Media Interactive, <http://mulberrymedia.ca>. Price: \$free with in-app sales. Ages: NA. Platform: iPhone, iPad, Android. Teaches/Purpose: Adults songs and fingerplays to enhance early childhood learning. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.1 stars. Entry date: 7/25/2012. [CC]

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



Ease of Use	8	63%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	N	
Design Features	4	
Good Value	6	





Sonnets by William Shakespeare, The

Ready to sample from a buffet of masterfully spoken English? The Sonnets by William Shakespeare is waiting, providing you don't mind the \$14 price of admission.

The heart of the app is a collection of 154 readings performed by famous actors and Shakespeare scholars. As you listen, you can watch the score of the Sonnet which has been synchronized to the reading, line by line.

Additional content includes interviews with scholars such as Katherine Duncan-Jones, James Shapiro and Henry Woudhuysen. You can also see a copy of the Sonnets as they first appeared when published in 1609. You can also add your own notes, which can be shared via various social media outlets.

Every so often we review an app that makes us wish we were back in high school or college taking classes that we admittedly struggled with at the time. Knowing we would have greater understanding and interest in a subject if we had exposure to certain apps that utilize the technological advances of today excites us for modern students. The Sonnets by William Shakespeare is one such app.

Details: Touch Press, www.touchpress.com. Price: \$13.99. Ages: 10-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: Shakespeare sonnets, reading, language, English, poetry, poem. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 7/18/2012. [CC]

Sushi Monster

Turn your iPad or iPhone into a fast-paced addition and multiplication math facts machine, with facts served up by the Sushi Monster. Your job? To touch numbers that add up to the Sushi Monster's sum before time runs out. The better you do, the harder the challenge. This free app is one of 18 games that are part of a larger Scholastic math curriculum called Fastt Math Next Generation.

Content covers addition and multiplication math problems. The idea is to build "math fluency" through basic facts. There are seven levels for Addition; five for multiplication.

Features include the ability to track a single child's progress over time. There are also controls over music, narration and the ability to turn on/off the timer. Details at <http://scholastic.com/fasttmath/nextgeneration>

Details: Scholastic, Inc., . Price: \$free. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: math facts in English, Chinese, Czech, Dutch, French, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Swedish and Turkish. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 7/18/2012. [WB]

Ten Giggly Gorillas

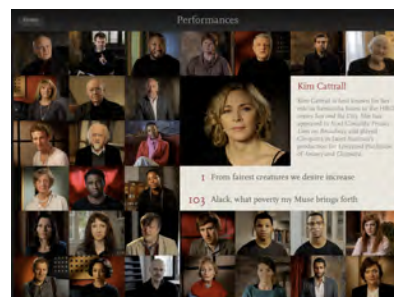
Ten Giggly Gorillas is like Five Little Monkeys. The story is enjoyable and the optional Read to Me narration by Angela Catterns is well done.

Young children who tested the app laughed at appropriate times and quickly picked up the counting down concept. There is a separate Monkey Memory game featuring the characters from the story.

The main feature of Ten Giggly Gorillas is the ability to tickle the gorillas in order to make them fall, which did not work well. Children became frustrated when the gorilla they were trying to tickle did not respond. Sometimes, pages would turn instead. The arrow to turn the page on the bottom right of the screen also blended in with the background colors which made it hard to find.

Details: Wasabi Productions Pty Ltd, www.wasabipro.com.au. Price: 3.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: counting, math. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2.9 stars. Entry date: 1/29/2012. [CC]

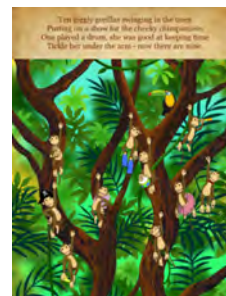
Ease of Use	10	96%
Educational	10	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	10	



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



Ease of Use	5	58%
Educational	6	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	5	
Good Value	6	





Tens Frame

A tens frame is a simple yet very effective tool for playing with numbers up to five and ten. This app provides a tens frame and ten counters, five blue and five purple.

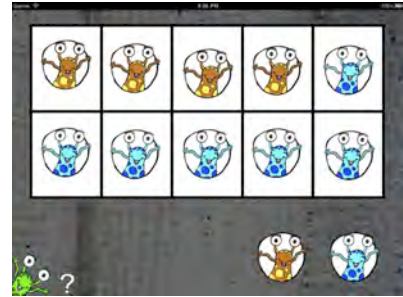
To an adult, the concept of tens frames may seem very simplistic and unexciting. To a young child, tens frames contribute to a growing sense of numbers; and a better foundation of mathematical understanding.

While this is certainly a valid concept, this app treats it as a tool for a teacher to demonstrate the concept, rather than a setting for a child to play with the underlying math.

Make sure you take the time to read a clear description of this app before you buy. If so, Tens Frame could be a valuable addition to your app library.

Details: Rubber Chicken Apps, www.rubberchickenapps.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: math, counting, base ten. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.6 stars. Entry date: 3/25/2012. [CC]

Ease of Use	9	72%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	5	
Design Features	5	
Good Value	8	



Ease of Use	6	54%
Educational	6	
Entertaining	5	
Design Features	5	
Good Value	5	



Word Tower

Word Tower is a noble attempt to teach Pre-K to 2nd grade spelling and phonics but falls short of meeting valid educational goals.

The theme of building a tower is valid. You use a crane to stack a set of words, but the sequence of words is odd and is not developmentally appropriate. In addition, the phonetics were not always correct. At times there were more than one correct word ending given, but when a child created an actual word they were told they were incorrect.

The testers wanted more control of the crane arm, and recommended adding tilt-to-move control. This would make the process of playing with word meaning more fun. The bottom line: this is a good idea that has been poorly implemented.

Details: 52apps, www.52apps.com. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: spelling, reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2.7 stars. Entry date: 7/24/2012. [CC]



Future Releases & Updates

AUGUST 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.

Elmo's Musical Monsterpiece; The Videogame

Featuring Elmo, Abby Cadabby and Count von count, this game is designed to get children up and dancing. The game introduces children to instrument names and sounds, while helping them practice early math skills through music. Children can play instruments and mix sounds together to create songs, and the game difficulty adapts to your child's level. The music in the game is performed by Ozomatli, a Los Angeles band, and includes some of their original songs. The game features a Parent's Page where you can review games your child has played, as well as curriculum goals. You can also customize up to three profiles and set limits for the number of games played. Developed by Griptonite Games for Warner Brothers.



Details: Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, Inc., www.warnerbros.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 3-6. Platform: Wii, Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: music, instruments, dance. Entry date: 7/2/2012.

Furby (2012 Edition)

It's baaack.... Furby, that is. After 14 years and a lengthy hibernation, Hasbro is reviving one of its most famous toys for this holiday, with new technology, a hefty price tag (\$60) and an app connection.



This is the most huggable Furby ever, with fur that hides embedded touch sensors that can tell when he's being hugged or petted. A large pair of backlit LCD eyes sit behind mechanical eyelids that can blink, look around, or respond to sounds picked up by Furby's onboard microphone. According to Hasbro engineer Don Cameron, "this is the most subtle AI inside a toy." For example, Furby can differentiate between your spoken language, another Furby, or the rhythm of a song for dancing. High frequency audio codes make it possible for a Furby to "talk" with your iPad or another Furby, say, to ask for some food.

In case you missed the 1998 Furby phenomena, the toy's biggest selling feature is that it develops over time, not unlike a child. The development starts with the unboxing and continues for months until Furby starts speaking English. Put another way, the more you pull Furby's tail or hang him upside down, the faster the next stage might come. There is no off switch — the only way to make his random babbling stop is to remove one of the four AA batteries. Or, you can wait it out for two minutes, which is one of the reasons our last Furby ended up living in the attic. Consider yourself warned.

Details: Hasbro, Inc., . Price: \$59.99. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: . Entry date: 5/31/2012.

Gogo Explorer

Instead of just taking a picture or video on a field trip, this app lets you recreate, collaborate and share your experience in the form of a portable field trip on your iPad. The "patent-pending platform features a 2 ½ dimension drawing canvas" allowing you to choose a scrollable background and drag-and-drop objects to recreate your favorite field trip.



For example, if you saw a butterfly but it flew by too fast to take a picture, you could drag a butterfly from your object library, drop in onto your scene, pinch it to the size you want and tap on the color palette. You could also add flowers and bees to your scene. Each object selected provides both visual and voice feedback to reinforce the spelling and pronunciation of the object. As you create, you earn points with the Activity Wizard. When you publish your field trip to the community, the total points you earned can earn you a spot on the Gogo Explorer Leaderboard. We did not test this app.

Details: Hagend Labs, www.Kidsfuntrip.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 0-7. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: a utility for field trips. Entry date: 12/29/2011.



LeapPad2

This year's upgraded LeapPad, called the LeapPad2 Explorer, looks and feels the same as last year's LeapPad. But it has more powerful innards and it acts like it. Besides starting faster, the apps feel more responsive. There are now two cameras (both front and back) and both are higher resolution than the meager camera offering in last year's LeapPad. But the resolution is limited and videos are limited to 20 seconds. This LeapPad also has twice as much memory -- 4 GB vs last year's 2 GB.

Leapfrog PR also stated that the LeapPad2 has improved battery life (a feature we did not test) and is compatible with a new internal battery system and recharger pack that is available separately for \$40.

Other notes:

- Speakers aren't bad but don't compare to the iPad.
- The accelerometers work, but felt sluggish in the Disney Phineas and Ferb game.
- The mono-touch membrane screen is responsive. But it is mono-touch.
- The video and photo manager is well designed. It is easy for a child to find their

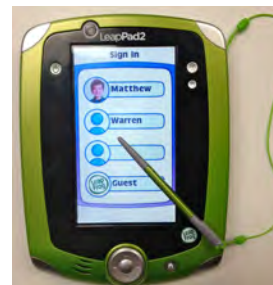
photos and videos and delete them, if necessary, to free memory.

When you turn on the LeapPad2 for the first time, you create one of three profiles. In other words, LeapPad can have three separate identities in case you have different children using the same device. Each is assigned an age, from Pre-K to grade 6.

Getting more apps requires connecting the LeapPad to a Mac or Windows computer. Children are asked frequently to get a parent to connect the LeapPad to a computer. Free content includes a music player with five LeapFrog Learning Songs, a new Cartoon Director creativity app, an Art Studio creativity app, the Pet Pad writing app and choice of an additional app.

The Cartoon Director lets children make and narrate their own puppet shows. LeapPad2 is compatible with LeapFrog Explorer cartridges and LeapFrog App Center digital content.

Details: LeapFrog, . Price: \$100. Ages: 3-9. Platform: LeapPad. Teaches/Purpose: readiness skills, math, reading, art, photography. Entry date: 6/19/2012.



LeapsterGS

Not many things get thinner and faster as they age, but that nicely sums up the LeapsterGS. It also comes with a slightly larger color mono-touch screen (though still small) and -- for the first time in history, both a camera and accelerometers, for motion input.

Other features include two GB of memory and a \$40 "recharger pack," available separately in case you don't want to use the 4 AA batteries. Onboard games include Escape of the Sillies (an augmented reality app) and Pet Pad (for writing). Leapfrog offers a free app, as long as you connect the Leapster to a computer, install the content management software (like iTunes) and sign up for an account.

This Leapster is compatible with LeapFrog Explorer cartridges as well as the LeapFrog App Center content, although the latter is limited by internal memory. Downloadable apps cost \$5/each; game cartridges are \$25. Coming August 1, 2012.

Details: Leapfrog, www.leapfrog.com. Price: \$70. Ages: 5-9. Platform: Leapster Explorer. Teaches/Purpose: school readiness, creativity, math, reading. Entry date: 6/19/2012.





Little Monster at School

Don't call this new series "The Living Books" because Houghton Mifflin now owns the brand. The new brand is called "Wanderful." There are three titles: Little Monster at School (Mercer Meyer's Little Monster goes to school, exploring subjects and making friends with Yally, an often difficult fellow student); The Tortoise and the Hare (a modernized edition of the classic Aesop's Fable that illustrates that slow and steady wins the race); and Arthur's Teacher Trouble (Marc Brown's Arthur has problems with Mr. Ratburn. Can he win the Spelling Bee?).

Additional titles based on the late Jan & Stan Berenstain's Berenstain Bears, Marc Brown's Arthur, and others.

Each Wanderful app is available in three versions: a standard, single language edition is \$4.99 (and extra languages can be added for \$1.99 each); the premium version features multiple languages plus a classroom activities guide and the right to perpetual updates for \$7.99. Each title will be released with a free version, presenting one interactive story page.

Introduced in 1992 by Broderbund Software, Living Books became best-selling early reading experiences. Twenty years later, Wanderful has assembled key members of the original Living Books team, including creator Mark Schlichting. Mickey W. Mantle, President of Wanderful was the former CTO of Broderbund.

Each app includes the classic "read to me" mode, so children can watch and listen to the story play automatically. Wanderful apps will be available for the iPad, iPhone and iPod Touch on iTunes and the Mac versions will be on the Mac App Store later this month. Android and Windows versions are planned.

See the YouTube (promotional video) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQOfhqCGyUs>.

Details: Wanderful, www.wonderfulstorybooks.com. Price: \$5 and up. Ages: 2-up. Platform: Mac OSX, iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language. Entry date: 6/18/2012.



Magic School Bus Oceans (Leapfrog Explorer)

This cartridge-based game for the Leapster and Leapster 2 will be available for retail in August at \$25. LeapFrog will also offer The Magic School Bus: Dino Shuffle for download in the LeapFrog App Center for \$7.50.

In this activity, children explore facts about ocean life by way of trivia challenges and seven games. They can earn badges which can be redeemed for things like bus decorations or a customized Magic School Bus driver's license – through the LeapFrog Connect Application.

Details: Scholastic, Inc., www.scholastic.com. Price: \$25. Ages: 5-8. Platform: Smart Toy, Leapster. Teaches/Purpose: science. Entry date: 6/14/2012.



Mathway.com

High school math teachers, take note -- students have a free resource that can do their homework for them. Mathway is a free, ad supported web-based math problem solving service. Note that the base service is free, but you can purchase additional tutorial help.

The site lets you enter a math problem, and see it solved. The site is powered by Solved! Technology, the software product line that provides step-by-step solutions to user-entered math problems. Mathway claims to have solved over 100,000,000 problems in basic math, pre-Algebra, Algebra, Trigonometry, Precalculus, Calculus, Statistics, Finite Math, Linear Algebra, and Chemistry.

There are different modes. You can solve problems with step-by-step work and explanations; get example problems and solutions; or generate graphs. The Step-by-step subscriptions are available for 1 day (\$4.99), 7 days (\$9.99), 180 days (\$39.99), and 365 days (\$49.99). Also available is the Solved! software that can be installed on any Windows computer. Prices are \$39.99 for first subject and \$19.99 for each additional subject. An Android app version is also available.

Details: Bagatrix, . Price: \$4.99 & up. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Internet Site, Windows, Mac OSX, Android. Teaches/Purpose: Math: algebra, trigonometry, statistics, calculus. Entry date: 7/18/2012.





Smart As

Sony calls this "next generation brain training" by way of 20 games that are meant to "give your brain a workout." The more you play, the more content you unlock.

There are four categories including both language and logic. The games look a lot like Nintendo's Brain Age, only results can be saved on facebook or twitter. See preview at See <http://youtu.be/cG5XbGoSGVo>

Details: Sony Computer Entertainment America Inc., . Price: \$40. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Vita. Teaches/Purpose: spelling, logic, memory, fine motor. Entry date: 7/20/2012.



Speakaboos (www.speakaboos.com)

This is a subscription based online library designed with the help of Dr. Alice Wilder (producer of Blue's Clues).

The website features interactive storybooks that are designed to "get children to read, play and discover educational digital stories and accompanying activities in a safe and ad-free environment." Topics range from fairytales to sports stories. You get ten stories for free, but then must pay a monthly subscription for more. We looked at one of the sing-a-longs, and the content looks good although not very interactive. Prices are \$4.99/month or \$49.99/year.

Details: Speakaboos, . Price: \$4.99/month. Ages: 4-8. Platform: Internet Site, Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language. Entry date: 6/7/2012.



TV Games Zombie Hunter Video Game

Based on the AMC television series, The Walking Dead, this gun-shaped controller plugs directly into your TV. No game console or software needed. In the game, you travel through forests, desolate outskirts, and an abandoned metropolis as you blast the walking dead. The included gun (controller) features pump and shoot shotgun action. The package includes gun/game controller and a wireless sensor bar. Runs on 3 AAA batteries. See also Big Buck Hunter Pro TV Game. Note that the packaging says ages 8+ but rating is Teen. How does that make sense?

Details: Jakks Pacific, Inc., www.jakks.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 10-up. Platform: TV. Teaches/Purpose: fine motor coordination, shooting. Entry date: 7/19/2012.

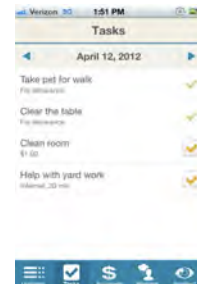
Tycoon (www.tycoon.com)

Designed to be a cloud-based financial services platform for families, Tycoon intends to help parents manage a child's money-related behaviors. Specifically, these are earning, saving, giving and spending. A reward system works with Amazon.com so that children can purchase real items for completing tasks or goals. Tycoon gets a percentage of each sale.

While in a child's account, a parent can assign jobs, track progress, pay allowance and set goals. Because this is cloud based, these management tasks can take place from any computer screen or smart phone, say, when in the toy aisle. The app is based on real money and it makes real money through the Amazon.com relationship.

Tycoon comes from two investors, Mark Bruinooge and Doug Lebda.

Details: Tycoon, www.tycoon.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 8-15. Platform: Mac OSX, iPad, Windows. Teaches/Purpose: money management. Entry date: 7/18/2012.





Vocabulary.com

Vocabulary.com models each person's abilities in order to serve up an individualized word-learning experience, drawn from a 90,000 word list. It uses a technology called Adaptive Vocabulary Instruction (AVI) to develop a personalized list of words to master. Because each word is used in different contexts, it is impossible to rely on rote memorization to get through the exercises. For example, consider how Vocabulary.com handles the words "censor" and "censure" from the following excerpt.

"A censor hides information. A censure is harsh criticism. They're both judgments. Foul language, nudity, and revolutionary ideas are often censored, or hidden, by some gang who's in charge, such as a government, the FCC, or your parents when they kick you out of the room for the best part of the movie. Censor can act as a verb or a noun:

But Iran routinely censors the Internet using sophisticated filtering technology. (Wall Street Journal)

The catalog reproduces a news photograph of "beach censors" arresting women in such offending garb. (New York Times)

Censure is a strong dislike. When you strongly disapprove of something, usually in an official capacity, you are censuring that something, like when the student council censures your idea to have a pool party in December."

Features include a dictionary that uses predictive technology to display definitions. Content includes "100 million example sentences" drawn from texts. The free service is supported by advertising.

Details: Thinkmap, Inc., www.vocabulary.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 11-up. Platform: Internet Site, Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: reading, spelling. Entry date: 11/1/2011.