

# Children's TECHNOLOGY REVIEW

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Hello, I'm Fraser.

ON THE COVER  
**Rounds: Franklin Frog**  
by Nosy Crow lets children explore the life cycle of a frog. See page 17.

*How to use abstract, symbolic screens to*

# Get Real!

## A roundup of apps & sites to help children learn about the real world

### Children's Technology Review

September 2012

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### Abstract Screens Build "Thought Bridges" to the Concrete World

In this issue of CTR, we're getting a little bit theoretical by considering the fantastic interplay that goes on inside a child's head related to the construction of thoughts. We then rethink how the iPad has influenced this relationship and provide a list of apps to support this process. Page 4.

### LittleClickers: Exploring Mars

Is Mars really red? (Not really). Is it larger or smaller than the Earth? (Smaller). Is it warmer or colder than the Earth? (Much colder). How many moons does Mars have? (Two). How long does it take a radio signal to get from the Earth to the Curiosity rover? (Between 5 to 20 minutes). Could you breathe Martian air? (No way). Still curious about Mars? Turn to page 3 where you can find some links and videos to help you follow what we are learning about this amazing planet.

### Staff Update

We're pleased to have Bob Tedeschi join us as a Contributing Editor. Bob has written for The New York Times since 1998, and from 2008 until this summer reviewed apps as the creator and author of the Times' weekly App Smart column. So what does Bob know about children's apps? Three years ago, as an editorial experiment, Bob helped to create an app under the pseudonym Craig Fusco in order to better understand the app creation and development process. The result was the amazing **Bobo Explores Light**, <http://bit.ly/pU8Cgt> that caught our attention both as the winner of the 2011 KAPi Prize, and Apple's highly regarded Apple Design Award



Bob Tedeschi, Photo by Sara Barrett

<https://developer.apple.com/wwdc/awards>. When we learned that Bob Tedeschi was actually Craig Fusco, we invited him to tell his story at the annual Dust or Magic Institute, and also to begin sharing his expertise with interactive design by way of reviews in CTR. Bob is currently on hiatus from technology reporting with the Times, and as with other CTR contributors, any potential conflicts will be disclosed in the context of the articles or reviews.

Don't Miss the 12th  
Annual Children's  
Interactive Media  
Design Institute

Dust or Magic

Review this year's "dust" and the "magic" products

**Where?** Lambertville, New Jersey. **When?** November 4-6

**Who?** Chris Crowell, CTR; Drew Davidson of CMU; Barbara Chamberlin, NMSU; Chip Donohue, Erikson Institute; Daren Carstens; Claire Green, Parents' Choice; Benj Heuston, President, Waterford; David Kleeman; Jason Krogh, zinc Roe; Frank Migliorelli, migidea.com/NYU; Robin Raskin; Don Rawitsch, Co-Creator, Oregon Trail; Bob Tedeschi; Scott Traylor, 360KID; Jesse Schell, CMU; and Kate Wilson, Nosy Crow.

**I Want to Register!** Check seat status at [www.dustormagic.com](http://www.dustormagic.com)  
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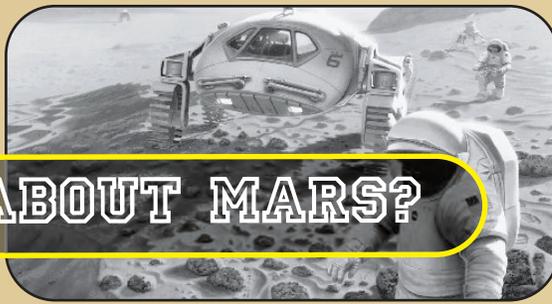
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# CURIOUS ABOUT MARS?



LittleClickers is made possible by  
Safe, fun Internet  
explorations  
for children  
**COMPUTER  
EXPLORERS™**

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**I**s Mars really red? (Not really). Is it larger or smaller than the Earth? (Smaller). Is it warmer or colder than the Earth? (Much colder). How many moons does Mars have? (Two). How long does it take a radio signal to get from the Earth to the Curiosity rover? (Between 5 to 20 minutes). Could you breathe Martian air? (No way). Still curious about Mars? Here are some links and videos to help you follow what we are learning about this amazing planet.

**1. Is Mars really red?** According to <http://1.usa.gov/NbsP9y> the red color associated with Mars comes from iron oxide (or rust). On the surface, however, Mars has more of a butterscotch color.

**2. Is the climate on Mars more like a hot summer or a cold winter?** The New York Times <http://nyti.ms/R1CNFy> reports the Curiosity Rover has measured swings in temperature from minus 103 to 28 degrees Fahrenheit. That's a very very cold winter. Brrr!

**3. If you were to step onto Mars without a space suit, would you survive?** According to Science Clarified <http://bit.ly/TG2xvg> you'd be dead in 15 seconds. First the low pressure would make your body fluids boil. Next, you'd freeze, even on the warmest day which won't get above freezing (see <http://1.usa.gov/OL1fM7>). If you were still alive, you'd suffocate because there is no oxygen. If you could survive that, you'd eventually starve, because there would be no way to grow food.

**4. How long does it take a radio signal to get to Mars?** The distance between Earth and Gale Crater can be as far as 150 million miles. That's 32 years for a 747 jet, or about 20 minutes for a radio wave. That's why you can't "drive" the rover in real time. Say you saw a cliff ahead. You'd hit the brakes, but that braking radio signal could take 20 minutes to activate the brakes. You'd already be over the cliff. See <http://bit.ly/OXyJIX>.

**5. T/F After two years, the Curiosity rover will be dead.** (Answer True). Unlike previous rovers, this one has its own generator. It is powered by a chunk of very hot, poisen radioactive metal called plutonium. The heat is used to warm the instruments and generate electricity for 10 instruments, plus motors, lasers and cameras... for about 2 years. After that, it will stop working. Learn more about Radioisotope Thermoelectric Generators at [http://www.nasa.gov/mission\\_pages/msl/index.html](http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/msl/index.html).

**6. If the Earth is a basketball, how big is Mars?** The Lunar and Planetary Institute <http://bit.ly/RaKYnf> says that if Earth were a basketball, Mars would be a softball.

## APPLICATION

**a) Make a true scale model solar system.** Want to really know how big the solar system is? Visit <http://www.noao.edu/education/peppercorn/pcmain.html> for instructions on making a 1000 yard solar system to scale. The sun will be a bowling ball, and the earth is a peppercorn, 26 paces away. Go another 14 paces to get to Mars, which is the size of a pinhead.

**b) Where is Mars, right now?** We found this real-time solar system calculator that tells you <http://www.solarsystemscope.com/>

**c) Play some games.** Visit the NASA Kids's Club [http://www.nasa.gov/audience/for\\_kids/kidsclub/flash/index.html](http://www.nasa.gov/audience/for_kids/kidsclub/flash/index.html) where you can practice driving a rover. You'll need a regular browser that can run Flash-based games.



## LittleClickers YouTube Playlist: Mars

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL9A6A026D6852273A> To see NASA's movies, visit <http://1.usa.gov/Njyiw4>



Interact with this page online, at <http://www.littleclickers.com>

# How to use abstract symbolic screens to *Get Real*

## A roundup of apps & sites to help children learn about the real world

By Warren Buckleitner

Consider a baby's brain. Something amazing and invisible goes on whenever he or she interacts with something new. This interaction has a lot to do with language and learning, and they start the instant any "sensorimotor" (a Piagetian stage) contact happens. It might be a spoonful of pudding, or the cold nose of a puppy. During the very first two years or so, these new items don't exist in a child's head unless they are currently sensing them. It's out of sight, out of mind.

**THE DAWN OF SYMBOL AWARENESS.** When the child reaches around 24 months of age, something incredible happens that is **exclusive to the human species**. You can show them a picture of that spoonful of pudding and they'll start to get hungry. Try showing a picture of a bone to a dog -- even a very smart one, and it just doesn't work. For the toddler, "out of sight" no longer means "out of mind," and symbols can, for the first time, start to fill in for real items. Now this isn't to say we should start using abstract products at age two. This is a very gradual process and older children (and even adults) depend on concrete objects to create understanding. This concrete/abstract relationship lies at the core of constructivist theory. This notion — that symbols that are in the form of language, pictures, words, sentences and so on — is one of the defining characteristics of the human species, and it lies at the core of Jean Piaget's definition of cognition.

**ENTER THE IPAD...**Over the past 48 months, but especially this year, the concept has gotten boost due primarily to a single device: the iPad. We can now hand a child a camera/web enabled iPad (and coming soon, a swarm of Android options) with a multi-touch screen, so they can take a snapshot of a real object, and control the process of turning it into a symbol. A better name of the iPad might be "the symbolizer." Because the child is actively involved in taking the photo, it has more meaning. These tablets can do a lot more than take photos. Increasingly it is possible to find apps where children can play with symbols, much like they do lumps of clay. Consider the apps from TouchPress, where you can spin a working V8 engine with your fingertip, or the clever ebook on the cover of this issue, called Rounds: Franklin Frog that playfully introduces one of the most abstract science concepts reproduction (gasp). Then there's the augmented reality titles like Solar Walk or Spacecraft 3D that bridge the concrete symbolic space by making it possible to show the evening stars through your ceiling, or to examine the Curiosity Explorer, as if it is sitting on your dinner table. It is also easy to find symbol-rich apps that link pictures with more abstract printed labels, as in the Peapod Labs and Oceanhouse Media titles. Here's a starter list, by topic.

### EARLY EXPLORING

**ABC Food** by PeaPod labs is one in the series of the ABC apps. Others deal with transportation, animals and so on. The app turns your iPad into an alphabet-themed visual encyclopedia. Instead of using stock art, however, these apps pull photos from royalty free sources, such as Flickr and YouTube. The photos are beautiful and they create an authentic presentation of letter-themed food art. Each word is spelled on the bottom of the screen. Touching any of the letters within the word lets you quickly jump to a new set of words. Teaches: language, reading, letter recognition. Peapod Labs. , \$1.99. Best for ages 3-up. [Rating: 4.7]

**X is for X-Ray** What does the inside of a seashell look like? What about an insect, a motorcycle or an iPad? Here's an app that lets you find out. The app contrasts two images -- before x-ray and after x-ray, and every possible gradation between. To move between the views, you swipe with a single finger, from top to bottom. The app would be an excellent supplement to any science curriculum, for general exploration and discussion. It would be fun to use it along with a project that involves taking something apart. Teaches: science, x-rays, exploration, mechanics, reading. Touch Press. www.touchpress.com, \$8. Best for ages 5-up. [Rating: 4.4]



Search on  
*"mental representation"*  
or *"representational thought"* if you want to dig deeper into the theory behind this article.

### WHAT IS STEM?

An acronym for science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Say the word "stem" in any gathering of educators, and they'll generally start thinking about grants, or politically driven initiatives begun to address the perceived lack of qualified candidates for high-tech jobs. Inertia for STEM began back in the 1960's space race, and has been associated with a national effort to stay ahead of other countries. See, for example NSF's "What we do" at <http://www.nsf.gov/about/what.jsp>.

**SpyClops Bionic Eye** First released in 2007 under the name "EyeClops TV Microscope" by Jakks Pacific, we were able to find this composite video online for just \$15. You put in five AA batteries, plug the yellow composite video cable into your TV and start exploring specimens at 200x power. Objects are illuminated by three white LEDs. There is one big drawback. There is no auto off feature. So if you leave the batteries on over the weekend, you have to come up with five fresh AA batteries. Teaches: science. Jakks Pacific, Inc. [www.jakkspace.com](http://www.jakkspace.com), \$40. Best for ages 6-up. [Rating: 4.5]



**Jim Henson's Sid's Science Fair.** This playful, easy-to-use collection of three activities does an excellent job informally reinforcing an early math and science curriculum, where collecting, charting and noticing differences are the desired outcomes. For free exploration of some messy concepts that lie at the heart of STEM learning, you can't beat this app. And no cleanup is required. Created by Jim Henson Studios and Daren Carsten of Carsten's Studios for PBS Kids. Teaches: science, math, charts, noticing differences, collections, observation, counting. PBS Kids. [www.pbskids.org](http://www.pbskids.org), \$2.99. Best for ages 4-7. [Rating: 4.7]

## GEOGRAPHY

**Barefoot World Atlas.** Featuring a 3D spinning globe interface, this children's atlas makes it possible to zoom in and pull out of a globe view, and to explore surface-level facts and photos on several hundred topics, including basic facts about each country. These facts can be compared with a touch (for example, for Mali) to learn the current time, weather, distance from you (the app knows where you are), and then compare land area, highest point, currency, transport per 1,000 people, and average CO2 emissions. There's plenty to explore, and the spinning globe organization works far better than a book. Teaches: geography, science. Barefoot Books. [www.barefootbooks.com](http://www.barefootbooks.com), \$7.99. Best for ages 8-up. [Rating: 4.4] or .88%

## SPACE

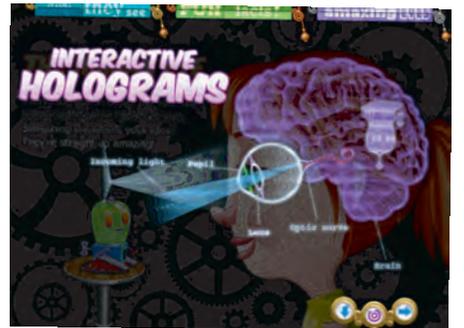
**NASA Science: A Journey of Discovery.** This app is organized around four questions that have driven NASA research: What are the effects of space weather on the Earth's technology?; How are Earth's sea ice sheets changing?; Are there other habitable planets?; and Was Mars ever a habitat for life? Each leads to an encyclopedia-like set of interactive info-screens, of the variety that you can imagine at a kiosk in a hands-on museum. Using this app requires a lot of reading, and there is very little sugar coating. That's why it should be in every upper elementary and middle school iPad. Teaches: space travel, STEM, Mars. NASA. <http://science.nasa.gov/connect/apps/>, \$free. Best for ages 8-up. [Rating: 4.6]

**Spacecraft 3D.** Amazing, but limited, this augmented reality (AR) app lets you explore different NASA spacecraft used to explore our solar system. To use the app, you need to first print a sheet of paper containing a marker, needed to unlock the spacecraft. Current options include the GRAIL (at the moon) and Curiosity rover (on Mars). After you have your sheet of paper, you lay it on the table and line up your iPad or iPhone's camera. Presto -- a 3D model of Curiosity Rover pops up on your screen. You can move around the craft, and a set of buttons on the bottom of the screen extend the robotic arm. Teaches: space travel, NASA, exploration. NASA. <http://science.nasa.gov/connect/apps/>, \$free. Best for ages 8-up. [Rating: 4.5]



## PHYSICAL SCIENCE

**Bobo Explores Light.** Here's a great example of how an app can let children aged 7-up play with -- and better understand -- an abstract concept; in this case light. What better way to understand how light changes when it hits a mirror, than to let a child manipulate the mirrors. Other noteworthy content includes a schematic of an eyeball, a conversation with Thomas Edison, and an experiment on mixing colors of light. The best part about this app is the way that it lets children directly manipulate the concepts, so they can "try the ideas on for size." See the demo, at <http://youtu.be/G0LIP7pl08w>. Disclosure: CTR Contributing Editor Bob Tedeschi helped produce this app. Teaches: science, light, angles. GameCollage LLC. [www.gamecollage.com](http://www.gamecollage.com), \$4.99. Best for ages 7-up. [Rating: 4.9]



**Monster Physics.** This invention construction kit contains 50 puzzles sorted into five challenge categories. In addition, an open-ended "build" mode lets you freely experiment with 68 parts such as blocks of ice, rubber band balls, fruit, wings, bombs, magnets, a mechanical claw, ropes, chains and shapes. You can also just freely build to create a car, crane or a rocket ship. Testers found the puzzles to be addictive and realistic, but requested hints on some of the puzzles. Of course, this lack of help is also one of the charms of such puzzles. Teaches: science, problem solving, deductive reasoning, logic. Dan Russell-Pinson. <http://dan-russell-pinson.com/>, \$.99. Best for ages 6-up. [Rating: 4.6]





**Painting With Time** (See also **Painting With Time Climate Change Edition**). Helping a child understand long term temporal relationships -- things like how a plant grows or how a glacier retreats -- has always been a challenge for a parent, librarian or teacher. Now there's an app for that, and it works. Featuring a very basic design, *Painting With Time* (called "Paint With Time" in the app store) exemplifies how you can leverage the power of a multi-touch screen to make an abstract concept -- in this case time -- have meaning. A gallery containing 14 pictures includes such things as *A Messy Room* (showing how a child's playroom gets messy over just a few days), *Growing a Beard* (over 30 days), "Spring Comes to Boston" and "A Glacier Retreats." This app is part of a larger long term NSF initiative designed to expand the general public's notion of time relationships. [www.exploringtime.org](http://www.exploringtime.org). Perhaps the best part -- the app is free. Teaches: science, time. Red Hill Studios. [www.redhillstudios.com](http://www.redhillstudios.com), \$free. Best for ages 6-up. [Rating: 4.5]

## EARTH SCIENCE

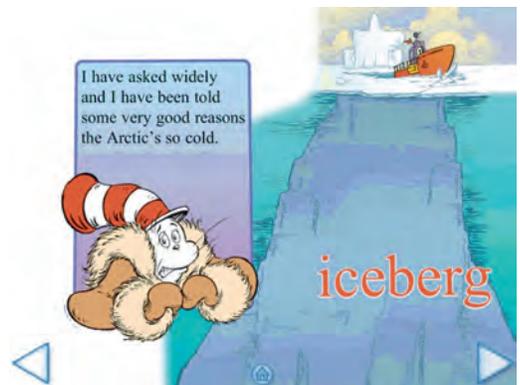
**Focus on Earthquakes.** This interactive earth science textbook has an amazing and very useful feature -- a real time seismic globe that shows the most recent earthquakes, as they happen. As a result, this is a wonderful way to show that we live on a continually moving, shifting planet. Teaches: earth science, earthquakes. Tasa Graphic Arts, Inc. [www.tasagraphicarts.com](http://www.tasagraphicarts.com), \$3.99. Best for ages 11-up. [Rating: 4.7]

**Gems and Jewels.** Similar in design to "The Elements" and "The Planets" *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 plane. There are 165 types of gems, each with as many as six examples. As a specialized reference, this app is the best in it's class. Teaches: science, geology, gems. Touch Press. [www.touchpress.com](http://www.touchpress.com), \$13.99. Best for ages 10-up. [Rating: 4.8]

## OCEANOGRAPHY

**Magic School Bus, The: Oceans** Ms. Frizzle comes to the multi-touch screen, in the app version of the Scholastic book "The Magic School Bus: On The Ocean Floor." Arranged in ebook fashion, the app takes children on a tour of the basic parts of the ocean. At any point, you can touch any child to hear some dialog, and at several points, tilt the screen to interact with the graphics. Teaches: science, ocean life. Scholastic Media. [www.scholastic.com](http://www.scholastic.com), \$8. Best for ages 2-up. [Rating: 4.5]

**Ice is Nice** Here's another solid addition to the Oceanhouse Media's "The Cat in the Hat's Learning Library." 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. See the CTR video review <http://youtu.be/qMWyB6JmcfY>. Teaches: reading, science, ecology. Oceanhouse Media, \$5.99. Best for ages 5-10. [Rating: 4.5]



## LIFE SCIENCE

**Rounds: Franklin Frog** This innovative app stretches the definition of ebook, with a dash of Nosy Crow irreverence. *Rounds: Franklin Frog* is the first title in a series of non-fiction apps that deal with life-cycles. Children can participate in a G-rated version of each stage of frog reproduction, helping a male frog hop, swim, croak, eat and find a female to reproduce. Next comes eggs and changing from a tadpole into a frog. Because the app is based on three generations, you play the app three times, with different characters (Franklin, Franklin's Son and Franklin's Grandson), hence the word "rounds" in the title. This is the first time we've seen this type of circular design, similar in ways to a play with different actors using the same sets. Teaches: science, life cycle of frogs, biology, reproduction. Nosy Crow. [www.nosycrow.com](http://www.nosycrow.com), \$4.99. Best for ages 3-6. [Rating: 4.3]

**WolfQuest** ([www.wolfquest.org](http://www.wolfquest.org)). If you're tired of being a frog, how about a wolf? This NSF-funded simulation puts you on the prowl for food and a mate. You start by creating your wolf avatar, choosing a coat, gender, strength and speed. Next, you find yourself in the middle of a forest, with hunger and stamina meters that could've come out of any video game. You move through the 3D landscape in search of food and eventually a mate. If you teach upper-elementary or middle-school-age children, make a note of this virtual world. Teaches: science, ecosystems, wolf habitats, logic, spatial problem solving. EduWeb. [www.eduweb.com](http://www.eduweb.com), \$free. Best for ages 9-13.

## SPACE

**NASA Rocket Science 101** Can you match the rocket, and all it's components, with the NASA space mission? If so, you can get your satellite (or Mars rover) into orbit. If not, your rocket will never leave the ground. That's the basic challenge of this free NASA App. You start by choosing one of eight missions; each requiring a different payload. You learn that the Curiosity is very heavy, for example, weighing as much as a loaded SUV. Getting all that weight to Mars requires a very powerful rocket. There's a

hidden treasure in the credits, in the form of links to videos of actual launches, from the real missions. Teaches: problem solving, scientific vocabulary, Science. NASA KSC IT Mobile Team. \$free. Best for ages 4-up. [Rating: 4]

### Star Walk

Point your iPod Touch, iPad or iPhone at the sky (or ceiling) to harness the power of an augmented reality system paired with a database of the stars. The program uses your camera, compass, current location and accelerometers to know which star you're looking at. A set of Wikipedia Links that let you select a celestial body and tap the "i" icon to activate a magnifier to read information, or you can tap the Wiki icon to open the Wikipedia page Teaches: astronomy . Vito Technology. [www.vitotechnology.com](http://www.vitotechnology.com), \$3 for iPhone, \$5 for iPad. Best for ages 8-up. [Rating: 4.9] or .98%

**Solar System for iPad.** Touch a planet, moon or comet to explore, in this carefully crafted interactive science poster that covers every corner of our Solar System. You notice a location-based slider on the screen bottom, that starts with the center of the solar system (the Sun) and moves out to the distant comets. This space-line serves as a constant table of contents, helping you to jump around quickly through huge distances. To learn more about a planet or moon, touch it or turn it to pull up more Hubble photos. Content includes about 200 "pages" of interactive information, presented book style. The best part of this app is the working model of the solar system where you can zoom in or out on the model, and adjust units of time or your view in the system, with a swipe. This feature helps children (and adults) understand how the solar system works, and the vast time/space relationships involved. See the demo at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbGGe7B77VQ> Teaches: science, astronomy, the solar system, planets. Touch Press. [www.touchpress.com](http://www.touchpress.com), \$14. Best for ages 7-up. [Rating: 4.8]

**There's No Place Like Space.** Stretching the term "non-fiction," The Cat in the Hat's Learning Library is an ebook adaptation of the Dr. Seuss series, done in classic Oceanhouse Media style, where you can touch any item or word to see it labeled. So what's different? Some of the words, like Sun, appear in bold-face form. If you touch it, a definition pops up. Touch the definition again and it is read aloud. For a good clean design with excellent language support and some embedded science content, it's hard to go wrong with this title. Teaches: reading, science, astronomy, outer space, the solar system. Oceanhouse Media. [www.oceanhousemedia.com](http://www.oceanhousemedia.com), \$5.99. Best for ages 5-8. [Rating: 4.4]

**We Choose the Moon** ([www.wechoosethemoon.org](http://www.wechoosethemoon.org)). A prime example of bringing history to life, We Choose the Moon ([www.wechoosethemoon.org](http://www.wechoosethemoon.org)) is a real-time reenactment of the Apollo 11 mission (with Neal Armstrong), from take off to the start of the return to Earth. The site is divided into 11 stages, starting with the blastoff. At each stage, you can witness the events in realtime, as indicated by a flight clock shown on the left side of the screen. As the events pass, you can hear the real audio stream, with the transmissions between mission control and the spacecraft, you can see the transmission stream in more contemporary terms -- as a Twitter stream. See also [www.google.com/moon](http://www.google.com/moon). Teaches: science, space travel, history. John F. Kennedy Library Foundation. [www.jfklibrary.org](http://www.jfklibrary.org), \$free. Best for ages 6-up.





# Feature Reviews

SEPTEMBER 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.

## Alien Assignment

This is a light-hearted scavenger hunt that has a specific role for both parents and children. After a short comical (think Jetsons, with a family of aliens) animated introduction, you are asked to run around your house or school to take pictures of specific items. For example "the control panel is smashed. Take a picture of something that has buttons so we can fix it." Once four clues have been photographed, you are asked to hand your phone to a parent who can correct the choices. This is a great example of how the technology can be used to facilitate collaboration between a parent (or a teacher) and a child.

Both the content and the design are limited. For example you never get to see your photos in the story context and the photos could all easily be of the "wrong thing" like your foot -- the app has no way of knowing. But Alien Assignment's comical introduction makes it fun for adults and children to play along together. And it is, after all, free. Note that this app is designed for iPhone/iPod Touch sized screens and a camera is required. Disclaimer: CTR Editor Warren Buckleitner is an unpaid advisor ELE, which is also a project of the Fred Rogers Center. He had no role in the development of this work.

Details: Fred Rogers Center, [www.fredrogerscenter.org](http://www.fredrogerscenter.org). Price: \$free. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: language, creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 9/6/2012. [WB]

## Appitivity Hot Wheels

Two special Hot Wheels cars (sold for \$20) use a technology we first saw last fall (see Disney AppMates, CTR Nov. 2011). The cars are sold only in Apple stores, and they can be detected by touch screens.

Here's how it works. If you look at the bottom of one of the cars, you'll see four round pegs that stick down slightly below the wheels. These pegs touch the iPad screen, allowing the capacitive electrical charge from your hand to be transferred from your finger, through the car, into the pegs. Put another way, the iPad thinks the car bottom is actually four, very small fingertips. Because each car has a unique pattern of pegs, it also has a unique fingerprint. So now your iPad will know which car is on the screen, and if it is facing north or south, based on the orientation of the dots. A fourth spring-loaded peg touches the glass if the hood is pressed, making it possible to launch missiles. Both cars can double as Hot Wheels if a mechanical switch is used to retract and lock the pegs into the bottom of the car. Note that you can download the free app and drive the car with your finger, however, the cars make the controls easier to use.

We've tested nearly all the iPad toys to date, and this one is the most sophisticated and interesting. These cars do more than drive. There are nine different challenges, each with a different activity. This might include hopping across a canyon, shooting at an enemy with a missile, or stamping out a pattern to make it over a jump. The more you play, the more points you score, which unlocks more tracks, games and things like armor and rocket boosters.

There is a learning curve to this app, and there are times when the car movements are less than responsive. Note that you must turn off your iPad's multi-tasking gestures before using this app. Otherwise you'll accidentally keep switching between apps. Created by BigBit for Mattel.

Details: Mattel, Inc., [www.mattel.com](http://www.mattel.com). Price: \$free app. Cars are \$20. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad (176 MB download). Teaches/Purpose: spatial relations, strategy, some math, fine motor skills. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 7/15/2012. [WB]

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



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





### Circuit Math

Designed for small or large screen play (for iPod Touch/iPhone or iPad), Circuit Math is a math puzzle where you create number pyramids by sliding sums around a pyramid-shaped game board. The result is an addicting way to practice your math facts.

The goal is to get your numbers to add up as quickly as possible to earn points and unlock the next level. The free level that we tested contains six addition levels and six subtraction levels, each with endless number combinations, so you can freely experiment. Harder levels are sold as in-app purchases, for \$.99. There's also a hint option if you get stuck. You quickly learn that the best strategy is to put the larger numerals on top (reverse for subtraction). Whenever the numbers fit, a green line signals that the circuit is complete. Scores are saved, so you try to beat your own best time or compete with other players in Game Center to see who can complete a level with the best time. Each level has its own leader board in Game Center.

Details: Cultureplay, LLC. Price: \$free/in-app sales. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: math, addition, subtraction. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 8/2/2012. [WB]

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



### Felt Board

This app is a noble attempt to simulate a real open-ended felt board, of the variety inspired by a legacy of classroom felt boards.

On first glance it almost succeeds. You can easily imagine this app running on an iPad plugged into a projector to create a huge, organic-looking creativity surface. While the app comes with a nice library of items that can be resized (try that with a real piece of felt!), there are some quirks. It is possible to accidentally add items when you are scrolling through the library. Once an item is added, you can't quickly get rid of it, say by dragging it back to the library, or just off the screen. You have to use a rather small recycling icon for this job. In addition, we couldn't figure out how to erase our picture and start over with a blank screen. Obviously there were bugs in the version we tested that will hopefully be addressed in future updates.

There's a nice variety of costumes, settings and props, including a set of letters and numerals, as well as a "glue" tool, designed to let you lock pieces of felt together into one piece. This allows them to be moved or resized as a single chunk.

Art is included for songs like Itsy Bitsy Spider, Old MacDonald, 5 Little Monkeys, and 5 Little Speckled Frogs. This could be an excellent app if it contained just a few more navigation features. Software Smoothie, the publisher, proudly proclaims "does not contain ads, in app sales, or links to social media." We can confirm this claim.

Details: Software Smoothie, www.softwaresmoothie.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, Nook. Teaches/Purpose: creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 8/29/2012. [WB]

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



### iPieces Air Hockey Game

Here's a free app for two players that works in tandem with a \$10 set of two felt covered air hockey paddles, both of which are the size of chess pieces. You start by picking a country (USA, UK or Canada) and then each player logs in by entering their name.

After you touch "start," your game begins, which consists of a cramped-feeling game of air hockey. The puck is fast and responsive, and the paddles are fun to use, but you learn you can also use your finger. You also learn that an iPad screen is a pretty small surface for air hockey. There are four games in the iPieces series: airhockey, fishing, goose, and snakes and ladders.

Details: Pressman Toy, www.pressman-toy.com. Price: \$9.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: fine motor coordination. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.6 stars. Entry date: 9/4/2012. [WB]

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





### iPieces Fishing Game

Here's a free app, for 1 to 4 players that works in tandem with a \$10 set of spoon-sized plastic fishing poles. You start by picking a country (USA, UK or Canada) and then each player logs in by entering their name.

After you touch "start" a race begins, to see who can drag the most fish to their bucket. Because both the bucket and the fish are color coded, you learn that you earn more points if you catch the right color. The game is OK, but our testers lost interest after a few minutes. We also learned that you can play the app perfectly well with your fingertip -- no pole required. There are four games in the iPieces series: airhockey, fishing, goose and snakes and ladders.

Details: Jumbo, . Price: \$9.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: fine motor abilities. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.6 stars. Entry date: 5/9/2012. [WB]

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



### Jazzy 123

See also Jazzy ABC.

This third app in the Jazzy series by The Melody Book is the sister app to A Jazzy Day, this time dealing with counting with musical instruments. Worth noting are the ten language options: a rare feature for any app.

There are three options listed on the title page. "123" starts with a set of numerals, from 1 to 10. Tapping the 9 for example will show a set of nine flutes. Each will play a random jazz lick when touched. They can also be moved around the screen; which is a nice touch. "Play" (the second menu option) consists of two structured counting tasks, with right or wrong answers. For example, you are asked to "move nine instruments to the stage." If you drag and drop the correct answer, you hear a short concert. Camera, the third option, lets you take a photo with the iPad's cameras and overlay it with characters from the app. From a math/number sense perspective, this isn't the deepest content, and there are some minor design issues. We were disappointed in the way some of the instruments could be played. While you can play the individual keys on the piano keyboard, you can't on the accordion. Also when we tried to play the string instruments by swiping they only moved the entire instrument. Not being able to control the sounds was disappointing.

We did like the ability to choose from twelve language options, making this app useful for foreign language exposure. Overall, Jazzy 123 is a nice app that is similar to Jazzy ABC with slightly less content. It is simple to use, and delivers on it's promise to bring some music to counting.

Details: The Melody Book, [www.themelodybook.com](http://www.themelodybook.com). Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: Number Recognition, counting, musical instrument naming, ten languages, including French, Dutch, Japanese and more. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 8/17/2012. [CC]

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





### Leonard

This storybook app is about a small boy with a large imagination who moves from the city to the country, and must make new friends. Children join Leonard as he searches everywhere he can think of, from outer space to his sister's tea party, looking for friends. Interactive features include: squish bugs in the deep dark forest; go on safari: and meet some fish but watch out for the whale. Illustrated by Timothy Penner and developed by endloop. Chris Crowell: "I really like this story app. The graphics are nice and it is meaningful to any child who has had to move. Wish I had this app earlier in the year." There is no text scaffolding, but there are things to discover on each page. The art style is very cartoon-ish. Illustrated by Timothy Penner, narration by Andy Tirthardt.

Details: Ink Robin, [www.inkrobin.com](http://www.inkrobin.com). Price: \$3.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, moving. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 5/23/2012. [CC]

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

84%



### LOL Elmo

LOL (Laugh Out Loud) Elmo is a sound activated robotic plush toy that is smaller than previous Tickle Me Elmo Toys. He also does less in terms of his movements -- he waves his hands and rocks back -- and he also moves his mouth as he talks.

After you install the 4 AA batteries and find his "on" switch (well hidden behind a fabric pocket) Elmo starts to laugh whenever he detects a loud sound. A small squeaker toy is included, but any sound will work. You can also make Elmo laugh when you tickle his tummy or his feet. Elmo can tell eight jokes, such as the classic "Why did the cookie have to go to the doctor?... Because he felt crummy!" Each laugh is accompanied by foot-kicking motion, that sends Elmo backward, laughing and waving his hands. Our testers found Elmo hard to turn on/off. This type of toy has a big novelty effect, with little or no contribution to learning or development. It is commonly called a "watch me" toy; more for entertainment.

Details: Playskool (Hasbro), [www.hasbro.com/playskool/](http://www.hasbro.com/playskool/). Price: \$40. Ages: 18 mo. & up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: causality, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.6 stars. Entry date: 8/13/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	8
Educational	5
Entertaining	6
Design Features	9
Good Value	8

72%





## MoMA Art Lab

This well-intentioned creativity experience from The Museum of Modern Art (aka MoMA) in New York City has limited creativity power but some good activity ideas.

The heart of the app is the blank canvas, called Ideas, where you can mix and match basic geometric shapes and scribbles in 48 colors. Missing are the "undo" or "redo" features, both key omissions for any type of creativity experience. For example, if you make an accidental line, there is no way to quickly remove it. You can erase the entire canvas or draw in the background color, but this is a clunky solution and you risk losing work. While objects can be resized, this is a less-than-straightforward process, too, because the objects tend to hang.

An idea section of the app introduces you to the work of six artists, and then gives you a chance to apply the ideas using a touch-based activity. Our favorite was "Create a line design" where you see the world of artist Jim Lambie, who creates art for a specific place using strips of colored tape. The app equivalent lets you fill in a grid with different colors. Another activity lets you create "sound compositions" by associating stock sounds (like breaking glass) with an item on the screen.

Finished products can be easily saved and shared online, although we did not try this upload feature. For introducing the concept of modern art, this app can work. It's too bad the drawing and creativity options aren't better designed. Note that the sharing function in this app, which permits a child to share artwork with MoMA, and with others by e-mail or Twitter, is turned off by default so that parents can decide whether to permit their child to share their artwork. Instructions for enabling sharing can be found in the Information/For Parents section of the app. The App was designed and developed by RenderMonkey Design.

Details: MoMA - The Museum of Modern Art, [www.moma.org/explore/mobile/artlabapp](http://www.moma.org/explore/mobile/artlabapp). Price: \$4.99. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: modern art, some creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 9/3/2012. [WB]

## Montessori Numbers

Four number sandboxes in one app are ideal for letting a preschooler freely experiment with the first mathematical relationships using number sets that range from 0 to 1000. It is rare to find an early math app that offers this type of number range and flexibility. Designed in France, the app can be toggled between three English accents: American, British or Australian. You can also toggle on or off the narrator, the timer and the open-ended block building activity. These options let you customize the app for home or classroom settings as well as various challenge levels.

1 to 20 (the first menu option) starts by offering a choice between three levels: 0 to 5, 0 to 10 and 11 to 20. You can then freely drag-and-drop blocks to build the numbers, in order. When your set is complete, you are rewarded by a block building activity, where everything on the screen can be moved around or stacked.

Quantity increases the size of the numbers into the hundreds and thousands, by way of number bars and number squares. If you like, you can hide the numerals to work specifically on the association of number names with quantities. The child can also touch placed beads to make the app count them, and touch numbers to hear their names. There are 3 levels of difficulty: 0 to 9, 10 to 99 and 100 to 999.

Numerals specifically asks you to find a spoken number by dragging numerals into place. Each experiment is labeled in clear speech and illustrated in real time, showing children the size of the numeral they are attempting to build. This is a very strong activity. There are 3 levels of difficulty: 0 to 9, 10 to 99 and 100 to 999.

Numerals (from Quantity) associates a quantity with a given numeral. This time, you're asked to build the number that matches a quantity, displayed as blocks. For numerals greater than 10, this can be hard, because the child has to consider decimals.

We especially liked how this app mixes structure with free exploration. After you solve a problem, you can freely mix and match numerals or blocks on the screen, making whatever you like. This free play mode can also be turned off if you like. YouTube demos can be found at <http://bit.ly/numbersvideo> and <http://bit.ly/numbersvideo2>. This is a must-have app, for any early learning setting.

Details: L'Escapadou, . Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: math, counting, base 10, adding, number sense, in English or French. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 8/15/2012. [WB]

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



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





### Motion Math: Hungry Guppy

Designed to zoom in specifically on early math concepts, this fish-feeding app effectively connects your finger with the principal of additive sums, a fundamental number concept that lies at the base of many mathematical ideas. It is the idea that two sets, or representation of sets, can be combined to make one that is larger.

The result is an endless series of math exercises that is both never ending, and self-correcting. The better you do, the harder the challenge. You start with a set of bubbles -- each with with a set of one to five dots, and a fish with a number. To feed the fish, you must drag and drop bubbles together, until you make a numeral that matches the fish. If you do, the fish will eat the bubble, and grow larger.

This mix of dots and numbers shows children "as young as two" how math works. The concept of adding quantities might sound simple, but the way it is presented in this app is active and dynamic. The main menu offers four challenge levels, or you can touch a large PLAY icon to start at the last-played level. Besides this subtle bookmarking feature, there are no other record keeping options. Music is a little repetitive but you can turn it off. This is the fifth app from the Stanford University-inspired app studio Motion Math, and the second that deals with a hungry fish. It is an excellent addition to any iPad, especially if it is located in a preschool or Kindergarten classroom. Unlike the previous app, Hungry Fish, there are no in-app sales. You get the entire program for \$2.99. We did not review the iPhone version. <http://youtu.be/ZY3vxOxm1wA>

Details: Motion Math Games, [www.motionmathgames.com](http://www.motionmathgames.com). Price: \$2.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: numbers, addition, subtraction. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 6/13/2012. [WB]

### NASA Rocket Science 101

Can you match the rocket, and all it's components, with the NASA space mission? If so, you can get your satellite (or Mars rover) into orbit. If not, your rocket will never leave the ground. That's the basic challenge of this free NASA App.

You start by choosing one of eight missions; each requiring a different payload. You learn that the Curiosity is very heavy, for example, weighing as much as a loaded SUV. Getting all that weight to Mars requires a very powerful rocket, in this case the Atlas V. You construct a rocket jigsaw-style by dragging and dropping parts onto a launchpad. As you do, you can study the facts on each part. There's also an auto-build mode that walks you through the assembly process. This portion of the app has some quirks. Sometimes the parts are so small your finger blocks the target location; in addition the menus are less-than-intuitive. But if you are able to get your rocket assembled, you are rewarded with an animated liftoff sequence. Note that there's a hidden treasure in the credits, in the form of links to videos of actual launches, from the real missions.

Details: NASA KSC IT Mobile Team, [www.nasa.gov/externalflash/RocketScience101/RocketScience101.html](http://www.nasa.gov/externalflash/RocketScience101/RocketScience101.html). Price: \$free. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: problem solving, scientific vocabulary, Science. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 8/22/2012. [CC]

### NASA Science: A Journey of Discovery

This app is organized around four questions that have driven NASA research: What are the effects of space weather on the Earth's technology?; How are Earth's sea ice sheets changing?; Are there other habitable planets?; and Was Mars ever a habitat for life?

Each leads to an encyclopedia-like set of interactive info-screens, of the variety that you can imagine at a kiosk in a hands-on museum. You can swipe through photos, watch movies, and play with interactive maps of Mars or the Earth's glaciers. The information comes from various NASA missions. For example, the Kepler Mission is an effort to survey a region of the Milky Way in search of other Earth-like planets, by way of a 9 foot diameter satellite equipped with a very sensitive photometer. Using this app requires a lot of reading, and there is very little sugar coating. That's why it should be in every upper elementary and middle school iPad.

Details: NASA, <http://science.nasa.gov/connect/apps/>. Price: \$free. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: space travel, STEM, Mars. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 9/4/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	88%
Educational	10	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	10	



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



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





### National Geographic Little Kids: Look & Learn Animals Vol. 1

Did you know that a brown bear has claws as long as your mom's hand? That's one of the 18 "fun facts" found in this app, which is built around photos from National Geographic Little Kids magazine. As you might expect, the animal pictures are beautiful although they are limited in number, and the content seems pre-digested. There are three shallow activities, set to looping background music -- the national geographic theme -- that can't be adjusted.

Animal Bounce lets you first choose from three habitats, and then touch the screen to generate an animal bubble that rolls around the screen. The design is similar to Sound Shaker, in part because it was designed by the same studio (zinc Roe).

Animal Match is a shape discrimination activity, where you match the animal with the outline with either a tilt or a swipe. Animal Words is a multiple-choice quiz that asks children to match pictures to their starting letter. At the harder level, the program tracks errors and progress. The only external link is in the parent's menu. The bottom line? Not bad but could be better, especially if you could learn more about the animals.

Details: National Geographic Society, [www.nationalgeographic.com](http://www.nationalgeographic.com). Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: animal sounds, classification, counting. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 8/14/2012. [CC]

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



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



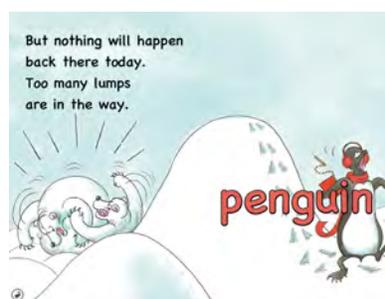
### Nature's Friends

This nature-themed coloring book and story app is designed to introduce your child to the topic of protecting the environment, through fantasy characters. Content includes 45 narrated black-line coloring screens that let you fill in each area with color. Some of the fill areas are frustratingly small, and are hard to target with a fat finger, but other than that, the coloring mechanism is well designed, making it easy to change colors, fill or sketch, without blurring the lines.

Each page contains a hidden animated element (e.g., some trash will fall into a recycling bin), and each drawing is accompanied by a narrated story. The background music and narration can be toggled on/off. Other content includes a game of concentration, a jigsaw puzzle, and character matching.

Details: Bumblebeemie Interactive Studio, [www.bumblebeemie.com](http://www.bumblebeemie.com). Price: \$1.99. Ages: 4-10. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: coloring, nature. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 5/16/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	10	78%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	6	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	8	



### Nothing Ever Happens at the South Pole

This previously unpublished title was written in 1960 by Stan and Jan Berenstain, of Berenstain Bears fame. Judging from the illustrations and the confusing storyline, you can understand why it was shelved. Consider the following line of copy: "A snowball that went round and round, and smashed some baddies to the ground." (To go with an illustration of some wolves being hit by a large snowball).

The 24-screen story is about a young penguin who is searching for adventure. As with the other Oceanhouse Media apps, there are three modes: Read to Me — listen to the narrated story with words highlighted as they are read; Read it Myself — read the book in its traditional form; and Auto Play — plays like a movie, automatically reading and turning pages.

Other features include Picture/Word association with words that zoom up and are spoken when pictures are touched; and individual word highlighting. All of these are standard features for Oceanhouse Media products which make them excellent early reading experiences. Note that a printed copy of the book is being released along with this app (August 2012). See also Dr. Seuss' first published book, To Think that I Saw it on Mulberry Street.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, [www.oceanhousemedia.com](http://www.oceanhousemedia.com). Price: \$2.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: language, reading, word recognition. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 8/28/2012. [WB]



### Play at Home with Daniel Tiger

Daniel Tiger's iPad debut looks good, but the ratings are reduced by sluggishness and shallow content. Testers: "On the surface, this looks like this is a very appealing app, but there's not much to do." You start with a menu that offers four activities: a doctor's office, Daniel's bathroom, bedroom and an open-ended sticker activity. The star of each is Daniel Tiger, the animated four year old son of one of the puppets that appeared on the set of Mr. Rogers Neighborhood (Daniel Striped Tiger). This is the first time the famous red sweater has appeared on any character, besides Mr. Rogers.

In Doctor Daniel, you can select one of five "toy" versions of the instruments pediatricians use, such as a tongue depressor or a syringe. The idea is that this might make it easier to manage a real visit when the tables are turned. Other than a verbal label for each instrument and a one time demonstration on Daniel, there's no other information provided about the tools.

In Daniel's Bedtime you see Daniel getting ready to go to sleep. The idea is that children can think about their own bedtime routines through Daniel. The routines and songs are automated and, once they start, they can't be stopped. In addition, items are shown on the screen that don't do anything.

Daniel's Bathroom has the same problem. You can turn off the water, and make bubbles, but when you try to pop the bubbles (what child won't) you can accidentally turn off the water. In addition, you can't put the seat up on the toilet.

A sticker book is a good idea, but the stickers don't do much. They can't be resized or adjusted, creating an "all or nothing" setting, where you can't undo things. While there's actually quite a bit of content in this app, it doesn't feel like it, because children have to access it through an adult-designed filter. We're hopeful these issues will be fixed in future Daniel Tiger apps (we've been told this is the start of a series). PBS KIDS now has 19 apps available in the App Store, and quality varies widely. This is the first app to be produced by The Fred Rogers Company and CloudKid for PBS Kids. See the CTR critique at <http://youtu.be/YCV4ZDvdGmM>

Details: PBS Kids, [www.pbskids.org](http://www.pbskids.org). Price: \$1.99. Ages: 2-4. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: health, personal needs, social-emotional school readiness curriculum . Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2.4 stars. Entry date: 8/31/2012. [WB]

### PlaySquare: WordWorld's Happy Birthday Dog!

Billing itself as "touchable television", this innovative new app mixes interactive play with TV- quality video, from the PBS show Word World. The result is a solid language experience, with a chance to play with letters and words to apply some of the concepts.

In case you've missed a recent Word World episode, objects like houses or dogs are made out of words, helping children make the connection between clusters of letters and the items they represent. The designers, who include former Nickelodeon TV producers, have nicely integrated some multi-touch features.

To start, a child enters the story by finger drawing a square when prompted. This launches a series of linear media segments that can be easily skipped or fast-forwarded with a set of controls at the bottom of the screen. By giving the child this innovative set of controls, children can settle down and watch the video, or skip ahead.

Content includes nine squares, each with a different vignette, and each with a set of challenges such as "can you help bear find a set of five balloons?" There are plenty of spelling challenges that might include finding a set of hidden letters and squeezing them together to make a word, required to move the episode along.

Sometimes the letters that made up the characters bodies were reading from right to left instead of left to right (from a reading pedagogy view, a minor glitch), but overall we found this app succeeded in delivering a playful child controlled experience with about 25 nouns like barn, dog, bear. This is the first in a planned series. This app, Happy Birthday Dog! is available free and works only on the iPad. Future episodes are planned which will be available as in-app sales. Note that this can be a noisy app (like TV) perhaps making it better suited for home rather than classroom use.

Details: PlaySquare, <http://playsquare.tv>. Price: \$free. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: Letter recognition, letter sounds, vocabulary, word recognition. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 8/24/2012. [CC]

Ease of Use	9	48%
Educational	5	
Entertaining	3	
Design Features	3	
Good Value	4	



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





### Professor Kim - What's Missing Here?

Can you spot the missing sea creature, before the other player? This classification experience presents this type of simple early logic challenge, starting with smaller, easier sets, and progressing to harder challenges, for two players.

Here's how it works. First, you are shown a set of five or so sea-related items. Another similar set is shown on the bottom of the set. The two sets are identical except one item is missing on the lower set. Your job is to look over both sets, and touch the item that isn't in the target set. Correct answers earn a fish; wrong answers earn a fish bone. You also can earn a fish if you beat a second player to the target.

Features include a two player mode, designed so that a second player can sit on the other side of the iPad. It is also possible to turn the background music off from the main menu.

Weaknesses: The app could use better directions (you don't know what to do at first), and the scoring system could be better designed, to have more meaning to the target audience (you score points in the thousands).

While it's not perfect, it does present a nice set of matching puzzles. For focussed logic/memory experience this app is worth considering. We noticed no external links, ads or hidden agendas.

Details: ApppMedia, [www.apppmedia.com](http://www.apppmedia.com). Price: \$1.99. Ages: 4-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: matching, classification, memory. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 8/29/2012. [WB]

### Punky Dunk and the Gold Fish

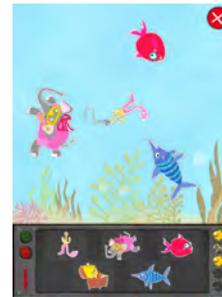
Somebody made a 100-year old children's book into an app! The best part is that the illustrations look old, along with the shoe-lace-style binding. But don't be fooled -- this app also has text with hot spots and read-out loud narration. It's too bad there isn't more to do, and more content to explore. In addition, the page turning is rough between the first and second pages, which lowered the rating.

First published in 1912, the 11 page/screen story is about a curious cat who finds something to play with on every page. According to the publisher, there are 101 interactive sounds and animations plus a musical score to help bring the story to present day. Better interactive features include a spool and thread you can drag around the screen, and a ball of yard that you can roll, by tilting the screen.

Features include the ability to toggle between Spanish and English (English by Matthew Modine, Spanish by Kate del Castillo). Nice touches include a record your own name feature, so you can hear your own name in the title page, and a handful of innovative interactive routines, such as the ability to swipe to make kittens run around a tree. So why not a higher rating? Beside having limited content, the background music is of low quality and the page turns can take you to places you didn't think you were going. The app was designed by Dumfun Productions as part of a planned series.

Details: Dumfun Productions, [www.facebook.com/PunkyDunkProject](http://www.facebook.com/PunkyDunkProject). Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, cause and effect, English and Spanish. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 8/15/2012. [CC]

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



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





## Rounds: Franklin Frog

This innovative app stretches the definition of ebook, with a dash of Nosy Crow irreverence. *Rounds: Franklin Frog* is the first title in a series of non-fiction apps that deal with life-cycles. Children can participate in a G-rated version of each stage of frog reproduction, helping a male frog hop, swim, croak, eat and find a female to reproduce. Next comes eggs and changing from a tadpole into a frog. The entire experience is high in child control, creating an excellent way to introduce children to the basic concepts of reproduction, without embarrassment.

Because the app is based on three generations, you play the app three times, with different characters (Franklin, Franklin's Son and Franklin's Grandson), hence the word "rounds" in the title. This is the first time we've seen this type of circular design, similar in ways to a play with different actors using the same sets. As you explore, you discover frog facts: that they drink through their skin and chew food inside their mouths by squashing it between their tongue and their eyeballs. The app makes it easy to swipe to guide frogs with your finger, to make them jump, swim and catch flies. You can help them croak to attract a mate, and you watch a tadpole gradually turn into a frog. Features include quality orchestrated background music that seems very relaxing. There are three reading level settings, and the text highlighting can be toggled on or off, in case you want the child to read by themselves.

The app is illustrated by Barry Tranter. The narrative is written by Emma Tranter. All in all, this is an excellent new addition to the ebook genre that is worth the \$4.99.

Details: Nosy Crow, [www.nosycrow.com](http://www.nosycrow.com). Price: \$4.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (iOS 3.1.3 or higher). Teaches/Purpose: science, life cycle of frogs, biology, reproduction. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 8/8/2012. [CC]

## Sesame Street Elmo's Musical Monsterpiece The Videogame

Excellent Sesame Street programming is sandwiched between 18 clumsy games that deal with basic musical concepts. As a result, children spend nearly as much time watching, waiting and listening to instructions as they do moving, exploring or dancing. We reviewed both the DS and Wii versions; the ratings apply to the DS version which are slightly higher due to the more concrete touch and swipe control mechanism.

For the Wii version, you hold the Wii Controller handlebar style, and lean left, right or jump. This has problems because the leaning motion isn't directly associated with the screen motions. This disconnect between your lean and Elmo's hop is a big deal because it blurs your feeling of control. It also is not a good choice when menu items are presented in a grid, with up and down choices, when you can only lean left and right. Once inside some of the activities, you can jump, dance, or speak into the microphone to collect sidescrolling notes, but the sluggish interactivity makes it possible to "win" with random movement. The default background music has nothing to do with the song or the sounds you are supposed to be learning about. You can turn this music off but it is a less-than-straightforward process. Finally, you don't know how many times you have to collect, sort or count, which can make you feel trapped, wondering "how long before this is over" in some of the games. Most activities like this provide some sort of visual mapping mechanism.

Strengths include authentic music (for the Wii version) and original TV-quality narration, and an innovative tracking system that can keep detailed records for up to three different children, letting you see how much time a child has spent on each game. In addition, the DS version lets you make a playlist from the 18 games, so you can customize which activities your child will play. But you can't make a good playlist from low quality games. You can learn more about these games at [www.sesamestreetvideogames.com](http://www.sesamestreetvideogames.com), or see CTR's video review, at <http://youtu.be/1QidJtwrXHM>.

Details: Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, Inc., [www.warnerbros.com](http://www.warnerbros.com). Price: \$20. Ages: 3-6. Platform: Wii, Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: music, instruments, dance, English, Spanish. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2.3 stars. Entry date: 7/2/2012. [WB]

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



Ease of Use	7	46%
Educational	4	
Entertaining	5	
Design Features	3	
Good Value	4	





### Spacecraft 3D

Extremely amazing, but limited, this augmented reality (AR) app lets you explore different NASA spacecraft used to explore our solar system. To use the app, you need to first print a sheet of paper containing a marker, needed to unlock the spacecraft. Current options include the GRAIL (at the moon) and Curiosity rover (on Mars). You can print the marker directly from your mobile device, or have it emailed to an account of choice. After you have your sheet of paper, you lay it on the table and line up your iPad or iPhone's camera. Presto -- a 3D model of Curiosity rover pops up on your screen. You can move around the craft, and a set of buttons on the bottom of the screen extend the robotic arm. There's not much to do, but what there is will grab your interest, and imagination. You certainly can't argue with the price -- \$free.

Details: NASA, <http://science.nasa.gov/connect/apps/>. Price: \$free. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: space travel, NASA, exploration. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 8/22/2012. [WB]

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



### Spelling: Squeebles Words

Create customized, talking spelling tests for one or more children on your iPad. It is easy to set up a child's account and make a spelling list although the menu design is cluttered and requires reading, both for making and for taking a test.

After you create a child's account, you start typing in words using an unconventional QWERTY keyboard. Each word can have a short recording, and you can determine if it needs to be capitalized.

Children can see each word before having to spell it, depending on the parent or teacher's preference. If a child spells a word incorrectly, it is recorded in the Tricky Words section where children can be tested on all the words they have struggled with in one area. Correct answers earn stars that can be used to buy time to play an arcade-style game called Squeeberang in which children swipe to hurl a Squeeble (a round creature) as far as possible. There are 100 different squeeberangs and 15 Squeeble characters to keep things interesting. There are no in-app purchases, no ads and no web links. KeyStageFun also offers apps for times tables, multiplication, reversals and addition & subtraction.

Details: KeyStageFun, <http://www.keystagefun.co.uk/>. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: spelling. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 6/19/2012. [WB]

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



### StoryBot

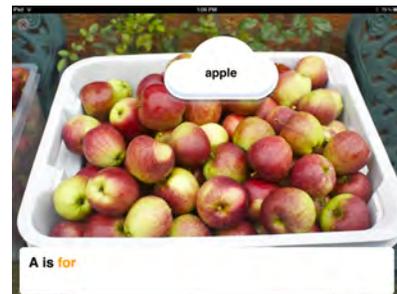
Using your own photos and sentences (rather than the pre-packaged variety), this early reading experience lets you make your own sentence creation drill that will have meaning to your children. The presentation is dry, but it could be potentially useful.

Here's how it works. You start by taking a photo, or using photos already stored on your iPad or iPhone picture library. Next you are prompted to type a sentence about the picture. It might be something like "The dog is jumping over a log." When you play your story, you see your picture, as each word of the sentence floats by on a cloud. When you touch the words in order, you hear the word read aloud, and see your sentence being constructed. The idea is that children can play with sentence structure, key sight words, and grammar. Incorrect words just buzz and don't do anything.

There are three customizable robot voices and some sample sentences to help you get started. Created by two teachers from New Zealand.

Details: StoryBot, . Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: reading, parts of speech. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 8/29/2012. [WB]

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





### Swan Lake, The

This is an ebook version inspired from the Tchaikovsky ballet Swan Lake, complete with narration and orchestrated background music. The graphics are aesthetically pleasing and the music is played on real instruments, although it is never played in unabridged form. As a result, this is a fairly nice representation of Tchaikovsky's original ideas, and at the very least, is a good way for a child to play in a setting with lovely art and sounds.

The story follows the ballet, as Prince Sieg tries to find Princess Odette (the swan). The text on each page is narrated with word highlighting. Additional features include two types of puzzles (concentration and jigsaw) plus coloring pages. The main menu includes a direct link both to facebook and email, so keep an eye on how children use this app. We especially liked the ability to record your own narration. All in all, while there's not a lot of innovative features, the aesthetics make this app worthy of consideration. Made in Greece by Publisto.

Details: Publisto Ltd., [www.publisto.com](http://www.publisto.com). Price: \$4.99. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: ballet, reading, memory, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 8/30/2012. [WB]

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



### Talking Tom Talk Back

Here's a fun app-turned plush toy, and it really works. Out this week from Dragon-i Toys, Talking Tom Talk Back (\$30, [www.talkingfriends.com](http://www.talkingfriends.com)) is 12-inch tall stuffed cat with a sensitive, hidden microphone and moving lips. If you press his hand, he parrots-back anything he hears, in 4 second phrases. The result on children is fun to watch, as they literally put words in Tom's mouth, over and over again. Besides the parrot feature, Tom can also make other sounds -- some not so polite -- when his tummy is rubbed -- just like the app. Note that Tom has a twin called Talking Ben Talk Back, with the same price and capacity.

There are some limitations. For one, Tom can only store 20 seconds of sound bites before he turns into a deaf stuffed animal, and there is no warning. So you might keep talking, with no result. You learn that you need to squeeze Tom's hand to wake him up, and keep your sessions brief.

A set of other Plush toys that only make the app sounds are also available in 8", 10" and 12" sizes for \$8, \$10 and \$13 respectively. Key chains are also available for \$5. There are now 14 characters in the Talking Friends collection, including Talking Tom Cat, Talking Ben and Talking Gina the Giraffe.

The apps, from Outfit7 run on either Apple or Android devices, and they feature the same animated 3D characters that can engage in two-way conversations, which can them be shared on Facebook, YouTube or email.

Details: Dragon-i Toys, . Price: \$29. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: language, oral feedback, vocalization. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 8/10/2012. [WB]

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





### TenseBuilder

Designed for classroom settings for teaching tense forms (past, present or future), this app contains a set of 36 animated, sometimes funny cartoon-style videos that show a short sequence of events. You might see a bear sit on a turtle, or a woman approaching a man who is reading and calls him to dinner with a megaphone.

After the video, you are given a short multiple-choice quiz that requires some thinking to answer. "Tap on the picture that shows what will happen in the future, but hasn't happened yet -- The woman will call the man to dinner." To correctly answer you must touch one of three boxes that shows a woman approaching a man with a megaphone. This is a complicated, abstract task, which is why younger children could be confused by this line of questioning. It requires replaying the vignette from memory, and correctly seeing the situation from different points in time. For older non-English speaking students this app may be worth noting. Each verb has a separate animated lesson to show past, present and future tense.

Content includes 36 video lessons (the publisher plans to expand to 60 by December 2012), including the past tense of irregular verbs. Topics covered include how to sequence events and how to differentiate between events that will happen, events that are happening now, and events that have already happened.

Other features include the option to record your own sentences "to improve receptive and expressive language skills" and the ability to save and email progress reports.

Details: Mobile Education Store, [www.mobile-educationstore.com](http://www.mobile-educationstore.com). Price: \$14.99. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading comprehension, ESL, language, parts of speech, verbs, nouns, tense, English. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 8/28/2012. [WB]

### Wee A B See

This animal-themed, 26 screen alphabet book that looks good and is based on a solid play pattern -- find hidden letters. But some of the letters are less-than-accurately represented, and the circus music is fun at first, but becomes overbearing. Note that the music can be toggled on or off.

The idea is to start a new screen, listen to a short poem about a letter, and then play with the illustration. There's a variety of popup-style interactive elements. You can pop bubbles, swing the gorilla or help a hummingbird flap her wings. At the end of the letters, there's a sketchpad where you can practice drawing letters. This is a free-draw type of activity -- with no formative feedback.

After tracing a letter the child can either erase their work and repeat the task or select either the left or right arrows found in the same spots that enabled the child to progress through the story. There are some minor design issues. We wish the hidden letters in the animals would orient correctly once the child touches/finds them to enhance a child's opportunity to learn. For example, D & E are turned up and down respectively. Additionally, the letters are not always as distinguishable in the artwork as they are in the text. The squiggle line in the body of a newt looks more like an "S" than an "N".

Details: wee society, [www.weesociety.com](http://www.weesociety.com). Price: \$2.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad\*. Teaches/Purpose: letter recognition. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.6 stars. Entry date: 8/21/2012. [CC]

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



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





## Where's My Perry

This fun, addicting logic puzzle is based on the "Where's My Water" format. It features first-rate Disney characters and music from Disney's Phineas & Ferb series.

The idea of Where's My Water is simple. You use your fingertip to guide water in its different forms (ice, steam, and liquid) through different levels, to achieve a goal. The game feels a bit like "cut the rope" because you have to plan your tunnels carefully, so enough water is left to reach your goal. This is a great exercise in higher order thinking. In addition, there's a touch of reading comprehension practice, because each puzzle comes with a mini-story that is both narrated and presented in text.

Your initial investment of \$.99 gives you 80 puzzles, and free updates are promised. But there are other in-app hooks in this game. In the story, Agent P becomes stuck in one of his transportation tubes after being summoned to the headquarters of Major Monogram for a mission briefing. Your goal is to lead Agent P back to the OWCA headquarters. Interesting puzzle elements include lasers to help change water to different forms -- a heat-inator to turn water into steam or ice into water, a cool-inator to turn water into ice and the celebrate-inator vacuums up water or steam. The game also features gnomes to collect and bonus levels to unlock.

Monetization. Pay attention to the way this app is monetized. You buy the first level for \$.99, which gives you 80 puzzles. Additional sets of puzzles cost \$.99 each as in-app sales, or you can unlock the full series for \$1.99. So the true cost of this app is \$2.99. There are a lot of padlocks in this game. In addition there are frequent facebook "like" pings.

All in all, this is an excellent quality, but highly commercialized app. As long as you keep an eye on eye on your pocketbook, you'll have a great time, and stretch your brain, too.

Details: Disney Interactive Studios, [www.disneyinteractivestudios.com](http://www.disneyinteractivestudios.com). Price: \$0.99. Ages: 10-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad, Android. Teaches/Purpose: logic, memory, strategy, reading . Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 8/22/2012. [WB]

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





# Future Releases & Updates

SEPTEMBER 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.*

## A Whale of a Tale!: All About Porpoises, Dolphins and Whales

The fourth digital book in The Cat in the Hat's Learning Library series (adapted from the printed series) this omBook features The Cat in the Hat as a guide.

You board Captain McElligot's Cetacean Station, searching for whales, dolphins, and porpoises and learning how cetaceans stay warm without hair, have teeth or baleen, swim in troops, spyhop, spin, and breach.

The app features interactive diagrams designed to teach the difference between a fish tale and a whale tale, demonstrate the use of echolocation to find prey and highlight migration patterns on a world chart.

Children can also learn new terms by tapping on instant glossary words throughout the story. Other features include: a matching quiz to test your child's dolphin knowledge; animated objects; individual words that highlight and are read aloud when tapped; and picture / word association — words that zoom up and are spoken when pictures are touched. As with other Oceanhouse Media books, there are two ways to read the book - Read to Me and Read it Myself. The book is based on original text and artwork.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, [www.oceanhousemedia.com](http://www.oceanhousemedia.com). Price: \$5.99. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: science, fish, oceanography. Entry date: 8/29/2012.



## Action Shot Digital Video Camera

About the size of a hockey-puck, the Action Shot Camera is a portable camera designed to provide extreme sports enthusiasts with an up-close, front row view of their adventures. The camera can be attached to skateboards, bikes or helmets using the mounting system, and can record up to 20 minutes of your athletic feats. The footage can then be uploaded to a computer through the built-in USB port and shared with family and friends or uploaded to social media websites. Scheduled for release Fall 2012.

There is no video viewer, however you can purchase a line of Action Shot accessories including: Action Shot Cam Video Viewer Attachment for on-the-spot viewing of recorded footage (\$30); Action Shot Cam Flash Attachment (\$20); Action Shot Cam Water Proof Case (\$20); Action Shot Cam Hi-Impact Case to protect the camera from falls (\$10); and Action Shot Cam Mounting Accessories Kit (\$25). There will also be a high definition version available that lets you share your stunts online in high-def (HD Action Shot Camera - \$100).

Details: Jakks Pacific, Inc., [www.jakks.com](http://www.jakks.com). Price: \$50. Ages: 7-up. Platform: digital video camera. Teaches/Purpose: photography. Entry date: 7/25/2012.

## Berenstain Bears and the Big Spelling Bee, The

Children join Sister Bear and Papa Bear as they practice for the big Spelling Bee at Bear Country School. Like other Oceanhouse media apps, this one is based on an existing printed story. It uses enlarged artwork and individual words are highlighted as the story is read. Words also zoom up when pictures are touched. There is no actual spelling bee game.

Features include Auto Play, which plays like a movie by automatically reading and turning pages; Read To Me, which allows children to listen to the narrated story with words highlighted as they are read; and Read It Myself, which lets children read the book in its traditional format.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, [www.oceanhousemedia.com](http://www.oceanhousemedia.com). Price: \$2.99. Ages: 4-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language. Entry date: 6/7/2012.





## Cell Lock-Up

About the size of a toaster, this is a tongue-in-cheek jail cell for your child's (or spouse's) cell phone, designed to bring levity to the issue of the technological erosion of family time.

The rather cheap feeling plastic case has a "lock" which is designed to be hacked (an alarm will sound). After you put your device in the cage, you set a timer for 15, 30, 45, or 60 minute terms, using the push button timer.

A judge's voice announces the sentence as the door is shut. Once time has been served, the judge announces that "justice is served" and the cell phone users are "free to rejoin digital society". If you try to remove your phone before time is up, an alarm sounds and a guard announces, "Alert! Alert! Break-out in progress!"

This type of gadget naturally raises the question: Have we really come to a point when we need to lock a child's phone in a jail? What happened to plain old parenting, where we take the phones away during homework or tell our kids no phones allowed at the dinner table?

Details: EB Brands, . Price: \$20. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: a parenting utility. Entry date: 8/10/2012.

## Curiosityville ([www.curiosityville.com](http://www.curiosityville.com))

Billing itself as a "personalized learning world for children ages 3 to 8 and their families" this subscription-based service "allows parents to guide and track their child's progress in real time."

There are six themes, represented by characters. These consist of Pablo the painter, Ruby the teacher, Joe the gadget guy who is also Curiosityville's mayor, Rosie the scientist, Jack the policeman, and Olive the dancing chef. Designed to teach reading, math, science, social studies and other core skills, the site also features the Learning Tree, a real-time and interactive data-driven collection and reporting program.

As a child plays in Curiosityville, the Learning Tree tracks a child's activity, automatically adjusting to a child's learning level and interests. Every activity adapts to a child's learning skill level within 10 Learning Areas. The Learning Tree also makes personalized recommendations for learning at home, online and in the community. Other features include learning clubs that focus on art, reading, nature, science, cooking and community service, where children can participate in contests and earn rewards and prizes; child's personal Scrapbook to save and share art created in Pablo's Masterpiece Maker, songs composed in Joe's Music Maker, and stories written in Ruby's Story Master; Show and Tell Book for parents; and personalized recommendations to parents for offline play that connect to what their children learn online.

Full access requires a \$79 annual membership fee. There is a two week trial membership for no cost.

Curiosityville was created by Susan Magsamen, the president of the L-rn (Learning Resource Network, see <http://l-rn.com/faqs.htm>), a national community-based movement to bring the science of play and learning to life. She is also the director of interdisciplinary partnerships at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Brain Science Institute, and serves on a number of boards for non-profit organizations. Susan also founded FamilyStories, a collection of resources for families, and Curiosity Kits, a supplemental learning company creating multi-sensory learning activities for children. This service was designed by Fablevision.

Details: Curiosityville, LLC, <https://curiosityville.com/>. Price: \$79/yr. Ages: 3-8. Platform: Internet Site. Teaches/Purpose: early learning, reading, school subjects. Entry date: 8/22/2012.





## Disney Epic Mickey 2: The Power of Two

This year's edition of Epic Mickey (aka "Epic Mickey 2") lets a second player assume the role of Oswald the Lucky Rabbit, while you play as Mickey. Oswald was Walt Disney's first cartoon character, pre-dating Mickey. Hence the title: The Power of Two. This title contains 80 years of forgotten Disney characters and theme park attractions.

Like last year's underwhelming title, players use a magical paint brush that wields paint and thinner. This year, Oswald gets a remote control that lets him command electricity. But this year's edition has a major new feature: drop-in, drop-out (co-op) gameplay, so you can play with another person -- much like the LEGO titles.

Content includes the voices of the official actors, and the soundtrack can be customized to each player. Developed by Junction Point for Disney. Prices are \$60 for Xbox 360 and PS3 versions, \$50 for the Wii, and \$40 for PC. Coming Fall 2012. See the CTR E3 preview at <http://youtu.be/TgzIG9WJPCU>

Details: Disney Interactive Studios, [www.disneyinteractivestudios.com](http://www.disneyinteractivestudios.com). Price: \$60. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Xbox 360, Wii, PlayStation 3 Move, Windows. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Entry date: 6/12/2012.

## Disney Epic Mickey: Power of Illusion

Called (by us, anyway) "Epic Mickey 2 for 3DS" players can play as Mickey Mouse as he infiltrates the Castle of Illusion on a quest to end the evil witch Mizrabel's diabolical intentions. Made exclusively for the 3DS, the game furthers the Wasteland saga and takes players on a new adventure.

This time, the Castle of Illusion has fallen into the alternate world of Wasteland. Mizrabel unleashes a plot to escape using the Castle of Illusion to imprison and drain the cartoon essence from currently famous Toons.

Players use Mickey's magical paint thinner brush to fight Mizrabel and save the Toons.

Features include a drawing and painting function that allows players to draw their own 2D illustrations that appear in the game on the top screen, in 3D. Other features include battles with familiar Disney villains and game levels based on animated Disney films including Peter Pan and Aladdin. Developed by DreamRift in collaboration with Junction Point for Disney. See CTR's E3 interviews with the creators, at [http://youtu.be/d\\_oiz8Zmuxc](http://youtu.be/d_oiz8Zmuxc)

Details: Disney Interactive Studios, . Price: \$40. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, socialization, creativity. Entry date: 6/12/2012.



## Easi Speak USB Recorder

This microphone for the classroom lets you record, replay and download up to four hours of audio (WAV or MP3 formats). It operates with two buttons, and charges and downloads to your computer via built-in USB port (Mac or PC). It also includes one headphone jack. Designed for classroom use.

Details: Learning Resources, . Price: \$70. Ages: 4-up. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: microphone. Entry date: 8/20/2012.



## Fantastic Gymnastics Dora

This dancing Dora doll makes a big first impression but runs out of moves. Fisher-Price's Fantastic Gymnastics Dora (\$50, [www.fisher-price.com](http://www.fisher-price.com)) is a noisy, hard-plastic robot that can right herself and do a handstand split, as long as she's placed on a hard slippery floor. Her actions resemble last year's Rock Star Mickey, who can also do the splits.

Inspired by the Nickelodeon show, this Dora's best move is her flip. Her routines, activated by pushing a button on her belly, consist of seven moves that include the splits, a handstand and backbends. As she clunks through her routines, she counts and sings 40 phrases in English and Spanish. This includes a song about teamwork. Like many toys these days, this Dora will be released along with an app, which Fisher-Price says will let you watch your Dora come to life. See the demo at [http://youtu.be/ivQH\\_E\\_voFg](http://youtu.be/ivQH_E_voFg).

Details: Fisher-Price, Inc., [www.fisher-price.com](http://www.fisher-price.com). Price: \$50. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: fostering an interest in gymnastics. Entry date: 7/25/2012.





## GoSum

Like a crossword-puzzle with numbers, this ad-infested multi-player app asks you to place numbered tiles on a board to achieve points. The free version is hard to figure out. To play, you drag number and function tiles (for addition, subtraction, multiplication and division) onto a shared gameboard, to build off each others equations, not unlike Words With Friends.

Features include: play 2, 3, or 4-player games. Prices are \$2.99 for iPad and \$0.99 for iPhone.

Details: Aaptex Ltd, [www.gosum.com](http://www.gosum.com). Price: \$2.99. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: math, math facts. Entry date: 8/16/2012.



## I Spy Two Game Pack (DS)

Two older games come on one cartridge. I Spy Fun House and I Spy Universe contain 50 riddles and 200 levels of play. In I Spy Fun House, you earn tickets by completing games, riddles, and the ultimate Prize Popper challenge.

I Spy Universe features a trip through the cosmos in which players unlock new planets and explore the universe while searching for 400 objects in 36 I Spy riddles and playing six brain-teaser games. See the separate reviews of each.

Details: Scholastic, Inc., [www.scholastic.com](http://www.scholastic.com). Price: \$20. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, visual discrimination, memory, language. Entry date: 8/28/2012.

## Magic School Bus: Dino Shuffle

Available for download in the LeapFrog App Center, this game lets children shuffle through a Dino Deck that science teacher Ms. Frizzle has created to learn hundreds of dinosaur facts, including size, diet and speed. Children can test their dino knowledge in two games.

Details: Scholastic, Inc., [www.scholastic.com](http://www.scholastic.com). Price: \$7.50. Ages: 5-8. Platform: Leapster Explorer, LeapPad. Teaches/Purpose: dinosaurs. Entry date: 8/28/2012.

## Magic Town

Magic Town ([www.magictown.com](http://www.magictown.com)) is a story delivery system for iPad and Internet. The download is free; additional stories are sold as in-app sales. The stories live inside the exotic houses shown in a town on the first menu, where hosts Izzy and Max introduce you to Louis the Storyteller, a wise old lion who has collected all the books in Magic Town.

The books we previewed are limited; we did not try any of the purchased content so it is not possible to rate this title. It's up to kids to read the stories and build the town. Each child's version of Magic Town is customized to his or her personal profile. Magic Town first launched as a website and has recently (August 2012) migrated to the iPad. Produced by Mindshapes, a London based studio started by some of the founders of Playfish, a service that was sold to Electronic Arts.

Details: Mindshapes Limited, . Price: \$free. Ages: 4-8. Platform: Internet Site, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language. Entry date: 5/16/2012.





## MG

MG is a planned portable Wi-Fi gaming system that will be able to run the thousands of free and freemium Android apps. The device is being self funded through Kickstarter, and the planned cost is \$170 or so. Features include a front facing camera, a 4" touchscreen, rounded corners and grip. The goal will be to appeal to older kids who don't yet have smartphones.

There will be no data plan. The cost includes preloaded games and a cash credit toward future game purchases. A management feature called the MG Family Collaboration System will have a "DebitSmart" Digital Wallet and "Remote Trust" notification functions. The MG "DebitSmart" Digital Wallet allows parents to set up a reloadable debit account for their teen's MG and create "game allowances" that link their credit card or bank account to a set amount.

MG's "Remote Trust" notification allows kids the freedom to discover, download and play the games they want from the app marketplace, while parents can opt in to receive email updates on their kids' MG activity.

Other features include: an MG Origins Avatar System to track points and accomplishments; built in Wi-Fi; a 4" touchscreen; 4GB of internal memory, plus an SD port for expansion; camera that can shoot stills or video; a stereo headset jack; and Android 4.0's "Face Unlock" security feature utilizing MG's built-in front-facing camera. The MG runs on Android 4.0 - Ice Cream Sandwich (ICS). See <http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/playmg/2141856242?token=6eb90711>. MG will be sold through Amazon.com.

Details: PlayMG Corp., . Price: \$169. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: An Android gaming system. Entry date: 8/30/2012.



## Midway Arcade App

Released Feb. 23, 2012 for iPad, iPhone and iPod Touch, this collection of 10 classic arcade titles includes Spy Hunter, Joust, Rampage, Pool, Air Hockey, Roll Ball and Basketball. You can purchase additional Midway classics through In-App Purchase. The extra fun in the Fantasy Game Pack includes Gauntlet I, Gauntlet II and Wizard of Wor, while the Action Game Pack unlocks APB, NARC and Total Carnage. Players compete against their friends, earn achievements and dominate online leaderboards. A PR quote was provided by Greg Ballard, Senior Vice President, Digital Games, Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment. Games include:

Spy Hunter: Race down a freeway in an armed sports car and destroy enemies while protecting civilian vehicles; Rampage: Reduce the city to rubble as gigantic monsters George (a King-Kong-like gorilla), Lizzie (a Godzilla-like dinosaur/lizard), and Ralph (a giant werewolf); Defender: Defeat waves of invading aliens while protecting astronauts in this 2D shooting game; Joust: While riding a flying ostrich, fight to defeat enemy knights riding buzzards; Root Beer Tapper: As the bartender, serve beer and collect empty mugs and tips without letting the thirsty patrons' patience expire; Arch Rivals: In this Basket Brawl, outscore opponents as a crowd pleaser, rebound king, a defensive giant and more; Skill-Based Games: Beat your friends' top scores in Pool, Air Hockey, Roll Ball and Basketball. The two additional game packs, available through In-App Purchase, include: Fantasy Game Pack Gauntlet I: Hack and slash through monsters as they try to exit the dungeon maze; Gauntlet II: The monsters return in this acclaimed sequel, with all new levels, and challenges; Wizard of Wor: "Warriors" must make their way through monster-infested dungeons to destroy the Wizard of Wor. Action Game Pack APB: Playing as Officer Bob, a rookie police officer, pursue law-breakers, cite and arrest criminals - and pick up donuts along the way; NARC: Arrest and kill drug offenders, confiscate their money and drugs, to defeat Mr. Big; Total Carnage: As a member of the Doomsday Squad, invade evil dictator's General Akhboob's base and destroy mutants, rescue hostages and capture Akhboob.

Details: Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, Inc., [www.warnerbros.com](http://www.warnerbros.com). Price: \$.99. Ages: 10-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: video game history. Entry date: 2/23/2012.



## MobiGo 2 Touch Learning System

This second edition MobiGo (MobiGo 2) has two new significant features for 2012: a motion sensor and microphone. It is backward compatible with older MobiGo cartridges. Like the Leapfrog's Leapster GS, it is designed to run cartridges specifically for children aged 3-to 8. Unlike the Leapster or the LeapPad, MobiGo has a full QWERTY keyboard that slides out from the bottom.

Features include the ability to run apps that have been downloaded to a computer, and then transferred to MobiGo via a USB cable, included. Currently 80 apps are available for download at the online store, called the "VTech Learning Lodge Navigator" at [www.VTechKids.com/Download](http://www.VTechKids.com/Download). See also the InnoTab 2.

Details: VTech Electronics North America, [www.vtechkids.com](http://www.vtechkids.com). Price: \$60. Ages: 3-8. Platform: Smart Toy, mobigo. Teaches/Purpose: early learning, a mobile device for children. Entry date: 6/12/2012.



## Nabi 2

The iPad wasn't the only tablet to get a brain/screen transplant in 2012. Nabi 2 (<http://www.nabitablet.com>), aka the "Fuhu NABI NABI2-NV7A 7-Inch Tablet", comes with a higher resolution 1080p graphics, a better battery and a faster processor (NVIDIA Tegra 3 4-PLUS-1 quad-core), compared with last year's edition. In addition, Nabi is no longer locked into a Toys R Us exclusive, so you'll find them in other stores. Note that the final version of Nabi 2 has not yet been released, so these notes should be considered preliminary.

With financial backing from Foxxcon (ironically the same company that makes the iPad) the China-based Fuhu clearly sees an opportunity in the US kid's app market, and Nabi 2 is the key. Pronounced "nob-ee" (like doorknob) and not "nab - ee", the tablet begs the question: with more power and the same price what's the catch? It appears that more and more kid's hardware makers are following a business model used by your local car dealer. Sell you a cheap car, but expensive floor mats. The hardware is merely the portal to hardware specific stores.

In the pre-market version of the Nabi 2 I tested back in June, it appeared that it was no longer easy to get to a mainstream app store. If you wanted to put some of your child's songs or videos on his or her Nabi, you'd have to use the Spinlet, a store that orders songs or videos such as "Paddington Bear," "Busy Town" or 19 million other tracks. Apps come from App Zone 2.0, with 500 children's apps plus "exclusive access" to heavily didactic Fooz Kids University.

Movies and TV are sold on a subscription basis (\$3 a month for example, or \$36/year) and songs are offered à la carte from an MP3 store. Educational content consists of dry multiple-choice drills on English, math, science and social studies for Kindergarten through Fifth Grade, from Sunburst Digital.

EBooks and magazines come from a store called MeeGenius. Other upsells will include Nabi specific accessories, from carrying cases to character packs, headphones to puzzle pieces to the bumper.

Other features include a Chore List and Treasure Box. With Chore List, kids can manage their priorities for the week and keep track of their achievements, which parents can manage. Treasure Box is a rewards system allowing children to earn and choose from amazing games, apps, music, video and accessories.

It is still possible, in theory anyway, to type in a password, turn off the kid mode, go to a browser and get apps from the outside world, but you won't be able to easily install them in your child's account. This wasn't a process I was eager to attempt on the preview Nabi. Stay tuned.

Details: Fuhu, Inc., [www.foozkids.com](http://www.foozkids.com). Price: \$200. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: an Android tablet for children. Entry date: 6/12/2012.





## Pokémon Black Version 2

Coming next month: Two versions of Pokémon for Nintendo DS, with backward compatibility with previous Pokémon games.

Both new versions (White 2 and Black 2) will have a new sharing feature called Join Avenue. Anyone with whom a player has interacted through wireless tag mode, trading or battling can open shops in Join Avenue and sell items not found elsewhere in the game. There are several different types of shops, including supplies or the ability to power up Pokémon. The rarity of items that can be purchased from these shops is determined by how populated a player's avenue is. Other features include: Memory Link -- by connecting Pokémon Black Version 2 or Pokémon White Version 2 with a previously played Pokémon Black Version or Pokémon White Version game, players will be able to see what happened to some of the characters from Pokémon Black Version and Pokémon White Version during the past two years. They'll also be able to capture special Pokémon.

The scenes players encounter in Pokémon Black Version 2 and Pokémon White Version 2 will depend on how far they have progressed through Pokémon Black Version or Pokémon White Version. To use Memory Link, players must have either two systems from the Nintendo DS or Nintendo 3DS family, or broadband Internet access and a Pokémon Black Version game or Pokémon White Version game that has been synced to the Pokémon Global Link website. Also new: Pokémon Dream Radar (Oct. 7 2012) - a new eShop title for the 3DS. This is a 2D experience that lets players catch Pokémon and items using augmented-reality technology by moving the Nintendo 3DS to aim and shoot Dream Clouds. Caught Pokémon and items from Pokémon Dream Radar can be transferred into Pokémon Black Version 2 and Pokémon White Version 2. The Pokémon that players catch in Pokémon Dream Radar may have hidden abilities that aren't available in Pokémon Black Version 2 and Pokémon White Version 2, and many of the items in the game cannot be found in Pokémon Black Version 2 and Pokémon White Version 2. Finally the new Pokédex 3D Pro lets players learn about their Pokémon. Content includes facts about 640 Pokémon, set in the history of the series. A set of quizzes lets them test their Pokémon knowledge. The original Pokédex 3D will no longer be available from the Nintendo eShop after Oct. 1. Launching on Oct. 7, 2012, the Pokémon Black Version 2 and Pokémon White Version 2 are made for the Nintendo DS family of systems, but are also playable in 2D on Nintendo 3DS and Nintendo 3DS XL. Visit <http://www.pokemon.com/BlackWhite2> for more information.

Details: Nintendo of America, [www.nintendo.com](http://www.nintendo.com). Price: \$35. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Nintendo DS, Nintendo DSi. Teaches/Purpose: reading, logic, memory. Entry date: 8/20/2012.

## Super Scratch Programming Adventure!

This is a color, cartoon-illustrated guide book designed to teach programming fundamentals of Scratch - the educational programming language developed by Mitch Resnick's group at the MIT Media Lab. The book is thin -- 160 pages, organized into 10 chapters that start with sprites and coordinates, and end with complex sprite movements and sound recording. Each chapter starts with a cartoon that stars Mitch (a tall, geeky programmer inspired by Mitch Resnick) and Scratchy (the cat). It then introduces a basic programming challenge, and walks you through each step. Missing are useful features, such as an appendix or command directory, making this less of a reference book, and more of an attempt to contextualize Scratch, which in turn, can lead an upper elementary age child through the Scratch basics.

The book was written by The Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups Learning through Engineering, Art and Design (LEAD) and localized into English by the Canadian-based No-Starch Press. We were interested to learn that Scratch has now been localized into 50 languages. The book is best used with Scratch version 1.4, which includes Windows 2000 or newer, Mac OSX 10.4 or newer, and Ubuntu Linux version 9.4 or newer. Computers should have at least 120 MB of free disk space, and it helps if they also have a camera and microphone.

Details: No Starch Press, [www.nostach.com](http://www.nostach.com). Price: \$24.95. Ages: 7-up. Platform: book. Teaches/Purpose: math, logic, Scratch programming. Entry date: 8/29/2012.





### Tekken 3D Prime Edition

This game features the complete Tekken: Blood Vengeance 3D movie, along with the fighting action of the Tekken series. Players can battle with 40 fighters from the Tekken world and amass a collection of original Tekken Cards in-game or obtain using StreetPass to find them all. The game features multiple single players modes, as well as two player multiplayer through Local Play and Internet Player.

Details: Namco Bandai Games America Inc., [www.namcobandaigames.com](http://www.namcobandaigames.com). Price: \$40. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, memory. Entry date: 2/16/2012.



### USA States Abbreviations Flash Cards

You can't argue with the price of this flashcard app (free) specifically designed to introduce by way of drill the two letter abbreviations for the 50 US states. Each "card" displays one of the state abbreviations. Tapping the card or tapping the state button will shows the state name and a small map of the US with a shadow area for that state.

Touching the Map button opens a map of the United States with all of the states abbreviations. There are no right or wrong answers, and no Internet connection is required.

Details: Granza, Inc., [www.granzainc.com](http://www.granzainc.com). Price: \$free. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: US states and abbreviations. Entry date: 8/30/2012.

