



Children's TECHNOLOGY REVIEW

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Simple, fun... Magic

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* Denotes an
"Editor's
Choice."



Welcome to Fall 2012 and Happy Halloween!

We have an incredible batch of products to share with you this month. We know you're in a hurry, so here are the headlines.

- **Kinect TV** isn't perfect by any stretch, but it represents a noble attempt to get children jumping around, with the TV, rather than just passively watching it. See page 11. Oh, and while you have your Kinect turned on, try Harry Potter for Kinect on page 8.
- Three new well designed **Pokémon** titles have arrived. Enough said. Pages 15-16.
- **InnoTab 2** (page 9) and **LeapPad2** (page 12) both have cameras, accelerometers, and don't run Android. See our compare/contract video, at <http://youtu.be/SgxhoIBpfbo>
- **Pixel'd** (page 15) is an important new iPad animation tool from Disney's Kerpoof group.
- Remember the Living Books? They're back for iPad under the Wonderful brand. Can an antique interactive product work in the tablet age? See pages 8 and 20.
- Speaking of apps... Don't miss **Toca Band** (shown on this month's cover, and on page 19), and if you're intersted in children's lit, you must try Moonbot's **IMAG•N•O•TRON** on page 9. Finally, Halloween is just around the corner, so we've pulled a few interesting haunted apps, which have been highlighted in Chris' Mashable column. Enjoy the issue!

Duck Duck Moose Lays a Golden Egg

This month was a big one for a small children's app publisher called Duck Duck Moose. They announced that they were going to grow into a middle-sized publisher, and make it their day jobs. We've seen this happen many times over the years. Will they be able to make it work? To find out, Scott Traylor talked with Duck Duck Moose co-founder Caroline Hu Flexer, who has also presented many times at Dust or Magic. See page 4.

LittleClickers: Next Generation Electric Cars

Every time you coast, or apply the brakes in the Nissan Leaf electric car, the motor acts as an electric generator, converting energy (called kinetic energy) that would otherwise be wasted into battery energy. So even when you're slowing down, you're charging up; a concept called "regenerative braking." The Leaf is just one of many cars coming out this fall, which is why we decide to find links and videos to help you learn about this computer-driven industry. See page 3.

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

Dust or Magic

Review this year's "dust" and the "magic" with people who can tell the difference.

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

Sessions are being created by designers, reviewers and researchers in the children's interactive media space. These include Chris Crowell, CTR; Barbara Chamberlin, New Mexico State University; Daren Carstens, of Carstens Studios; Drew Davidson of CMU; Chip Donohue, TEC at the Erikson Institute; Caroline Hu Flexer, Duck Duck Moose; Tinsley Galyean, PlaySquare.tv; Jim Gray, YogiPlay, Claire Green, Parents' Choice Foundation and the Sandbox Summit; Benj Heuston, President, Waterford Learning; Kevin Hogan, Editor, Technology & Learning; David Kleeman, American Center for Children & Media; Jason Krogh, zinc Roe Design; Chris Lindgren and Jens Peter, Toca Boca; Frank Migliorelli, migidea.com; Robin Raskin, Living in Digital Times; Don Rawitsch, Co-Creator, Oregon Trail; Mark Schlichting, Noodleworks; Bob Tedeschchi, Columnist, New York Times; Scott Traylor, 360KID; Jesse Schell of CMU; and Kate Wilson of Nosy Crow. View speaker bios.

I Want to Register! Check seat status at www.dustormagic.com or call 800-993-9499

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- Contributors are required to disclose bias.
- There is no sponsored or advertising content of any variety.
- We're transparent; disclosing our review instrument and sources of potential bias.

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ELECTRIC VEHICLES



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We've all grown used to stopping at the gas station, the smell of exhaust, and worrying about global warming. But thanks to stronger lithium-ion batteries and computer controlled brakes that generate electricity (see <http://1.usa.gov/Oj5wCz>) the days of gas-powered cars are numbered. Let's learn about electric vehicles, also known as EVs.

1. Quick! How many electric vehicles can you name?
There's the Nissan Leaf and the Chevy Volt. But did you know about the Fiat 500 Elettra (pictured charging, above) or the Smart Fortwo Electric Drive (right). At National Geographic <http://bit.ly/Ovoy09> you can see 11 types of EVs coming by next year. While you're there, take the test <http://on.natgeo.com/Imtsg> to see how much know about electric cars and fuel.



2. Can race cars be electric? What about school buses?
Yes in both cases. Visit <http://bit.ly/PSg2GW> to learn about The Nemesis electric car, a modified Lotus Exige which hit a top speed of 148.7 mph with batteries charged by wind turbines. At <http://www.afdc.energy.gov/case/625> you can learn how a school district in Michigan uses an electric bus. Learn more at <http://www.michigancleancities.org>.

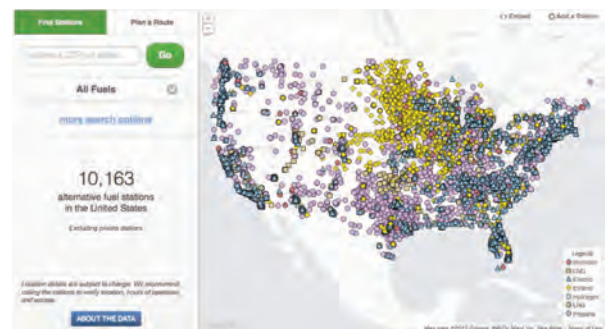


4. How many miles can an electric car go on a single charge?
According to Green Car Reports <http://hgm.me/UgJOaN> most common electric cars, like the Chevy Volt, can go for about 40 miles on a single charge. A very light electric car in Germany, called "Boozer" went over 1000 miles, but it took over 36 hours and a special track. See <http://phys.org/news/2011-08-boozer-ev-miles-plus.html>

5. Q. What weighs more: a Sumo wrestler or the battery in a Chevy Volt?
A. They're about the same: 400 lbs, according to <http://bit.ly/jDSNAU>. The batteries are made by LG, a Korean company who runs a battery factory in Holland, Michigan. Visit the plant and see the batteries, at <http://bit.ly/hlZgk9>.

APPLICATION: Talk your parents into switching to an EV.
STEP 1: Find a charging station by entering your zip code at <http://www.afdc.energy.gov/locator/stations>.
STEP 2: Tell them how to charge a car. Nissan Leaf takes about 10 hours to charge using a standard wall outlet, or two hours with a charging station you install in your garage. If electricity were gas, this would equal about \$.80 cents per gallon using current costs. STEP 3: Look at some new cars online. You can get a tax credit that brings the price to about \$29,000. Here are links to popular models.

- Chevy Volt <http://bit.ly/NMze4x>
- Ford C-Max <http://myfrd.co/SzX1qy>
- Nissan Leaf <http://bit.ly/bjtY9S>



YouTube™ LittleClickers YouTube Playlist: Electric Cars

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcBVHzUUEKwnPiE3UF3wB6GSTp0ooH1xW>



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

DUCK DUCK MOOSE

Lays a Golden Egg

BY SCOTT TRAYLOR

Traylor, S. (2012). Duck Duck Moose Lays a Golden Egg. Children's Technology Review, Oct. 2012 Vol. 20, No. 10, Issue 151, Pages 4-6.

When it comes to apps that actively engage young children, one of the companies with products on every list is Duck Duck Moose Design (<http://www.duckduckmoosedesign.com>). This small person studio — funny name and all — was one of the first to the children's app scene, with an app called *Wheels on the Bus* (CTR August 2009). Duck Duck Moose began as a three person operation based in San Mateo, CA. It launched its first app in 2009; today there are 14 DDM titles, collectively accounting for about 2.4 million paid downloads (publisher's numbers). On September 26, 2012, Duck Duck Moose announced it will be expanding its business, with a \$7 million investment from Lightspeed Venture Partners, Sequoia Capital and Stanford University. This type of investment raises questions that every small publisher hopes to deal with, namely "What do we do with lots of money?" "Is it possible to grow in a smart way, and keep our focus on quality?" And more importantly, "is this type of investment, and the constraints that come with it, a blessing or a curse?" Only time will tell. But we can say one thing for sure — Duck Duck Moose Design is once again charting new ground, as one of the first small mom-and-pop app publishers to get a significant cash infusion. Many other small children's app publishers will be watching from the sidelines with great interest to see how it affects their work. To explore the topic, CTR contributor Scott Traylor sat down with one of the three founders, Caroline Hu Flexer, just following the announcement.

Scott Traylor: How did Duck Duck Moose get its start?

Caroline Hu Flexer: Duck Duck Moose was born in 2008, when my then two year old daughter wanted to play with our first-gen iPhones. I noticed how the touchscreen enabled really young children to interact with technology in a way they hadn't been able to before. I started to see how the iPhone could provide big opportunities for learning and play. While this experience was engaging, there were no high-quality educational apps designed for kids at the time. Our company started with my husband, Michael, and our friend, Nicci. Between the three of us, we developed an app from beginning to end, from an initial concept all the way through to launch. Nicci is an illustrator and graphic designer, and Michael is a software engineer. He worked at various start-ups and was one of the founding engineers at Siebel Systems. Nicci and Michael worked at a prior start-up together. That's how they met. My background is in design and business. I started my career in architecture and previously worked at the design firm IDEO. I was heavily influenced by the IDEO design process. It's a user-centered approach where you work very closely with your customer. In our case, that's the child, starting with the initial concept, to brainstorming, prototyping and working all the way through development. This approach is really core to what we do.



Liberal arts, applied: Nicci, Caroline and Michael combine backgrounds in art, classical music, architecture and software engineering. They form the core of Duck Duck Moose.

ST: Tell me about your first app.

CHF: As a hobby, we started designing the *Wheels on the Bus* app for our own child. We all had other full-time jobs. It took about three months to develop, all of us working part-time. We launched that app in 2009. Later that year we won a KAPi Award, our first children's industry award, and that was the beginning. That's when we realized that maybe this could become a business. *Wheels on the Bus* continues to sell three-and-a-half years after its launch, and it's still in the top charts. It wasn't until 2010 that Nicci and I started working full-time. Michael started full time in 2011. That's when a good friend of his, Jesse Ambrose, another founding engineer at Siebel Systems, joined our team full-time. It was just the four of us up until early this year. The four of us basically created the first 11 titles. Today we're a team of nine, including the three founders.

ST: When did you realize your app was taking off? Was it purely the number of sales? Were you getting phone calls from the media?

CHF: It was a combination. Warren Buckleitner [disclosure: Warren is the Editor of this publication] was the first to call us to see if there were real people behind the app. He was the first person to discover us, and shortly thereafter he wrote about our app in *The New York Times*. We were thrilled! We had great word of mouth among parents and kids, and had strong download numbers. Apple also gave us a lot of attention. They really liked what we were doing. It was a gradual process. After the first app, we didn't know if we would be as successful with our following apps, but all of our apps have done really well. It really comes back to the design process and working really closely with kids. I think that's why each of our following apps have been successful in the marketplace.

ST: Your own kids must be very familiar with software testing.

CHF: They are. They're four and seven years-old now. They've become our QA testers, not so much our kid testers anymore, though we're constantly inspired by them. At this point, they're finding bugs for Daddy, so we're teaching them how to reproduce and identify bugs. They also do some of our voice recordings.

ST: In addition to the visual uniqueness of your apps, the music really stands out.

CHF: Michael and I are classical musicians. He plays the cello; I play the violin. So he codes all of our apps, and plays the cello when needed. Music is a big part of our apps. We place a lot of emphasis on it. We compose music specifically for the apps. We use some public domain songs, of course, but sometimes we have friends and others compose for us.

ST: How has your thinking changed about developing apps for kids since you started?

CHF: The core of it hasn't changed. We've always put kids at the center of what we do, but we're always learning different things with each app and with different ages we may be targeting. We've done a lot of different types of apps. We started with toddler apps, like The Wheels on the Bus, which had one or two things for a young child to focus on -- something we thought about a lot in the design. We didn't want our apps to over-stimulate, to have too many things going on at the same time. From a developmental perspective, we wanted our apps for toddlers to have simple interactions. Our apps for older children have been more open-ended and have evolved into more layered interactions. One example is our Draw and Tell app, where children make their own drawings, record their own voices, and create their own story. It's a very different approach to the interaction.

ST: You're testing those apps with older kids during your development process as well?

CHF: Absolutely. Depending on the age group that we're targeting, we recruit children to do one-on-one kid testing. A lot of it is observation. There's not a lot of talking during the test. It's mostly watching how children react to things from two perspectives. From an engagement perspective, what things make a child giggle? And what might cause them to press the home button and leave our app? We go back to the drawing board when that happens. And from a usability perspective, can a child successfully interact with the app? If not, we make changes there as well.

ST: Is there any child development or usability research you use to help guide your app development process?

CHF: A lot of what I've learned came from the Dust or Magic conference and Warren's Child Psychology 101 presentation. We also work closely with teachers, as well. If we're working on a kindergarten app, we'll work with kindergarten teachers as well as testing with kids. We're currently working with several teachers. One of which is Jennifer DiBrienza, who came out of the Stanford Ed school with a Ph.D. in early elementary education. She has an academic perspective and she has also been a teacher in New York City public schools for eight years, kindergarten through second grade. That's a great combination for us, and we learn a lot.

ST: What sort of stories are you hearing from parents who purchase your apps?

CHF: We hear everything from parents using our apps for potty training to kids singing the songs to teachers in classrooms. A few stories stand out. One parent told us about their special needs son who was pre-verbal and had never spoken. He was using our Word Wagon app. There is a character in Word Wagon called Mozzarella, the Mouse, and at one point in the app this mouse puts his hands up



"All the decisions we make have the child at the forefront."

"It's important to understand children at a very visceral level."

Watch and Learn: DDM Presentations on YouTube

YouTube

Caroline Hu Flexer of Duck Duck Moose: How We Made a Few Kids Cry, So a Million Could Smile

334 videos

More results for search results appeared

- Caroline Hu Flexer of Duck Duck Moose: How We Made a Few Kids Cry, So a Million Could Smile
- AppCamp 2012
- Dust or Magic AppCamp 2011
- Blizz Jeffrey: Teas Ross's Magical Recipe

1. AppCamp, May 2012: How We Made a Few Kids Cry, So a Million Could Smile, at <http://youtu.be/ghqYra3UKF4>
2. Dust or Magic Nov 2011 Demo, at <http://youtu.be/Q9Ve9VNYnag>
3. Dust or Magic Nov 2009, when Duck Duck Moose was just a year old, at <http://youtu.be/DV96SQzDXK4>

into the air and says, "Awesome!" While playing the app the boy did the same thing, he put his hands up in the air and said, "Awesome!" It was the child's first time speaking. Our apps are not specifically designed for special needs children, but they are designed for all children to be fail-proof and to be engaging. There's another story where one teacher made a blog post about how she uses our drawing app to teach math in school. That was something we never anticipated. It's a creativity app, but there's a graph paper feature within the app, and she was using it to teach heights and lengths and having all of her students measure the different characters in the app. It's a clever way of teaching through our app.

ST: Is there a mantra you and your team follow as you develop apps?

CHF: For us, it's about doing right by the child. All the decisions we make have the child at the forefront. Thinking about the child in all aspects of what we do. That's the underlying theme for us.

ST: What have you noticed about the children's app world since you launched your first app?

CHF: It's evolved in very rapid fashion. When we started, there were only a few children's apps out there. Today, the big children's media companies are playing in a major way. They're all investing in apps, spending a lot of money on development and marketing. Apps in the children's space have absolutely increased in quality.

ST: While there's been more money from big companies with big brands going towards children's app development, would you say big business has seen big success from those efforts?

CHF: There have been some. It's still rare to find interesting new content. There are a lot of big children's media companies that have good apps and include characters that really appeal to children, but I think it's a very unique time where we can invent new experiences using new characters because it's a new platform. We're able to do something really creative, and I think that's a pretty rare opportunity. There are not that many companies creating their own original story lines and characters. It's much more fun to invent something new, and it's a better business model for us too.

ST: Congratulations on your latest announcement about the investment in Duck Duck Moose. This of course leads to the big question: where are you hoping to take your company?

CHF: We're really excited about partnering with Sequoia and Lightspeed. They're great firms with a lot of experience with different entrepreneurs. The individual partners are going to be on our board, and we're extremely excited to work with Justin Caldbeck from Lightspeed and Aaref Hilaly from Sequoia. We think they'll provide a lot of mentorship. We're planning to grow our portfolio of apps. To do that, we need to build out our team, both on the executive side, as well as on the product side. We'll continue to play in the preschool and elementary school space, and that's going to be our focus.

ST: Do you have any thoughts about where the children's app creation is headed?

CHF: We're still in the early days, and it's hard to predict where it's going. I'm very excited about where it's going for us because we see a lot of opportunity. There's just so much that can be done in apps. We have a large map of what we'd like to do. Now that we can have a bigger team, we can execute some of these ideas. App quality in the children's space will continue to increase, and that's great for parents and for children. We'll be able to hire more great character illustrators and animators. In the past we did all of that work by ourselves. That's one example where we will increase the quality of our future apps.

ST: What advice do you offer new app developers that want to play a part in the children's space?

CHF: What has worked for us is staying really close to the kids. Test with kids constantly. Show them your prototypes. It's important to understand children at a very visceral level. That's the core of our success.

Scott Traylor is President of 360KID (<http://www.360KID.com>, a research and interactive design firm that works in the children's interactive publishing industry. Scott has no commercial link to the products or people mentioned in this article, and a current list of his business relationships can be found at <http://childrenstech.com/aboutus>.

"I started my career in architecture and previously worked at the design firm IDEO. I was heavily influenced by the IDEO design process. It's a user-centered approach where you work very closely with your customer. In our case, that's the child..."

"Apps in the children's space have absolutely increased in quality."



Feature Reviews

OCTOBER 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.

Counting Ants Math Adventure

This side-scrolling math game lets you collect numbers scattered on the screen, that meet a specific criteria.

Players jump from platform to platform collecting the correct numbers. The app contains seven play modes with 100 levels that practice counting, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, equality and other advanced concepts such as prime numbers.

The app is not very responsive, for example, you are supposed to make the car jump over the number if it is incorrect and no matter how the students timed the jumps they nearly always hit the incorrect number. In addition, it is difficult to locate the settings controls to turn off the repetitive music.

Details: Playtend, www.playtend.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 6-12. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: addition, subtraction, multiplication, division. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2.6 stars. Entry date: 9/17/2012. [CC]

Ease of Use	5
Educational	7
Entertaining	4
Design Features	6
Good Value	4

52%



Disney Princess: My Fairytale Adventure

Traditional explore/collect/unlock game mechanics meets a strong Disney flavored Princess theme for one or two players, with a very welcome drop in/ drop out game play feature of the variety found in the Traveling Tales titles (see, LEGO Star Wars).

You start by choosing an avatar -- in this case Cinderella, Rapunzel, Ariel, Belle or Tiana. Each has a magic wand with different abilities, and all are required to undo a spell that has been cast over the kingdoms. You start as an apprentice to the Fairy Godmother and explore each of the Princess worlds, and interact with Disney characters including Lumiere, Palsal, Flounder and Gus who help guide them through missions and help them progress through the game. You can also interact with the Disney Princesses, explore locations including Beast's castle and Rapunzel's tower, complete quests and play minigames to earn gems to exchange for special items. It is also possible to customize your princess avatar and her room in the Fairy Godmother's Castle. All in all, this is a solid game; good for one player but best for two.

Prices are \$40 for the Nintendo 3DS and Wii versions, and \$30 for PC/Mac. We tried the Wii version, and found the graphics to be low res, but the overall experience to be easy to play. Created by High Impact Games for Disney Interactive.

Details: Disney Interactive Studios, www.disneyinteractivestudios.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 3-8. Platform: Wii, Nintendo DS, Mac OSX, Windows. Teaches/Purpose: logic, socialization. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 6/12/2012. [WB]

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

84%





Dora: Where is Boots?

Billed as a "Hide and Seek Adventure" this app was inspired by the classic lift-the-flap books. The nine screen adventure hides something red in each page, but the experience could be more elegant and more responsive. For example, the Banana Catching game is responsive although the numbers of bananas you catch doesn't accurate map to your score (a missed math opportunity).

Features includes Read along with Dora, turn the pages and read along with highlighted text as Dora the Explorer reads the story. Content includes: Look for Boots, and help complete the story by revealing animated objects; Play Boots' Banana Catch Game - see how many bananas you can catch in each level; Look for the special bunches of 3 in every scene; Make Your Own Story Page - choose from any of the pages to decorate it with tappable animated stickers, then save it to your album; original music and animated artwork; and Sharing - parents can share via Email. Options let you turn the "Read to Me" mode off. You can also toggle on/off the sharing settings. Created by Budge Studios for Nickelodeon. The bottom line? Not bad, but less than great.

Details: Budge Studios, www.budgetstudios.ca. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: reading, logic, counting. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 9/26/2012. [WB]

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



Harry and the Haunted House (iPad)

Mark Schlichting's classic (first published as a Living book in 1994, and as a printed paperback) finally comes to iOS (iPhone, iPad, and iPod Touch) from a new company that has been formed around an old idea. Many of the original designers are involved; including Schlichting.

The story deals with a little boy who accidentally tosses a baseball through the window of a mysterious mansion, and tries to get it back with his friends. Each room of the house is full of animated surprises that are designed to support the story. It is now possible to swipe to turn pages, in addition to the use of the arrow keys. Also new -- a table of contents that makes it possible to jump to any page at any time. Parts of the free exploration are turned off so that the story can be told during the page turn transitions.

The app comes in English and Spanish for about \$4.99, you can buy additional languages and a teacher's guide for \$2.99 as an in-app feature. For those of you with sticker shock, it may help to remember that the cost for the original version of this app was \$39.95.

Details: Wanderful, www.wanderfulstorybooks.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: reading, Halloween, overcoming fear. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 10/5/2012. [WB]

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



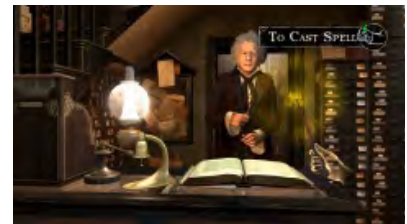
Harry Potter for Kinect

Looking for a magical Kinect title? Keep reading. Pulling from all the Harry Potter movies, this Kinect game lets you jump into the screen with Harry, Ron and Hermione to explore Hogwarts. The game uses Kinect's camera to let you put your face into the game, a first for a Harry Potter game. Also new -- the ability to cast spells with motion, or say them with your voice. There are both one or two player coop modes of play.

According to Corey (age 15), "I cannot tell you how amazing the gameplay is along with it's stellar graphics. I had a workout with this game! Gameplay consists of the activities Harry Potter does in the story such as potions, spells, & fighting the evil things with magic spells. My favorite thing when I played it was the broom racing where you whack the enemy racers out of the race. You cast spells with your body and/or your voice although I found it easier to wave my arms up & wave that wand down."

Details: Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, Inc., www.warnerbros.com. Price: \$call. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Xbox Kinect. Teaches/Purpose: gross motor, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 5/29/2012. [WB]

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





IMAG•N•O•TRON

This well designed augmented reality (AR) app requires two things in order to work: a camera equipped iPhone or iPad and a copy of the printed (real) book: The Fantastic Flying Books of Mr. Morris Lessmore (\$18 as a 48 page hardcover), which is obviously not included in the \$0.99 app. Once you have these essentials, you're ready to experience the best implementation of AR we've seen.

After you download the app and buy the book you point your camera at any one of the pages to see it come to life. There are augmented reality effects on each page. On one page, you might see the print come to life, with a string of text flying around your room (as seen through your camera). On another page, you'll see a whirlwind of books, flying around you. The narration and graphics are very high quality, and the augmented reality is the best we've seen. The app works with the iPhone 4 or later, the iPod Touch 4th generation or later, and the iPad 2 or later. Note that you may need to adjust your lighting for some of the pages. When sharing this app with a group of children, it helps to use Apple TV or some sort of wireless connection, because you move the screen around so much.

Details: Moonbot Studios, www.moonbotstudios.com. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 10/10/2012. [WB]

InnoTab 2 Learning App Tablet

In the ongoing tablet battle for the eyes -- and fingers -- of our young children, one shouldn't quickly rule out toy companies. They've had years to figure out the the final details of retail marketing, child-proof packaging, buy-one-get-one-free incentives and AA batteries.

What's interesting is the way the power gap between toy and tablet is narrowing. For \$80, you can now choose between a toy that's trying to act like a serious tablet, or a tablet that's trying to resemble a toy, and both are fighting for the attention of the same 3-to 9-year old child.

This year, VTech (www.vtechkids.com) is competing directly with LeapFrog with three AA battery powered portable platforms: the MobiGo 2 (\$60), the InnoTab 2 (\$80) with a new hinged digital camera and video recorder that can swivel from front to back, and the InnoTab 2S that costs \$20 more and has built in Wi-Fi, which we did not yet test. All three have touch screens, accelerometers, and internal memory for storing photos, plus music and apps from an app store called the Learning Lodge. All three run cartridges, too.

So which is best? The differences between the LeapPad 2 and InnoTab 2 are slim. This year's InnoTab 2 and 2s are smaller than last year's rather clunky InnoTab, despite having the same sized 5" touch screen, and they both are powered by four AA batteries. They're also backward compatible with last year's InnoTab cartridges. Both come with a photo viewer, video player, MP3 music player, e-reader, art studio and microphone. Out of the box software includes one tilt sensor game, one augmented reality game, one e-book, art studio app, notes app, friends list, calendar and calculator. Additional content can be downloaded from VTech's Learning Lodge Navigator at www.VTechKids.com/Download... a process that is less than straightforward.

InnoTab contains less memory than the LeapPad2 (2GB) but unlike the LeapPad, you can expand the storage with an SD card slot (card not included). Besides the 4 AA batteries, there's also a replaceable button cell battery for saving your profiles and setup information in case your AA batteries need to be changed.

According to VTech, the InnoTab library includes 200 items, including \$5 games and e-books. You can set it up four profiles (each with a user name and avatar) with a custom voice greeting, and a photo wallpaper. The bottom line? The differences between the InnoTab 2 and the LeapPad2 are slim; but both pale in comparison to the iPad.

Details: VTech Electronics North America, www.vtechkids.com. Price: \$80. Ages: 3-9. Platform: Smart Toy, InnoTab. Teaches/Purpose: early learning. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 6/12/2012. [WB]

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



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





Jakks Pacific Power Trains Auto Loader City

Here's a new twist on train sets, and an entirely different price range. Power Trains are hamster-sized motorized trains that run on 2 AAA batteries that last about an hour. You need a small screwdriver to put the batteries into the train, like many toys. Parts to the set are sold together or separately, so it is possible to expand your track, as large as you like. The "Auto Loader City" set, reviewed here, contains 56 pieces that include: 1 Auto Loader; 1 Motorized Engine; 4 train cars; 2 tunnels; 20 small decorations, and 28 track pieces that can be attached to make more than 18 feet of track. As you can imagine, there's a good deal of assembly required, and the parts don't always snap together perfectly. Testers found the coupling process (attaching the engine to a car, for example) clumsy, and the train will derail when it is the fast setting.

Engine features include two speed settings, a small LED headlight and wheels that work either on track or off. This isn't nearly the quality that you'll get out of a typical Lionel set, but it isn't nearly the price, either.

Details: Jakks Pacific, Inc., www.jakks.com. Price: \$60. Ages: 4-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: train play, cars. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 10/4/2012. [WB]

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



Kids Preschool Puzzle

Designed to teach one of 14 languages through simple puzzles, this simple, solid collection of 60 standard-variety touch and drop jigsaw puzzles are grouped into six common vocabulary categories: animals, vehicles, fruit, veggies, numbers and shapes. After each object is successfully assembled, the name of the object is spelled on the screen, and can then be pronounced in one of 14 languages (English, Norwegian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, and Ukrainian). To hear the word, just touch a flag. Weaknesses to note: the format has no game component, so it may become dry. In addition, it does not keep a record of past performance. We liked the ability to adjust the sound and the teaching mode on the fly. A free "light" version was provided that we did not test.

Details: EduKidsApps, . Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad, Android. Teaches/Purpose: Spatial Relations, foreign language, puzzles, English, Norwegian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Italian, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, and Ukrainian. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 6/7/2012. [WB]

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





Kinect Nat Geo TV

We've all grown used to the notion of watching TV. Now it can watch you back, providing you have one of two Kinect titles -- Kinect Sesame Street TV, or Kinect Nat Geo TV (\$30 each, from Microsoft Studios).

The catch, of course is that you need Microsoft's \$250 Xbox 360 Kinect video game system to make them work. Each title comes in a single jewelcase with two disks containing recent (2011-12 season) television episodes with games that invoke Kinect's motion-sensing camera and microphone. Additional episodes, offered for sale from the main menu cost \$5 each and required both an Xbox Live account and free hard disk space.

In the Nat Geo title (also two disks with multiple episodes) you can take pictures (screen captures) by shouting at the Kinect microphone, or become an onscreen bear, complete with a bear head and paws. You then earn points by scratching rocks to scare-up moths, snapping them from the air with your mouth. We found this to be easy and fun. The title features Casey Anderson, a Nat Geo WILD wildlife expert and host of Kinectt Nat Geo TV. Each 30 minute TV episode includes visual cues on the screen to highlight the interactive "sidetrack" activities for viewers to jump in and explore with Casey; "Go WILD" role-play games where players become animals as they explore the natural world; and access to archived episodes of Nat Geo WILD TV programs through Kinect. The game is available at retail stores on DVD or as a download when you purchase a Season's Pass on Xbox Live. Prices are \$30/2400 MS points for eight 30-minute episodes, or \$4.99/400 MS points per episode. Developed by Relentless Software for Microsoft Studios.

A second player can jump in simply by entering the camera's field of view, making this an excellent social experience. If you step out of the room or just get tired, your Xbox waits for about 45 seconds and then starts churning through the episode on autopilot. You might consider this the couch potato mode.

Details: Microsoft Game Studios, www.microsoft.com/games. Price: \$30. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Xbox Kinect. Teaches/Purpose: science, animals, bears. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 10/19/2011. [WB]

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The Sesame Street package contains two themed disks on growing up and science. Each disk contains four 30-minute episodes of the show. After you move your coffee table to the side and calibrate your Kinect, you'll see yourself inside an onscreen mirror with Grover or Cookie Monster, who might ask you to jump to shake coconuts from a tree, or wave to pop the bubbles floating on the screen. There's no shortage of counting, sorting and waving, as you might expect. A second player can jump in simply by entering the camera's field of view, making this an excellent social experience. If you step out of the room or just get tired, your Xbox waits for about 45 seconds and then starts churning through the episode on autopilot. You might consider this the couch potato mode.

Details: Microsoft Game Studios, www.microsoft.com/games. Price: \$30. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Xbox Kinect. Teaches/Purpose: early learning, counting, reading, movement, gross motor coordination. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 10/19/2011. [WB]

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

84%



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

82%





LeapPad2

This year's edition of the LeapPad, called the LeapPad2 Explorer, looks and feels the same as last year's LeapPad. But the apps feel more responsive, and the startup time is faster than the InnoTab 2. In addition, the rather serious screen lag present in last year's edition has been corrected. There are now two better quality cameras (both front and back); both higher resolution and an onboard nice photo editing and storage app. LeapPad 2 also has twice the memory, 4 GB vs. last year's 2 GB, for storing purchased "apps" from an online store, called LeapFrog Connect. To buy one of the \$5 apps, you need to download a 70 MB program called LeapFrog Connect for either Mac or Windows computers. We found this to be a less-than-straightforward process, for both the LeapPad and the InnoTab. For example, you must first register your devices and your children, and there is a strong selling and promotional feel to the experience.

The speakers are OK, but don't nearly compare to the iPad. The accelerometers work, but felt sluggish in the Disney Phineas and Ferb cartridge we tested. The mono-touch membrane screen feels responsive but it is mono-touch. The video and photo manager is well designed. It is easy for a child to find their photos and videos and delete them, if necessary, to free memory.

When you turn on the LeapPad2 for the first time, you create one of three profiles, in case you have different-aged children using the same device. The ages range from preschool to grade six.

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

The Cartoon Director lets children make and narrate their own puppet shows. LeapPad2 is compatible with LeapFrog Explorer cartridges and LeapFrog App Center digital content. Note: a new internal battery system and recharger pack is available separately for an extra \$40.

Details: LeapFrog, www.leapfrog.com. Price: \$100. Ages: 3-9. Platform: LeapPad. Teaches/Purpose: readiness skills, math, reading, art, photography. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 6/19/2012. [WB]

Legend of Spookley the Square Pumpkin, The

"One day in the pumpkin patch, the strangest little pumpkin hatched." And so begins this 16 screen story, about a square pumpkin, who -- by the end of the story -- saves the day by plugging a hole in the fence. The other pumpkins tease him at first, until they learn that there are advantages to being square. You don't roll away in a wind storm, for example.

The rhyming narrative deals with being different, along with shape attributes (e.g., cubes don't roll). The watercolor illustrations are clear and believable and the professional narrator tells the story in a spooky but friendly voice that could be described vampire-ish.

Interactive and text scaffolding features are limited. Objects are not labeled, as they are with many Oceanhouse Media titles where the words fly out and lay over the objects. You can touch a paragraph to hear it read and individual words are highlighted as the story is read, but the text feels less than responsive. And other drawback -- you can't easily jump around between pages. To get to the end, you need to swipe 40 times (several illustrations have multiple swipes, to activate Ken Burns-style zooms on the illustrations).

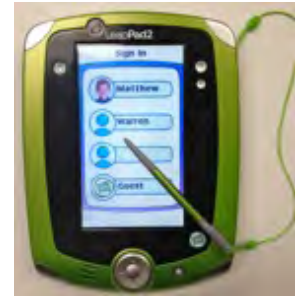
All in all, this is a good story with limited features. It makes a nice addition to your ebook app library.

Options let you turn on/off the news and sound effects. The original book was published by Holiday Hill Farm.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, www.oceanhousemedia.com. Price: \$.99. Ages: 4-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: emotions (being different), standing out, shapes. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 10/4/2012. [WB]

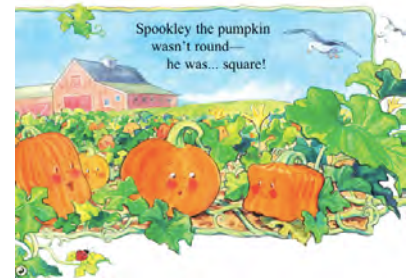
Ease of Use	8
Educational	9
Entertaining	7
Design Features	8
Good Value	9

82%



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

78%





LEGO Creationary Halloween

Here's a game of LEGO Creationary with a haunted Halloween theme. Like the original title (see CTR August 2012) the timed guessing game lets you earn points by correctly identifying which object is being constructed out of LEGO blocks (naturally) on the screen. The sooner you make a correct choice, from four possible choices, the more points you earn.

There are six categories of items to identify -- creatures, places, things, costumes, random, and random with double points; the more you play, the greater the challenge. Additional theme packs will be available.

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

Details: LEGO Americas, www.lego.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: classification, logic, memory, huddle game, social play, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 10/4/2012. [WB]

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



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



Math to the Rescue

Math drill meets a rescue theme, giving children the chance to practice addition, subtraction, multiplication and division facts, covering 1st grade through 5th grade.

You start with a disaster scenario such as a flood, fire or earthquake. Each scene has five numbered victims. To make a rescue, you have to program your vehicle (it might be a boat, fire truck or submarine) using a math equation. When you reach your victim, you are rewarded with a simple animated routine that adds a bit of spice. The top 100 high scores per level are shown on a leaderboard.

While the graphics and responsiveness were of moderate quality, the visual number lines made the app meet its objectives to help children practice math. The only drawback we could notice is with the pacing. Because the animated reward routines happen with each answer, they keep you from racing to solve problems. It would be good if children could fast forward through the routines, as an option.

The difficulty levels adjust the number line setups so that: Level One is 0 to 10, Level Two is 0 to 20, Level Three is 0 to 100, each with increments of 1. When a child plays on Level Four the number line is 0 to 20, with increments of 0.5. Level Five the number line is 0 to 10, with increments of 0.1.

The game asks children to think "what number do I add to 3 to get 7?" or "what number should I subtract from 22 to get 8?" Challenge ranges from $1+X=4$ type of equations to more difficult $(9.3-X) \times Y=4.6$.

Details: Blue Bear Software, www.mathtotherescue.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 6-10. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: math facts, number lines, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 9/18/2012. [CC]

Meet Heckerty

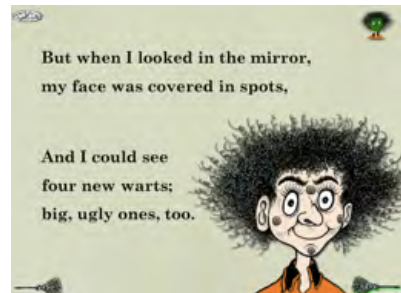
This eBook for iPad tells the story of Heckerty, a zany, rather silly witch who is trying trying to improve her beauty for a passport photo. She's not helped by a bad case of the warts, snakes that live in her hair (just touch to find them) or eyebrows that crawl around her face in a rather creepy way. Some of the visual effects are a bit unsettling, but they're offset by Heckerty's humorous tone. There's a bit of an edge here, which is helped by your ability to drive the animated actions.

In typical ebook fashion, you can swipe through the pages one at a time, or you can touch left/right broomsticks to manually turn the pages.

In the read-to-me mode, the text is gradually revealed to the reader, in scroll-like fashion. You can pause this process at any point; a nice touch that was appreciated by the teachers who tried the app. The graphics, which are simple yet well done, appear appropriately as the story unfolds on each page, which help to support text. None of the objects are directly labeled. The app was created by Jan Ziff and Allan Davidson.

Details: Broomstick Productions, Inc., . Price: \$free. Ages: 3-12. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language . Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 4/20/2012. [WB]

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





Mozart Interactive

The first of a multi-chapter suite of apps (this first chapter is free), this is an animated musical adventure designed to get children interested in music. In all cases, the music is well played, edited and mixed, although this app is more about watching and listening than making music. Much of the music is performed by the child prodigy singer/pianist Ethan Bortnick (see www.ethanbortnick.com), who was just 10-years of age when this app was recorded. Bortnick appears with an animated violin named Val. Ethan is so young, it's hard to believe the music is coming from his fingers.

Here's how it works: As Ethan and Val play Mozart's Rondo Alla Turca, you can use icons that pop up on the screen to select which instrument will play in upcoming measures. There are three options (besides Val the Violin): Heidi Horn, Timmy Trumpet and Febe Flute. The idea is to let children become the conductor, deciding which instruments will play and appear next. The only problem is that this app is both light in content (just one song) and in interactive options. So the end product of your "mixing" might seem very similar. We're not sure how this free app makes money. Note that there is also Flash-based virtual world by the same company. Visit www.melodystreet.com for more information.

Details: Melody Street LLC, www.melodystreet.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: mozart, piano. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 3/28/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	80%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	6	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	10	



now!Board Portable Interactive Whiteboard

Looking for a whiteboard alternative? Learning Resources has a \$500 option, providing you already have a projector, screen and a Mac or Windows computer. The now!Board Portable Interactive Whiteboard consists of a camera, stylus, extendable wand, carrying case, installation CD, and quick-start guide.

Chris Crowell said: "it took a bit to set up as I had to restart the computer to calibrate. The wand requires that you hold down the single button in order to work, which takes some coordination for younger children. Third grade teachers and students love it at my school. One third grade teacher has made the recalibration routine (9 taps in sequence) one of the new classroom jobs. Also not in the instructions: you'll need a USB cable, and a disk drive slot (a problem for driveless computer), and batteries (2 AAA last only about nine school days). All in all, this is worth considering."

Details: Learning Resources, www.learningresources.com. Price: \$499. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Mac OSX, Windows. Teaches/Purpose: portable whiteboard. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 8/20/2012. [CC]

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



Picture Me Trick or Treat

Using the iPad's camera, this electronic edition of the printed Picture Me book lets you put up to eight of your own photos inside the story, peeking out of windows on the pages. The story, which is told in a rhyming narrative, is about children getting ready for trick-or-treating. The paper version is by Deborah D'Andrea, and it is published by Picture Me Press.

The graphics are clear (the candy corn looks so good you could eat it) and the sounds work well with the story. Unlike the first edition, more of the interactive elements can be controlled by the child. For example, you can rearrange the candy corn on the screen. While all the interactivity isn't tied directly to the child's touches, the idea of putting your own photos into the story works like a charm and is very easy. You can snap a photo with the device camera, in real time, or choose from photos in your own library. Photos are easy to position into the pages. We didn't like the email or photo icon on each page (a toddler could possibly take hundreds of screen shots - with supervision, this shouldn't be a problem) and it is not possible to easily jump to specific pages in the story. Also missing, Oceanhouse Media's trademark labeling system, where the words pop out of the screen, and fly over the objects they represent.

If you've ever wanted to see what you look like in a fuzzy puppy costume, this app will give you a chance. See also Picture Me Cute as Can Bee.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, www.oceanhousemedia.com. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, creativity, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 10/4/2012. [WB]

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






Pixel'd

Ease of use meets power with this new creativity app, that combines straightforward animation tools with Disney characters. The app is free, but you must pay for extra stickers or backgrounds, which are sold directly in the menus. You can draw with lines, geometric shapes or fill with different (mostly Disney) branded backgrounds.


Features include three drawing layers on the canvas; 20 frames for creating animations; shape tools with adjustable squares, circles and triangles, plus a starter set of free stamps and fill patterns featuring Disney Princess, Bolt, Mickey and Friends, Cars and Vintage Mickey. In-app purchase options offer "expanded sets" of Disney character stamps and fill patterns for \$.99 each. An innovative Buddy Draw option lets multiple artists connect via Bluetooth or Wi-Fi to draw together in real-time Visit <http://disney.com/pixel'd>. If you don't mind the commercial themes and are knowledgeable about the in-app purchases, this is worth the download.

Details: Disney Interactive, Inc., www.disney.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: creativity. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 7/24/2012. [WB]

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




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




Pokémon Black Version 2

Featuring some new sharing options and new worlds to explore, this is one of two Pokémon titles that our testers called "the same game, with different covers." But Pokémon isn't about different game play, it is about new stories, and characters to collect.

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. Price: \$35. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Nintendo DS, Nintendo DSi. Teaches/Purpose: reading, logic, memory. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 8/20/2012. [WB]



Pokémon Conquest

Step into the role of a young Warlord linked with a Pokémon and use your abilities in battle to defeat rival Warlords, conquer castles, recruit allies and build their kingdom. The game takes place in a new region called Ransei which is made up of 17 kingdoms, one for each Pokémon type and features 200 Pokémon and 30 Warlords.

In the game, the Warlords are trying to take control and unite the region in order to awaken the Legendary Pokémon. Warlords and their Pokémon will face off on the battlefield, and players can control Pokémon, Warriors, and other Warlords, each with a special ability that can be used to help the Pokémon on the battlefield, for example, healing spells. Battles can grow to include up to 12 Pokémon in a 6v6 skirmish.

Cory says: "This game is awesome because of its resemblance to the Pokémon series, great DS graphics and gameplay. The gameplay consists of a checkers-like battle in which you move your Pokémon across the board where the highlighted blue permits. When you're done placing your Pokémon that you moved across the board, you have the choice of Fight or Wait. If you choose fight, your highlighted gold mark must be under the enemy. The game is finished when either all turns are up or one of the competing teams loses all of its players. The goal is to defeat all enemy players. Pokémon fans will love this." Developed by Tecmo Koei Games Co., Ltd. for Nintendo.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$30. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 6/8/2012. [WB]

Pokémon White Version 2


Good news for Pokémon fans: two versions of Pokémon for Nintendo DS, with backward compatibility with previous Pokémon games. Our seasoned players gave them both a solid thumbs up.

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. Price: \$35. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Nintendo DS, Nintendo DSi. Teaches/Purpose: reading, logic, memory. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 8/20/2012. [WB]

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




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






Pumpkin Pal

An oldy but a goody, this is one of the better jack-o-lantern Halloween apps in the app store (the last update was September 29, 2011). Children first choose from five pumpkin shapes. They can then either freely carve (with an adjustable-width knife) or they can select different eyes, noses or mouths that can be resized. The resizing is a little clumsy, but it is possible. After your pumpkin is done, you see it as if there were a candle flickering inside it, and can send it as an image, attached to your email. Work is automatically saved.

Details: Jeff Mohl Design LLC, jeffmohl.com. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, Halloween, jack-o-lantern, drawing, pumpkin carving. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 10/5/2012. [WB]

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



Social Express, The

The Social Express is set of eight video-based lessons delivered on either computer or iPad, for children with a condition such as autism, Asperger's or ADHD. It claims to teach "children how to think about and manage social situations through video modeling, thus enabling them to build social-emotional skills and develop the meaningful relationships they need to navigate life." Can such things be taught impersonally, by way of video? That's a key pedagogical question that we'll leave outside this review.

There are eight lessons, each with two skill levels. Each lesson consists of an animated video vignette, with multiple-choice breaks. Additional content is delivered via worksheets. Content was made by a Speech and Language Pathologist. Weaknesses include some lag time between interactive opportunities that could be potentially challenging to a child with ADHD. For example, the program might ask "what is Emma looking at" and you are supposed to explore the screen to figure out what is capturing a child's gaze. But the hot spots aren't responsive -- you don't know if you've found the bell or not. What you need to know:

The videos consist of animated graphics, that are clear and easy to watch, but do not use real actors or situations. Also, this iPad version is large, using 1.6 GB of space. Finally, reading is required to understand the instructions. We liked how you can pause the presentation at any time -- making this experience more valuable as a context for talking about teaching situations. Records are kept for individual students, potentially useful for IEP information.

Details: The Language Express, Inc , . Price: \$89.99. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad, Mac OSX, Windows. Teaches/Purpose: social development, interpersonal interaction. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 8/22/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	9
Educational	8
Entertaining	7
Design Features	9
Good Value	6
78%	





Standing Talk Back Ben and Standing Talk Back Tom

Like an electronic parrot, these 12 inch plush toy were inspired by the Talk Back Ben (and Tom) apps. The toys have an internal microphones and can repeat your words in a slightly-morphed voice.

Note that these are not the first "Talking-Tom" types of plush toys we've reviewed but this is the best to date because the the microphone is sensitive, and the voice is clear. In addition, Ben's lips move.

This type of toy could be used to help children practice verbalizing, as a fun reinforcement activity.

After you toggle a switch on the bottom of a foot to the on position, you can press a button in the front paw to wake Ben. Providing you have 3 AA batteries installed (included), he'll wake up and greet you. You can then wait for the red light in his chest and make any noise. The red light will blink to show it's recording. Then Ben will repeat any sound in the room, rather accurately, as his lips move. To turn him off, you can press Ben's paw, or he'll go into sleep mode after 5 minutes of inactivity, after a bit of snoring. This is one of two app-inspired echo toys... the other is Standing Talk Back Tom. According to press materials, these toys were created by Sound n Light Animatronics and distributed only by Cuddle Barn in the U.S. See also Talking Tom Talk Back (CTR September 2012) sold by Dragon-i Toys.

Details: Cuddle Barn, www.cuddle-barn.com. Price: \$35. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: language, oral feedback, vocalization, verbal feedback. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 10/4/2012. [WB]

Tizzy Seasons

Designed to let children freely explore four seasons (Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter). The games are simple, and progress for one player is saved.

In Spring, children can feed the birds in their very own birdhouse, plant a garden, find the shapes in the clouds, build a kite and then fly it, and feed the ducks in a beautiful pond.

Summer lets children make an ice cream sundae and eat it, blow bubbles and pop them, help a family of frogs jump to their lily pad home, trim the hedges and watch what shapes they can create, and look at catch butterflies.

In Autumn, children can carve a pumpkin, organize a leaf collection, harvest fruits and vegetables from the garden they planted, pick and sort apples from the orchard, and help rake the leaves in the backyard.

And in Winter, children can build and decorate a snowman, look up at the night sky and play dot to dot with the stars, light up the Tizzy Seasons house with twinkling lights, and build a snow sled from scratch and then go sledding. Features include: play as either a boy or a girl; musical soundtrack; and sound effects. There are no in-App purchases or Ads.

Details: Tizzy Labs, www.tizzylabs.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 2-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: science, the seasons. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 8/27/2012. [WB]

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



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





To the Farm!

Here's a slow-paced spelling app from Spain with beautiful needlepoint-like graphics, clear narration, and some nice adult-management features that include the ability to quickly change languages or levels. In the app, children spell the names of 16 farm animals, letter-by-letter. There are two spelling modes: Easy Spelling (you can see the outline of the letters and drag them into place) and Spelling (with no outlines). There's also a sentence reading mode.

There are a lot of on-the-fly features. You can toggle an autoplay mode on/off. You can also easily change between upper/lower case, and adjust the level so that children are presented with "easy spelling" (drag individual letters to their space, in a word like "sheep") or "reading sentences" in which a descriptive story ties things together.

This app features original illustrations of farm animals, and speech in six languages including English, Spanish, French, German, Catalan and Chinese. A parent guide contains some pedagogical tips from Hamelin International Laie School, who provided pedagogical advice. There are some localization issues that should be noted. When used in the English setting, some of the letters appear to be unconventional (the S in particular). Also, in one of the screens, the male chicken is called "cock" instead of "rooster."

Details: Sanoen, www.sanoen.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad.
Teaches/Purpose: Reading, spelling, word recognition, English, Spanish, French, German, Catalan and Chinese. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 6/7/2012. [WB]

Toca Band

Turn your iPad or iPhone into a playful, powerful musical sandbox with this well designed app. Toca Band (\$1.99 from www.tocaboca.com) is the eighth Toca Boca app we've reviewed, and it is one of the most difficult to stop playing.

You start with an empty stage, with seven spots waiting to be filled. You get your choice of sixteen musicians to mix and match. You discover that some are more rhythmic while others are melodic. In addition, the location on the stage can influence how they sound (the top spots make them more active). A spotlight area lets you further explore the different voices, which can be layered over your current band's loop. On first glance, you might think there may not be much to do with this app, but there's actually a lot to explore, and a lot of opportunities to informally experiment with mathematical and logical relationships.

Our testers wished for some additional features, such as a mute or pause button so that you could silence your band without having to rebuild it from scratch; or perhaps a way to adjust the tempo. Another logical feature would be the ability to record your own sounds, so you can be part of the band (see Smule's MadPad if you're looking for this type of app). But the downside of extra features is complexity, however, and simplicity is one reason Toca Band has such a bright future.

The music in Toca Band comes from the Swedish studio Hakan Libdo Audio Industries. Teachers: It is a blast to plug your iPad into a set of speakers, and have a classroom dance, where different children can take control of different instruments.

Details: Toca Boca, <http://tocaboca.com/>. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: music, math, patterns. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.9 stars. Entry date: 9/12/2012. [CC]

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



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





Tortoise and the Hare, The (iPad)

The Living Books have been reborn on the iPad. The first of three titles, *The Tortoise and the Hare* joins three others: Mercer Mayer's *Little Monster at School*, Marc Brown's *Arthur's Teacher Trouble* and *Harry and the Haunted House*, and others are planned. Are they as good as the originals?

Absolutely, although back in 1993, when the Living Books featured the state-of-the-art in graphics and sound they stood out from the rest. They combined full color animation with a crisp, responsive design. Today, however, the graphics look bit-mapped on the iPad's clear screen, as if they have been directly ported from an original version. This was immediately noticed by our testers: "the graphics look fuzzy." Of course the upside is that you get a "retro" look on the iPad. Fortunately, the original mono-touch design has been carefully adapted to the modern multi-touch environment to enhance a child's feeling of control. You can quickly jump to any of the still-funny-after-all-these-years hot spots with a single tap, and the outstanding sound hasn't faded a bit. This includes Barbershop quartets, multi-language narration and a banjo that could've come right out of a bluegrass band. The real magic of the Living Books was, and will always be, the way the "living" features work to help tell an already good story.

Features include both "Read to Me" or "Let Me Play" modes. New to the iPad versions: a table of contents that makes it easy to jump immediately to any of the 15 pages, and two ways to change the page -- with a swipe, and with arrow keys to manually advance pages. All of these new editions let you toggle between two languages (English and Spanish) and the words highlight when they are touched, or read by the narrator. It's worth noting that the original Living Books were the first to use both the "read to me" and "let me play" modes as well as speech-driven highlighting. Both techniques have been widely adapted in children's language app design.

The apps cost \$5 and come in English and Spanish. Additional languages are sold as in-app sales (currently these include French, Japanese, German, Italian, U.K. English and Brazilian Portuguese).

The bottom line? There's no doubt that the Living Books still have their magic. Our testers loved exploring the pages, over and over again, but they were also quick to jump to another app. Unlike the '90s, they have many more choices. See www.wonderfulstorybooks.com for more information.

Details: *Wonderful*, www.wonderfulstorybooks.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 3-12. Platform: iPad, iPhone (100 MB). Teaches/Purpose: reading, Spanish, English (French is available as an upgrade). Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 9/11/2012. [WB]

Who Stole the Moon?

This innovative edition of a printed story book (of the same name, by Windy Press; Hellen Stratton-Would, author) isn't perfect, but it contains some interesting interactive techniques that make it worth a look. In addition, the story is easy for a child to relate to, and is beautifully illustrated.

In the story, a boy dreams of being an astronaut, so he watches the moon at night through his skylight. The pages are designed so a child can take part in the story, by moving the skylight view, or by making the moon disappear.

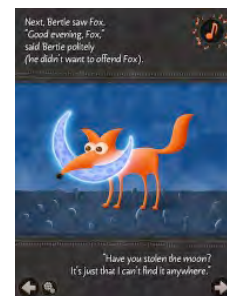
You help Bertie find the moon by visiting with animals, singing songs and playing one of four games. Content includes eight original songs by Susie Tallman and Richard Pleasance; 15 language options (English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Korean, Swedish, Dutch, Russian, Ukrainian, Czech, Turkish, and Afrikaans). Weaknesses include promotional links on the last page, and synthesized music accompaniments. Prices are \$4.99 for iPad, and \$2.99 for iPhone.

Details: Windy Press International Publishing House, LLC. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 3-9. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: language, reading English, German, French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Korean, Swedish, Dutch, Russian, Ukrainian, Czech, Turkish, and Afrikaans. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 10/4/2012. [WB]

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



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





Zoomy Handheld Digital Microscope

This handheld digital microscope displays excellent images of up to 43x magnification. Features include: designed to fit easily in a child's hand; one-touch photo and video capture; upload photos and video files to student portfolios or class websites; turn-top focus; 640 x 480 Pixels & VGS CMOS sensor; special effects and picture frames; USB port to charge and download on PC (XP, Vista, Win7) and Mac; and LED illumination.

Designed to work on a Mac or PC computer screen, our testers had difficulty loading the mini disk on to a new MacBook Air which does not have a disk drive. The PC laptop we use in the classroom setting did have the appropriate disk drive and the results were impressive. Utilizing the USB port to charge and download images and videos, the Zoomy Microscope fit comfortably in every child's hand and was easy to manage within a classroom (no batteries!). With LED lights encircling the lens opening on this egg shaped device and an easy to adjust turn-top focus, the use of the Zoomy Handheld Digital Microscope to produce clear images is outstanding. The student's in one kindergarten classroom were excited to experiment with examining various items and surfaces each day on their own. The ability to capture and upload pictures and videos easily made the Zoomy Handheld Digital Microscope valuable for projects. The portability of attaching it to a laptop and being able to freely explore/examine the world make it an excellent educational tool.

Details: Learning Resources, www.learningresources.com. Price: \$60. Ages: 4-up. Platform: Mac OSX, Windows. Teaches/Purpose: science, digital microscope . Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 8/20/2012. [CC]

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





Future Releases & Updates

OCTOBER 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.

Crayola DigiTools 3-D Pack

One of the three themed packs in Crayola's DigiTools series, the 3-D Pack (\$20) consists of two tools and a child-sized pair of special glasses. First you download the app (for iPad), which must be unlocked using the stamper. The innovative Digital 3-D Stylus looks a bit like a specialized dental tool, with two rubber tips. Both must touch the glass at the same time (making parallel lines) in order to make a line. If one of the "feet" come off the glass the line won't stick.

The tool kit contains the regular digital Crayola box features, including 64 colors. The Digital Stamper makes it possible to add animated 3-D images to scenes. The pack includes one pair of 3-D glasses which are required in order to see the 3D effects. A clip-on carrying case is included. See also DigiTools Effects Pack and DigiTools Airbrush Pack.

Details: Crayola, LLC, www.crayola.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 3-11. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: art, creativity. Entry date: 8/16/2012.

Crayola DigiTools Airbrush Pack

One of the three themed packs in Crayola's DigiTools series, Crayola's DigiTools Airbrush Pack includes a Digital Airbrush, Digital Stamper, Digital Rainbow Roller, and clip-on carrying case. You first need to download the Airbrush app (for iPad). The Digital Airbrush lets you select Crayola colors from the digital Crayola box and create freehand virtual spray art effects. The app also features a variety of stencils for kids to select from and color-in using the Digital Airbrush. Children can also use the Digital Rainbow Roller to make large swashes of gradient color appear and the Digital Stamper to instantly add animated images to their scenes. See also DigiTools Effects Pack and DigiTools 3-D Pack.

Details: Crayola, LLC, www.crayola.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 3-11. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: art, creativity. Entry date: 8/16/2012.

Crayola DigiTools Deluxe Pack

Next month the company that means coloring -- Crayola, will try to redefine the word for the digital age despite having a mixed record of bringing wax-like simplicity to the screen-age. Case in point: the sluggish iMarker, the battery powered stylus released during the early days of the iPad. This time, Crayola has again partnered with Griffith Technology to make DigiTools (<http://www.crayola.com/digitools>), consisting of a set of physical coloring tools that includes 3D glasses, your iPad and three apps.

The business strategy behind DigiTools is becoming common: to offer a free app that won't work unless unlocked with something you buy, in this case, one of the three themed bundles for \$20 each, or the Deluxe Pack for \$40, that will be in toy stores in two weeks. The Deluxe Pack includes: 3 apps - Crayola Effects, Crayola 3D, and Crayola Airbrush; a clip-on carrying case; digital crayon; digital airbrush; digital 3D Stylus; digital stamper; and 3D glasses.

From your iPad's point of view, each of the eight tools has a unique fingerprint, provided by capacitive feet. That's how it knows the difference between the airbrush, a sticker stamp or the Digital 3-D Stylus, which lets you doodle in 3D providing you're wearing the included glasses. Like any tablet stylus, the tools transfer energy from your hand to the screen, so no batteries are required.

Because specific functions like air brushing or stamping are paired directly with each tool, things do seem easier to use. Plus, it's possible to save your coloring page and share it on Grandma's Facebook page. If she likes, she could download the image, print it and stick it on her fridge, just like the good old days.

Details: Crayola, LLC, www.crayola.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 3-11. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: art, creativity. Entry date: 8/16/2012.





Crayola DigiTools Effects Pack

One of the three themed packs in Crayola's DigiTools series, Crayola's DigiTools effects Pack includes a Digital Crayon, Digital Stamper, Digital Color Changer, and clip-on carrying case. You first need to download the Airbrush app (for iPad). Children can then create art effects, including sparkly glitter designs with the Digital Crayon, swatches of shimmering color with the Digital Color Changer, and animated images with the Digital Stamper. See also DigiTools Airbrush Pack and DigiTools 3-D Pack.

Details: Crayola, LLC, www.crayola.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 3-11. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: art, creativity. Entry date: 8/16/2012.

Dr. Seuss Bookshelf

This free app is designed to make organizing, browsing, launching and buying your favorite Dr. Seuss apps easier. Oceanhouse Media has also announced a record your own voice feature, and a table of contents that they will start implementing in some of their apps.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, www.oceanhousemedia.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Entry date: 9/14/2012.

HappiTaps: Puppi Love

The second in the series, this plush holder for your iPhone or iPod Touch comes with a free app called Puppi Love, turning your device into a puppy. Toddlers can feed, nurture, or help their puppy go to sleep.

Details: Infantino, www.infantino.com. Price: \$16.99. Ages: 18 mo & up. Platform: iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: an iPhone or iPod Touch peripheral. Entry date: 8/22/2012.



I Spy Two Game Pack (Wii)

This two game pack for the Nintendo Wii contains 70 riddles and 60 mini-games in two titles, Ultimate I Spy and I Spy Spooky Mansion.

In Ultimate I Spy, the first game to feature 3D environments, players explore a wonderland and search above and below objects to solve riddles, puzzles, and mini-games.

I Spy Spooky Mansion takes players through a haunted mansion. Players are led by Skelly, a skeleton, and participate in mini-games, brainteasers, scavenger hunts, and 33 I Spy riddles as they try to find their way out.

Details: Scholastic, Inc., www.scholastic.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Wii. Teaches/Purpose: logic, visual discrimination, memory, language. Entry date: 8/28/2012.



LEGO: The Lord of the Rings

Based on the The Lord of the Rings trilogy, this game takes you through the story events featuring LEGOs. In the story, Frodo is entrusted with the dangerous task of destroying the ancient magical ring that threatens all that is good, and must leave his home. The only place the ring can be destroyed is Mount Doom. To help Frodo, a Fellowship is formed with Aragorn the Ranger, Gandalf the Wizard, Legolas the Elf, Gimli the Dwarf, Boromir a Man of Gondor, and Frodo's Hobbit friends Sam, Merry and Pippin. You will relive the story through the LEGOs as they explore Middle-earth, solve riddles, and overcome enemies in their quest to destroy the ring.

Features of the game include: wield the power of the Palantír or Seeing-stone ('one that looks far-away'), and jump between multiple storylines; LEGO characters deliver the dialogue from the films; collect, combine and forge new items in the Blacksmith Shop using Mithril, the most precious metal in Middle-earth; discover and unlock 80 playable characters, including Frodo, Aragorn, Gandalf, and others; collect and use a variety of weaponry and magical items, including the Light of Earendil, Elven rope, swords, and bows; easy access drop-in, drop-out gameplay option. Prices are \$50 for Xbox 360 and PS3 versions, \$40 for the Wii and PS Vita, and \$30 for the Nintendo DS, 3DS, and PC. Developed by TT Games for Warner Bros.

Details: Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, Inc., www.warnerbros.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Wii, Nintendo DS, Nintendo 3DS, Vita, Windows. Teaches/Purpose: . Entry date: 6/19/2012.



Luna Interactive Projection Camera

This video/still camera connects to your computer by way of a USB plug. It looks like small lamp with a base. Key features include: 3-in-1 technology tool - digital projection camera, web cam, and photo/video camera; 3.0 MP digital images; bendable gooseneck; auto-focus button; one-touch photo/video capture; internal microphone; LED illumination; USB port to charge & download (XP, Vista, Win7 and Mac OS 10.5 and above).

Details: Learning Resources, www.learningresources.com. Price: \$199. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Mac OSX, Windows. Teaches/Purpose: video/still camera. Entry date: 8/20/2012.



Robo Fish

About the size of a bass lure, these robotic fish were developed in New Zealand. They are powered by two button-cell batteries (included) and cost \$10 each. The rubber tails can be pulled off and used on different fish. The tail motion is randomized, which gives a lifelike swimming motion to the fish. One set of batteries gives about two hours of continual swimming time; an extra set of batteries is included in the package. See the preview at <http://youtu.be/65-BnFDuJ8k>.

Details: Zuru Toys, www.zuru.com. Price: \$9.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: a robotic toy for water play. Entry date: 9/16/2012.





Tabeo

Pre-loaded with 50 children's apps, this Android tablet will be on the market on October 21 as a competitor to Fuhu's Nabi 2. You might recall that Nabi was sold exclusively in Toys R Us, as the TRU Android solution). Here's what we know so far.

Called tabeo (all lower case) the 7-inch, multi-touch tablet contains 50 pre-installed apps that have been selected for "fun and learning." The tablet has "integrated parental controls that offer the flexibility to customize levels of Internet access for each member of the family." The price will be \$150 (compared to the Nabi 2, for \$200).

Troy Peterson, Vice President, Divisional Merchandise Manager, Toys "R" Us, U.S. said "We are proud that tabeo offers robust and flexible parental controls that can help protect children as they surf the Internet, and we are pleased to offer the tabeo App Store, which features only kid-safe content carefully curated by the Toys "R" Us team."

Apps were selected by "the tabeo team" and include Angry Birds, Fruit Ninja, Cut the Rope, Temple Run, 100 Floors, Collapse!, Tiki Golf, Tiki Cart 3D, Putt Putt Zoo, Freddy Fish and the Stolen Shell and Camera App. Ten education apps were listed, including AlphaTots, Discovery Kids Putterbugs, Operation Math and TechCalc.

Books include iStorybooks, Candy Factory and Little Red Riding Hood. Of course there will be the tabeo App Store for additional content. Features are on-par with other Android tablets, including 4GB of internal flash memory, a micro SDHC, profiles for up to eight users, with a filter designed to block 27 predetermined categories of content, plus parents can choose to block or un/block individual sites. A timer lets you turn it on for certain days or during certain hours. If the browser is used, parents can get an email alert.

Inside the box: a lime green bumper, one USB cable, and one USB power adaptor for charging via computer or wall outlet. Additional themed bumpers and tabeo branded licenses, docks and tabeo branded cables, will be available at Toys "R" Us stores nationwide and online at Toysrus.com. Powered by Android 4.0 "Ice Cream Sandwich," an ARM Cortex A8 1 GHz processor, 1 GB of RAM, a 7" capacitive screen with a micro USB, Micro SD (for up to 32 GB of storage), Mini-HDMI output, a built-in speaker with microphone, a front camera, power source and Lithium Polymer battery for up to 7 hours of run time. You can learn more at www.tabeo.com.

Details: Toys R Us, . Price: \$150. Ages: 2-8. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: a 7 inch tablet for children. Entry date: 9/12/2012.



VTech University

VTech University (at <http://vtechkids.com/university>) is designed to provide structured learning content for the MobiGo 2, the InnoTab, InnoTab 2 and InnoTab 2S, for children aged 3-9 years (preschool - 4th grade).

"Graduates" of the program will get a "diploma" that will be entered into a drawing for a \$25,000 college bond. To increase credibility of the contest, VTech has hired MIT Professor Eric Klopfer to serve as a spokesman for the program. The price of entry is the hardware, in this case an InnoTab, InnoTab 2, InnoTab 2S or MobiGo 2, as well as access to the Internet. All but the InnoTab 2S require being tethered to a computer running Learning Lodge Navigator, a separate program which must be downloaded and installed on a Windows or Mac computer. See www.VTechKids.com/download. The devices will track completed courses so kids can pick up where they left off in the curriculum each day and parents can check in on their progress.

VTech University also offers an Honors Curriculum for \$6.99. Children enrolled in VTech University will have until May 31, 2013 to complete the curriculum to be entered to win the \$25,000 college bond. Each child registered can enter the contest once. Parents can visit the VTech University website for contest details.

Details: VTech, . Price: \$free w/hardware. Ages: 3-9. Platform: MobiGo, InnoTab (Internet connect required). Teaches/Purpose: school readiness. Entry date: 10/2/2012.





WEBEE

WEBEE is a giant keyboard for toddlers with four large buttons that is looking for funding by way of KickStarter. It is certainly interesting, but we have our doubts, mostly because tablets now offer a better developmentally appropriate computing option for children. The device plugs into your computer by way of a USB connection. Software is delivered through a website -- www.webee-world.com. You can create a profile for your child, track scores and get progress updates.

Games are designed to teach basic skills including counting, identifying colors, and shapes. WEBEE comes from husband & wife team Danny and Rachel Van Buren.

Details: Webee World, www.webee-world.com. Price: \$call. Ages: 1-5. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: early learning. Entry date: 9/27/2012.



YogiPlay

YogiPlay is a free app recommendation platform, designed to help parents find apps that meet YogiPlay's educational objectives. Each app has "been carefully assessed by the company's in-house team of early childhood experts using a special mobile apps rubric." One of these experts is Jim Gray, formerly of LeapFrog. After you enter your child's information, the YogiPlay app tracks progress and suggests new apps. YogiPlay wants developers to integrate the YogiPlay SDK (a bit of special code) into their app, which will automatically send tracking information. This analyzes the "in-app" learning progress of a child. YogiPlay also provides developers with insight related to user engagement within their IP with targeted feedback for app optimization. The service makes money by charging "affiliate fees" and sponsorships with selective brands. Note: CTR contributor Scott Traylor serves as a paid advisor to this company.

Details: YogiPlay, www.yogiplay.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 3-9. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: a utility for parents to find apps. Entry date: 9/18/2012.

