



# Children's TECHNOLOGY REVIEW



On the cover: the world's largest stuffed animal. See page 3

## *CTR, February 2013* *Vol. 21, No 2, Issue 155*

500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins\*, p 6  
ABC Theater: Alphabet Song, p. 6  
Arno Kit, p 18  
Ben 10: Omniverse\*, p 7  
Cato's Hike, p 7  
Cutie Monsters Jigsaw Puzzles\*, p 7  
Endless Alphabet\*, p 8  
ESPN Sports Connection, p 18  
Fire Station, p 8  
Gingham Games, p 18  
Gro Memo, p 8  
Happy Wars, p 18  
Hectic Harvest, p. 9  
Hexbug Warriors Battling Robots, p. 9  
iBitz by GeoPalz, p. 19  
Just Going To The Dentist\*, p. 9  
Know Your USA (iPad)\*, p. 10  
Kung Fu Skeeter, p. 19

Leo's Pad Appisode 1, p. 10  
Little Things Forever\*, p. 10  
Look & Learn: Animal Alphabet, p. 11  
Marble Math\*, p. 11  
Marble Math Junior, p. 19  
Mario Tennis Open\*, p. 12  
Meet the Insects: Forest Edition, p. 12  
Meet the Insects: Village Edition, p. 13  
Monkey Word School Adventure\*, p. 13  
MyScript Calculator\*, p. 13  
Oh No Fractions!\*, p. 14  
Opposites, The\*, p. 14  
Project Shield (Working Title), p. 19  
Ranger Rick's Tree House, p. 20  
Rayman Legends, p. 20  
Rise of the Guardians, p. 14  
Rocksmith: Authentic Guitar Games, p. 20  
Smarty Print, p. 20

SmartyShortz Stylus & Grippers, p. 20  
Sofia the First\*, p. 15  
Story Toys Jr. Farm 123\*, p. 15  
StorySmith: Medieval Kingdom HD, p. 15  
Super Mario Bros. U\*, p. 16  
Tagamoto Road Set, p. 21  
Tank! Tank! Tank!, p. 21  
Toy Story Mania!, p. 21  
Transformers Prime: The Game, p. 21  
Victorious: Taking the Lead, p. 16  
War Horse\*, p. 17  
Welcome to the Vampire's Lair...If Your Dare!\*, p. 17  
Windows Surface, p. 22  
Word Pig, p. 22  
Zimmiz, p. 22

\* Denotes an  
"Editor's Choice."



## Welcome to February!

Here are this month's headlines:

- **CONFERENCES & EVENTS.** The American International Toy Fair is hosting two tech events (Digital Kids and the Safety Summit); in addition there's Kid Screen's iKids which includes the iKids awards. I'll be watching for promising new applications of technology, in particular the relationship between tablets, apps and toys.



- **SOMETHING IS BREWING AT SONY.** Last fall we had the Wii U. This month, it's Sony's turn. On February 20, the PlayStation group will announce what many believe will be the next generation console (the PS4?). Watch for full details in our March issue.

- **DUST OR MAGIC Hurricane Edition** was held last month. Many of the demos and presentations are posted, thanks to Scott Traylor. This year was thick with presentations which you can find @dustormagic. Videos include Mark Schlichtings "Advice for Young Whippersnappers" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pB0a2FriIt8>, Drew Davidson's Dust Diaries <http://youtu.be/wHE9u7mxD8o> and a visit from Toca Band's Stikk Figga <http://youtu.be/KTBj9nhhS3o>.

- A **NEW BLOG** from the Fred Rogers Center was launched "to expand the dialogue on the potential of digital media to support early learning and development." Here's to raising the quality of discourse (conversation) above the current standard set by the Huffington Post and the Guardian. Have a look, at <http://www.fredrogerscenter.org/blog/>

## Stuffed Animals

Guess what? There are no beans in Beanie Babies. This month's LittleClickers contains this and many other facts about stuffed animals. You'll even see a stuffed rabbit that is so big that it can be seen from Google Earth! You'll learn some other interesting facts about stuffed animals.



## Quality has Never Been This Good

Ready for some good news? In the 29 years I've been reviewing children's digital products, I've never seen so many quality products, at such a low price. The proof is on page 4, where we summarize the 18 Editor's Choice titles for this month.

## Coming Next Month! eBooks

We're currently judging for the Bologna Ragazzi eBook prize with jurors André Letria, Chris Meade and Christina Mussinelli. We've already had over 100 entries and some are completely amazing. The winners will be announced next month, and discussed in depth during Dust or Magic eBooks. If you're interested in digital storytelling, this will be a busy few months <http://dustormagic.com/ebooks/>

February 2013

Volume 21, No. 2, Issue 155

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Some people call them stuffed animals. The toy industry says "plush toys." Others say Teddy Bears, Beanie Babies, Webkinz or Build-a-Bears. Whichever you prefer, everybody seems to love their stuffed animal. Let's learn more about them.

**1. Why are they called Teddy Bears?** Visit the Smithsonian <http://bit.ly/T5zmpa> to learn how the Teddy Bear came after Morris and Rose Michtom, New York City candy shop owners, heard about President Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt's bear hunt, and his kindness toward a wounded bear. So they sewed together a stuffed animal (like the one pictured to the right) and gave it to the President. They went on to start their own toy company to sell their 'teddy bears.'

**2. T/F. Are there beans in a Beanie Baby?**

False. At <http://www.madehow.com/Volume-5/Bean-Bag-Plush-Toy.html> you can learn how a Beanie Baby is made, from start to finish. (They use small plastic pellets, called poly beads).

**3. What's the stuff inside a stuffed animal?** At Beary Cheap <http://www.bearycheap.com> they say that the right filling helps you get that "take me home" feel." Most modern stuffed animals use polyester fill and plastic pellets (called poly beads). Older stuffed animals used cotton batting, newspaper, rice or pebbles.

**4. How big is the world's largest stuffed animal?** If you go to <http://bit.ly/VDWVGN> you can see a giant stuffed animal laying on top of a mountain in Italy. It is made out of waterproof fabric, stuffed with straw, and is over 200 feet long. It was made by a group of artists called Gelitin, in 2008, and it is so big that it can be seen from Google Earth. The giant bunny took five years to build.



**5. Can I put a stuffed animal in the washing machine?** At the Dollar Stretcher <http://bit.ly/WM6ukZ> you can find tips on cleaning stuffed animals. For general cleaning, try a damp cloth or a baby wipe. Or, you can sprinkle a little baking soda on your animal, leave it for 20 minutes and then brush it off. Remember to brush your animal with a soft bristle brush to avoid damaging the fur. Some animals can even be washed in the washing machine, but use the gentle cycle.

**6. Is my stuffed animal worth any money?**

Here's how you find out. First, check the tag. The tag can tell you who made your stuffed animal, and may even have the date it was made. Next visit the company web site to try to figure more details about the toy. Third, look at the condition. Is it like new, or worn? Finally, check sites like Doll Values <http://www.dollvalues.com> or eBay, <http://www.ebay.com> where you can learn a lot about similarly-priced toys. Did you know one Steiff teddy Girl sold in a Christies auction for \$171,600 for example? <http://www.born-rich.com/entry/worlds-expensive-teddy-bears>.



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## Attributes of a Quality Stuffed Animal

Not all plush toys are created the same. Here are some attributes of quality:

- Non-allergenic materials.
- Solid stitching that can survive.
- Weighted with poly-beads.



- Look at the eyes and the nose. These are very important for making the animal look real.
- Washable
- Meaningful. Might resemble a former pet or something of significance.

## YouTube™ Playlist for Stuffed Animals

<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcBVHzUUEKwnXsg0hcre2RlfKDuH9-EN>



# Editor's Choice

## February 2013

Here's a summary of the the top rated products from this months issue. There's a lot to cover.

### Apps for Younger Children

For the youngest iPad users, here are two solid apps to download immediately. **Cutie Monsters Jigsaw Puzzles** by Little Phoenix Interactive is a clean set of simple jigsaw puzzles based on a counting theme. The second app, **Endless Alphabet** by Callaway Digital Arts is excellent for early reading. Why? It is an extremely strong early reading app that playfully introduces each letter, and shows children how the letters can be combined, like a jigsaw puzzle, to make words.

Oceanhouse Media has been busy expanding its library with classics like **500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins**. But before you download this particular app, read this NYTimes article on Theodor Geisel's (Dr. Seuss) fascination with hats, at <http://nyti.ms/URr0jy>. The app is based on the 1938 story that was inspired after Geisel took a train ride behind a guy wearing a fancy hat.

Testers also liked Oceanhouse's **Just Going To The Dentist**. Both apps employ Oceanhouse Media's record your own narrator track, a great feature that is ideal for parents or grandparents who miss an occasional bedtime story.

One excellent story app that isn't from Oceanhouse Media is **Story Toys Jr. Farm 123**. It come from the Irish-based studio StoryToys, and mixes farm animals with an all-to-common counting theme. What makes this app stand out is the way the 3D graphics are synced with your screen movements, giving it a "book on a stage" effect. When you flip (swipe) a page, the graphic elements pop up. We also liked how there is always something active to do on each page. You can herd chickens to hear them counted, or help cats hide from a dog; games that make this a good addition to your early childhood app library.

For playful phonics practice, **Monkey Word School Adventure** contains six bite-sized word recognition games, each featuring a playful monkey. This well designed, fun early reading activity is well worth the download.

Finally, **Sofia the First** by Disney Publishing Worldwide successfully merges a good story with a well designed activity. The story, which is narrated by ABC Modern Family's Ariel Winter, comes with a digital story theater (like Toontastic) which lets you record and animate your own version of the story. We did a video review of this title, at [http://youtu.be/3nj\\_M9OiYSs](http://youtu.be/3nj_M9OiYSs).

### Apps for Math and Geography Facts

As teachers of children, we always love to find apps like **Know Your USA** (iPad) from EdWare Interactive Learning — a clean, well designed flashcard program to introduce the US states, capitals and rivers. It's dry, but that might be what you're looking for. The quiz mode is timed, and you can race against

yourself if you like. The funny thing about this app is that it was designed in Ireland.

Another good upper elementary basic skills app that is a lot more fun is **Marble Math** from Artgig Studio. It follows the age-old formula of pairing an addicting game with math facts practice. You solve math problems by rolling a marble around the screen, either tilting or swiping to collect the answers. The more you play, the harder the challenge; which ranges from adding two digit numbers with no carrying, to simplifying expressions using multiplication and division.

Another math app to note is **Oh No Fractions!** by Curious Hat. This is a simple app, showing two fractions like  $5/8$  and  $1/2$ , side by side. The goal is to compare them using a sliding set of number lines to prove your answer. This is an excellent teaching prop. It is possible to adjust the denominator to any size, making harder or easier comparisons. It would be ideal for any elementary teacher who deals with fractions, not only to provide drill, but as another way to show how fraction relationships work. Another educationally valid app is **The Opposites** by Mindshapes Limited. This fast-paced word sorting game provides practice with opposing words. It starts easy, with word pairs like 'up-down', but gets harder, with custom words drawn from biology, economics, politics, medicine, poetry and classical Greek prefixes. I liked how each word is read aloud by opposing male or female characters who don't seem to get along (a nice touch), and it is possible to pause the game at any time.

### eBooks

**Welcome to the Vampire's Lair...If Your Dare!** by LivoBooks would be great around Halloween -- or any other time you feel like having a scare. Each screen contains narrated text with highlighted words along with a skit or a game. There's a finger-eating plant and a haunted Mona Lisa jigsaw puzzle. You can pull your own ideas into the app using the front-facing camera, and you can record your own narration.

For those who think kids don't care about history, consider **War Horse** for iPad by Touchpress -- the digital edition of Michael Morpurgo's novel, designed to teach children about the first World War from the view of a horse. The app mixes the text of the novel with an 80 minute musical reading by the author and 200 historical photographs, complete with a Touch Press treatment of various war items. The only downside -- you'll need \$14 plus 2 GB of free space.

### Puzzle Apps

I've always liked demonstrating the quality of KlickTock's **Little Things**, a hunt-and-find app from Australia.

Now there's **Little Things Forever** for both iOS and Android, with 10 fresh mosaic puzzles based on thousands of "little things" -- clothing items, tools, animals and other household items -- each cleverly woven into a larger object. The hint system is especially noteworthy, as is the Android compatibility, due in part to the app being based in Unity3D.





### Video Games

Our testers, Cory and Addison had some favorites that are safe buys for your Wii U. Ben 10: Omniverse (Wii U, Xbox 360, PS3, Nintendo DS and 3DS) from [www.d3publisher.us](http://www.d3publisher.us) is an action packed, E 10+ game features Ben Tennyson, and introduces a hero sidekick, Rook. Testers like the console version but warned "you may need to go online for some hints."

Testers (Addison ) liked **Mario Tennis Open** from Nintendo, saying Mario Tennis on the 3DS is an example of immersive 3D done right. The app works well for either single or doubles matches, and there are skill building mini games and online play.

And finally, a warning for all you old-timers. **Super Mario Bros. U** running on the Nintendo's new Wii U platform, looks and plays so good on an HD screen that you just might run out and buy a Wii U (or a new HD screen). The classic platformer has been running non-stop in Mediatech. It has come a long way since 1985 and the state-of-the-art NES (Nintendo Entertainment System). After you work through the complicated startup, Mario's famous "Here we go!" makes you feel all 1985 again, only in HD. It's all good. The game will appeal to all ages, and while it is intuitive enough for younger kids to figure out, nostalgic adults will enjoy this one. It's a wonderful and entertaining update to a proven old school formula.

### Last But Not Least, This Issue's innovation Award

At International CES, the winner of Robin Raskin's "Last Gadget Standing" contest was an app called **My Script Calculator**. The name says it all... you start by writing, using your finger, any numeral or mathematical expression, such as 2 + 2. Your imperfect-looking numerals suddenly melt into a perfect equation, along with the answer. Nearly every math symbol can be understood, and the size of your equation is limited only by the size of your screen. Be warned -- this app has a learning curve, but it certainly makes a good first impression.

by Warren Buckleitner



# Dust or Magic

## eBooks

### ANNOUNCING THE FIRST DUST OR MAGIC EBOOK RETREAT: DESIGNING AND CRITIQUING NARRATIVE DRIVEN INTERACTIVE MEDIA FOR CHILDREN

WHEN: April 21-23, Sunday through Tuesday

WHAT IS IT: A special event bringing together leading designers of children's interactive content, to "get smart" on children's literature in the age of the touch screen. We'll critique best practice, as identified by the 2013 BolognaRagazzi Digital Prize Jurors, and see what went wrong with the many less-than-noteworthy products flooding the Apple and Android app stores. We'll explore how to tap the potential of the tablet medium for:

- Telling stories— to move beyond the page swipe and hot spot.
- Scaffolding techniques to help a child move from a non-reader, to a reader.
- Child empowerment techniques, to increase engagement.
- Embedded reinforcements — ways to use interactive techniques to work with the narrative
- Child authorship techniques. Examples of ways you can put a child's voice inside a story.



Note that this is an event that is more about **making** than **selling**. We'll also demo and discuss the state of children's app design in general, and offer on the spot critiques of participant work using Dust or Magic's laser guided feedback.

ATTENDEES: Children's publishers, app designers, reviewers and researchers. As with other Dust or Magic events, this is independent, there are no sponsors or selling; all platforms are discussed equally.

WHERE: Our meeting will take place at the epicenter of children's literacy – at the former home of the founders of Highlights for Children, in the wooded hills near Honesdale, Pennsylvania. The campus consists of the Founders' farmhouse, 21 cabins and a 5,200-square-foot conference center known as The Barn at Boyds Mills, located 2½ hours from New York City and approximately 45 minutes from the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton International Airport. Participants from distant points are welcome to come early. Meetings and meals take place in The Barn, which has several relaxed classroom-like areas, a Great Hall, an outdoor fireplace and a giant kitchen. There is excellent password-free Wi-Fi and high definition displays. Charming cabins with a rustic feel have modern facilities and are writer-ready with desk, chair and filled bookshelves. Everyone raves about the food. Farm-style meals are prepared by a top-notch chef and mealtimes are a time for lively discussion. Snacks are always available for late-night or early morning writing sessions. We will accommodate dietary restrictions.



REGISTRATION: \$1680 per seat. Price includes food, supplies and housing for two nights. To register by phone, please call 800-993-9499 (9 to 3 EST) and speak with Lisa or Megan. Group size is limited to 40, on a first-come, first-served basis.

[www.dustormagic.com](http://www.dustormagic.com)



# Feature Reviews

FEBRUARY 2013

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.

## 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins

One of the joys of digital media is that you can find all kinds of hidden treasures, of the variety that your local library probably would not have on hand. Take this 1938 story that was inspired after Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss) took a train ride behind a gentleman wearing a fancy hat. In the story, a young poor boy has the magical ability to produce hats, which he sells to the king for 500 pieces of gold.

The 31 screen/page story has read to me or let me read modes, and other newer Oceanhouse Media features. You can jump to any page in the story, see objects labeled, and record (and share) your own narration.

Note that this is one of Dr. Seuss' early works. Besides the hat, the illustrations were sketched in black and white. Also note that this is a rather wordy book -- better suited for middle and upper elementary. Teaching tip: Ask a child what the story has to do with the price of vanity.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, [www.oceanhousemedia.com](http://www.oceanhousemedia.com). Price: \$3.99. Ages: 6-12. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 1/31/2013. [WB]

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

90%



But the Captain of the King's Own Guards leaned down from his big brass saddle and grabbed Bartholomew Cubbins by his shirt. Away flew Bartholomew's basket! The cranberries bounced over the cobblestones and rolled down into the gutter.

## ABC Theater: Alphabet Song

Good for playfully introducing letters and words in the context of a well known melody, this app is set in a puppet show. By tracing each letter, children help a letter-themed puppet come to life to act out a short letter-related skit. The app begins with the processes of learning letters, identifying the letters, knowing alphabetical order and how to properly write each of the letters. It then moves on to forming small groups of letters into words.

There's a nice touch with the xylophone, because children touch the alphabet song word as it appears on the xylophone, in a way that their finger drives the action.

Weaknesses include some sluggish transitions and a "rate this app" prompt that pops up when the alphabet song is finished. All in all, however, this is a nice addition to a child's app library with excellent illustrations and sufficient content.

Details: IQurio, [www.iqurio.com](http://www.iqurio.com). Price: \$2.99. Ages: 2-6. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: letter recognition, letters, words. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 10/18/2012. [WB]

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

86%





### Ben 10: Omniverse

Based on the new Cartoon Network TV Series, this E 10+ game features both Young and Teen Ben Tennyson, and introduces a hero sidekick, Rook.

Rook is a skilled but inexperienced plumber graduate who fights alongside Ben with his multi-functional weapon, the Proto-Tool. You can play as both Young and Teen Ben and switch forms between 13 playable alien heroes. The game features single player campaign mode and two player co-op mode, where one player controls Ben and the other Rook.

CTR Intern Corey said "It is important to note that the handheld and the home consoles play differently. The handheld gameplay is just a simple platformer with beat 'em up style gameplay. The music and graphics are as expected. I liked it. The console version is more elaborate, with great voice acting and Ben 10-tastic music. The controls work great but -- I must warn you -- can be hard to figure out. You may need to go online for some hints."

Developed by 1st Playable Productions for the Nintendo DS (\$30) and 3DS (\$30), and by Monkey Bar Games for Wii U (\$40), Wii (\$30), Xbox 360 (\$40), and PS3 (\$40).

Details: D3Publisher of America, Inc., [www.d3publisher.us](http://www.d3publisher.us). Price: \$40. Ages: 8-up.

Platform: Wii, Wii U, Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Nintendo DS, Nintendo 3DS.

Teaches/Purpose: cooperative play, problem solving. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars.

Entry date: 11/26/2012. [CH]

### Cato's Hike

Designed to teach children and adults how to program, this app lets you try to guide a cat through a maze using Logo-like commands like forward, turn, loop and so on. There are 60 challenge levels plus 10 tutorial levels and an in-depth manual, sharing of user-created map and program features, and lots of sounds when you tap on stuff while playing. In the app, a little boy named Cato is playing outside when a portal to another world opens up in front of him. Cato steps through and discovers that this world isn't like his own and doesn't follow the same rules. Every time he tries to take a step he finds himself stuck in place, until he discovers the rules in this universe - he must write a program for himself in order to overcome all the obstacles. Features of the app include: simple programming interface using cards with pictures; visual manual to help guide parents and more interested users; loops, branches and if/else, goto labels, looking and chaining looks to look ahead, goto's, and simple memory using colored flags are the main tools used to introduce programming; 60 levels and 12 tutorials; a map editor so you can create your own maps and puzzles and share with friends; preview your maps directly in the map editor to save time and test out your maps more quickly; saves program progress so you can pick up at any time and iteratively develop; email your puzzle solutions to share with others; and puzzles ranging from easy to hard to teach different programming concepts without trying to force them.

Details: Hesham Wahb, <http://hwahba.com/>. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 5-up. Platform:

iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: programming, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars.

Entry date: 1/2/2013. [WB]

### Cutie Monsters Jigsaw Puzzles

Want to learn to count to ten? Each page of this ten screen storybook features a playful (non-scary) monster with a name like Blushy, Toothy, Golly, Taily, Blobby, Growly and Snouty. There's one for each numeral, from 1 to 10. You can have the story read outloud, read it yourself with touch-and-hear text, or (the best part) assemble the monsters as a jigsaw puzzle.

The puzzles easy to solve (with just three or four pieces), and they do a nice job tying story and numeral concepts together.

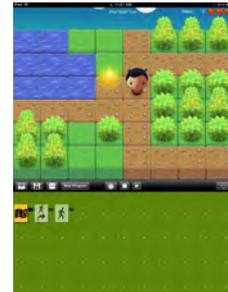
Details: Little Phoenix Interactive, <http://littlephoenixinteractive.com>. Price: \$2.99.

Ages: 1-4. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: spatial relations, some reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 1/25/2013. [WB]

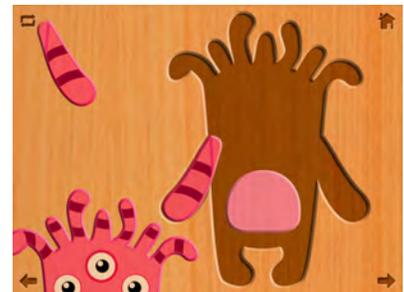
Ease of Use	8	88%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	10	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	9	




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



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



### Endless Alphabet

Here's an extremely strong early reading app that playfully introduces each letter, and shows children how the letters can be combined, like a jigsaw puzzle, to make words. Each letter becomes animated, sounds itself out and then becomes part of a word ensemble to sound out the final word. A narrator then defines the word, and a small skit is shown to illustrate the meaning. Linking word bits with meaning in a playful, child controlled way makes this an extremely valuable early reading experience.

Interestingly, this Endless Alphabet isn't really endless, at least when you first install it. The first version only goes up to the letter G -- the rest of the alphabet is loaded whenever you start the app, as long as your iPad is online. The app is currently free, and we liked how all the external links were hidden behind in a parent screen that requires solving a short reading puzzle in order to access. We did notice a "rate this app 5 stars" message in the child's content, however.

Details: Callaway Digital Arts, [www.callaway.com](http://www.callaway.com). Price: \$free for a limited time. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: the alphabet, ABC song, reading, letter recognition, music . Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 1/31/2013. [WB]

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



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

### Fire Station

While the design is less than flashy, the videos pull you in. This virtual field trip lets you explore community helpers by way of well chosen YouTube videos that are embedded in the app. The navigation is a bit confusing -- you don't know how to get inside the fire station.

The Fire Station is just one of six stops, although . Others include a baker and an ambulance driver. It is a good app for any child (or adult) who wants some real world information and experiences. Testers liked the hand-drawn images and the background music which can be toggled on or off. See our review <http://youtu.be/ASs0CEsiEwA>. Note that this is a big app, at 400 MB.

Details: Jumpseewow, Inc., [www.jumpseewow.com](http://www.jumpseewow.com). Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: community helpers. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 1/15/2013. [WB]



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

### Gro Memo

This playful game of concentration uses 29 animated routines that have an environmental theme. The more you play, the more levels you can unlock. The narration and graphics are less than polished -- with hints of Spongebob Squarepants mixed with, perhaps, some Angry Birds. There's also not much to actually learn about the environment from this app. What you do get is a fun, easy to play set of concentration games. There are no third-party advertising or in-app purchases.

Details: Gro Play, [www.groplay.com](http://www.groplay.com). Price: \$1.99. Ages: 2-8. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch, Android. Teaches/Purpose: memory. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 11/20/2012. [WB]





### Hectic Harvest

Fun and fast, this timed farming game features characters from Fizzy's Lunch Lab. It can be addicting, but has questionable educational value and can be frustrating for younger children. You start with an empty garden that is divided into grids, and then start planting seeds, weeding and harvesting as fast as you can. Each step earns money, and you learn that the better you plan, the more money you can make. You have to earn a certain amount to clear the level, creating an addicting play pattern that's a bit like Diner Dash.

There's a bit of planning and higher order thinking especially in the harder levels, where you can purchase things like weed killer or fertilizer. For \$1.99, this is a fun game, with indirect learning value. The narration and music is excellent.

Produced for and PBS Kids by Cloudkid; with major funding coming from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. See the video review at [http://youtu.be/jujD\\_cQZtwg](http://youtu.be/jujD_cQZtwg).

Details: PBS Kids, [www.pbskids.org](http://www.pbskids.org). Price: \$1.99. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: logic, planning. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 12/20/2012. [WB]

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



### Hexbug Warriors Battling Robots

Based on the same "vibrating toothbrush" (our term) self-propelling technique used in the Hexbug Nanos, Hexbug Warriors Battling Robots have a mean look, with beetle-like claws and snap on armor, designed to push other hexbugs away. These are really more like vehicles than robots, designed to do battle on specially designed arenas.

The warriors have a collision-tracking sensor, so that the more the vehicles bump into one another, the health LED decreases, from green to red, until it stops, deactivates, and only one Warrior is left standing.

There are two modes of play - training mode & battle mode. There are four varieties: Caldera (prep academy) - specialists in geothermal and clean energy; Bionika (Cyborg Academy) - experts in human cyborg robotic technology; Viridia (Prep Academy) - studying technology to preserve the earth; and Tronikon (tech academy) - world's oldest military technology Academy. Hexbug Warriors Battle Stadium is available for \$30 and includes two robots and eight expandable stadium pieces. Note that the games have very little to do with educational content.

Details: Innovation First, Inc., [www.hexbug.com](http://www.hexbug.com). Price: \$8. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: playing with robots. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 10/24/2012. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	80%
Educational	5	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	9	



### Just Going To The Dentist

Every kid has to go to the dentist -- here's an app that helps with the anxiety. This app, based on the Mercer Mayer print book, is about Little Critter's visit to Dr. Ghum (played by a male hippo -- the assistant is female). When he finds a cavity, Little Critter bravely gets a filling. The visit is painless and Little Critter's good nature reassures kids that going to the dentist can be not so bad.

Features include the ability to find up to twenty hidden creatures on each page (you are shown your count on the last page). The story has excellent object/text association, typical of other Oceanhouse apps, and it is possible to record your own narrator track, which can be saved in case you have to go on a business trip, and your child wants to hear a familiar voice reading the story.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, [www.oceanhousemedia.com](http://www.oceanhousemedia.com). Price: \$0.99. Ages: 2-5. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: personal health, going to the dentist, reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 1/23/2013. [WB]

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





### Know Your USA (iPad)

Looking for a clean, well designed flashcard program to introduce the states, capitals, rivers and more? This is a good choice. While there is no joy in the presentation, it does let you quiz yourself quickly.

There are two modes -- an Atlas and a Quiz. The Atlas introduces the states, capitals, mountains, major cities and rivers of the USA, by showing a map with push pins marking each key location. Touch a pin and learn the basic facts, presented on a narrated fact card. The quiz mode is timed, and you race against yourself to see how many items you can find. Your accuracy is also recorded. Designed in Ireland, this program was available for years as a software program for the PC (CTR, July 2006). It's nice to see it on the iPad, for a much smaller price.

Details: EdWare Interactive Learning, [www.knowyourusa.net](http://www.knowyourusa.net). Price: \$.99. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: US Geography. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 11/14/2012. [WB]

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



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

### Leo's Pad Appisode 1

Featuring beautiful pixar-like 3D animation and an overly chatty lead character, Leo's Pad is best described as an interactive movie, divided into "appisodes." After a short animated sequence, you participate in the story with four activities. You can tilt the screen to answer simple math problems, find letters in the stars to spell short words, put a jigsaw puzzle together, or make sketches with smooth, responsive lines.

This first episode is free (to get you hooked) -- the following cost \$1.99 each; sold at the end. So if you like the first one, you can buy more. The chapters are listed on the first screen without the price (so you don't know you don't have it installed). If you touch the icon, it says "buy" for \$1.99, and the link takes you to the app store. So it's not an in-app sale, but close.

We noticed a minor quirk in the story when it seems like you are looking for stars after just waking up in the morning; but all in all the story seems well synced to the activities. It is easy to jump around within the app, thanks to a table of contents, and a parental dashboard (not active in the first edition) tracks a child's progress. The second episode is "Rocket to the Stars," and the third is "Catch That Question!" This is definitely worth the first download.

Details: Kidaptive Inc., [www.kidaptive.com](http://www.kidaptive.com). Price: \$free. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: math, creativity, patterns, matching (jigsaw puzzle), spelling. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 1/10/2013. [WB]



### Little Things Forever

Do you like search and find puzzles? Here's an update to one of the better options available. It's also the most mellow.

This second edition of Little Things Forever (called Little Things Forever) contains 10 fresh mosaic puzzles based on thousands of "little things" --clothing items, tools, animals and other household items -- cleverly woven into a larger object. You're given a short laundry list of items to search for in the 9 puzzles to solve. There are 11 language options (English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, Dutch, Polish, Russian, Simplified Chinese, Japanese and Korean). The puzzles were created in Australia by Matthew Hall; the music is by Vel9 Studios.

Said Hall in a press release; "Android support has been requested ever since the release of the original. Switching the game engine to Unity3D made supporting Android possible."

Details: KlickTock Pty Ltd, [www.klicktock.com](http://www.klicktock.com). Price: \$2.99. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Android-Google,IOS-Apple, iPad, iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: logic, visual discrimination, classification, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 1/25/2013. [WB]

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





### Look & Learn: Animal Alphabet

Six activities that vary in quality combine letter recognition concepts with a animals themes. Content includes 60 animals, 100 photographs, animal facts and sound effects.

Games include A to Z Animals (an alphabet book where each letter is illustrated with an animal picture); Connect the Letters (a dot-to-dot game with letters in ABC order); Flamingo Flier (fly through letters in alphabetical order by tilting the screen); Learn to Write (trace letters to see a letter related animal); and Mask Maker (take a photo and add an animal mask to your face, then save or email pictures to friends).

Weaknesses to note include an inability to toggle the camera to take a front-facing photo and repetitive background music that can't be adjusted. Designed by avVenta Worldwide.

Details: National Geographic Society, [www.nationalgeographic.com](http://www.nationalgeographic.com). Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: alphabet, animals, letters, alphabetical order. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 8/14/2012. [WB]

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



### Marble Math

Following the age-old formula of pairing an addicting game with math facts practice, Marble Math (and it's little sister, Marble Math Jr.) lets you solve math problems by rolling a marble around to collect the answers. There are two control mechanisms -- you can either tilt the screen, or you can drag the marble through the maze with your finger.

For younger children, the dragging mechanic works best, however, tilting the screen gives the game a fun twist, and mixes in some dexterity practice. Options let you customize your own marble with different designs. A multi-user profile system lets you customize your own avatar for multiple players, and different player profiles. Record keeping tracks the number of games played and the high score. The more you play, the harder the challenge; which ranges from adding two digit numbers with no carrying, to simplifying expressions using multiplication and division.

Runs on either iPhone or iPad and concepts include addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, fractions, common denominators, improper fractions, roman numerals, factoring, decimals and negative integers. There is a "lite" preview version, for no cost. The bottom line? When it comes to practicing your math facts, it never hurts to have a little sugar (fun) to help the medicine (the math facts) go down.

Details: Artgig Studio, [www.artgigapps.com](http://www.artgigapps.com). Price: \$1.99. Ages: 9-12. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: Math facts, addition, subtraction, spatial relations, money. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 8/10/2012. [WB]

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





### Mario Tennis Open

Fun and fast, this 3D edition of Mario Tennis lets you join Mario and his Mushroom Kingdom friends on the tennis court for single or doubles matches. There are also skill building mini games and online play.

You can use the built-in wireless features of the Nintendo DS to play with up to four players in local or online multiplayer modes and exchange information using StreetPass. You can choose between touch-screen and gyro sensor controls or button-based gameplay. You can also choose from a variety of playable characters or use your own personalized Mii character. Other features include: an Open Match mode that automatically pairs you with players of comparable skill levels; Single Player Tournament mode that lets you compete against your favorite Mushroom Kingdom characters in a classic single elimination tournament; Exhibition mode that lets you adjust the skill level of your computer-controlled opponent, select a court, and choose the number of sets to be played; and Chance Areas that appear on the court during a match that you can run to in order to execute a supercharged Chance Shot. Developed Camelot Co., Ltd. for Nintendo. Note: additional Nintendo 3DS systems are required for local multiplayer mode and broadband internet access is required for online play.

Addison says: When I think of immersive 3D video games, I can't help but think of Nintendo's ill-fated Virtual Boy, an early attempt at 3D virtual reality. But Mario Tennis on the 3DS is an example of immersive 3D done right. The minigames are very well done and add variety. The leveling is my big problem. It's a little too easy to hit the ball, you hit it if you're anywhere near it. On the flip side, when the game gets hard it's frustratingly hard. It can also be a little tedious: I spent five minutes trying to get the final point in a match. The 3D effect is convincing, but to get a first-person view instead of the standard top-down view, you need to hold the 3DS vertically in front of you. This is not very ergonomic or comfortable.

Details: Nintendo of America, [www.nintendo.com](http://www.nintendo.com). Price: \$40. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: sports, tennis, collaborative play. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 4/5/2012. [WB]

### Meet the Insects: Forest Edition

Bug lovers young and old will find plenty to explore in this specialized touch-and-learn encyclopedia that zooms in on 30 forest insects common to South Korea. The 30 insects are illustrated with photos, videos and narrated text. They were selected because they are commonly found around urban and suburban settings. Content comes from the National Science Museum of Korea.

Each insect includes a narrated overview in clear English, plus a 20 second video and a few high quality photos that can be adjusted for close examination. The insects are grouped by order, and the navigation is book-like, with each page containing about six insects, organized by their order. Other features include an observation journal that lets you take photos of bugs you find (a good possible resource for a classroom), a clunky multiple-choice quiz and an animated tutorial called "The Insect Story" with interactive features. For example, in "How to Make Sounds" you learn how different bugs make noises, and why.

This app is full of clear photos, videos and facts on a limited number of insects. There's clearly enough to satisfy a curious child. Weaknesses include less than comprehensive content, an inability to mute the persistent background music, and a visually cluttered interface that is less than intuitive. "Too much screen clutter." It is also not possible so search for specific insects within the app. A second edition, sold as a separate app, covers village insects.

Details: NCsoft, <http://us.ncsoft.com/en/>. Price: \$5.29. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: insects. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 10/5/2012. [WB]

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



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





### Meet the Insects: Village Edition

This second edition interactive encyclopedia contains 30 insects commonly found around urban and suburban settings. The first app covered 30 forest insects that are common in Korea. The content comes from the National Science Museum of Korea.

Each insect includes a narrated overview in clear English, plus a 20 second video and a few high quality photos that can be adjusted for close examination. The insects are grouped by order, and the navigation is book-like, with each page containing about six insects, organized by their order. Other features include an observation journal that lets you take photos of bugs you find (a good possible resource for a classroom), a clunky multiple-choice quiz and an animated tutorial called "The Insect Story" with interactive features. For example, in "How to Make Sounds" you learn how different bugs make noises, and why.

This app is full of clear photos, videos and facts on a limited number of insects. There's clearly enough to satisfy a curious child. Weaknesses include less than comprehensive content, an inability to mute the persistent background music, and a visually cluttered interface. It is also not possible to search for specific insects. This is the second edition in the insect encyclopedia series, focusing on village insects. The first covers forest insects. Contents include cicadas, ladybugs, grasshoppers and flies. See also Meet the Insects: Forest Edition. The app was created by NCsoft's iactionbook, runs only on iPads running iOS 4.3 or later.

Details: NCsoft, <http://us.ncsoft.com/en/>. Price: \$5.29. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: science, insects. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 1/31/2013. [WB]

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



### Monkey Word School Adventure

Want to learn how to read and write? Apps like this one can help, by making some of the discreet skills involved fun. This is achieved by way of six bite-sized phonics and word recognition games. Each activity features a monkey who jumps around the screen. As you play each game you can earn prizes of living (animated) elements that you can add to your terrarium -- a nice touch.

The instructions given at the start of each level tend to slow you down; a minor problem. There are also in-app branding for the publisher between each screen transition, but no outside links.

Management features include the ability to have three separate profiles (one for each child) along with the ability to toggle the sound on or off. You can also choose between having the difficulty level gradually increase, or you can manually choose between three settings.

The bottom line? This is a well designed, fun early reading activity.

Details: Thup Games, [www.thup.com](http://www.thup.com). Price: \$1.99. Ages: 5-12. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: spelling, reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 1/24/2013. [WB]

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



### MyScript Calculator

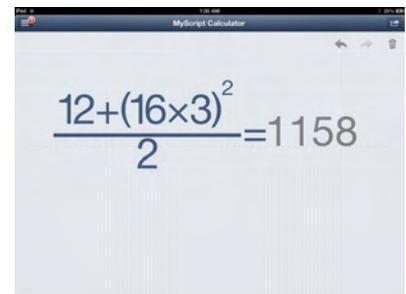
Times tables meets penmanship, in one single free app. It can transform your iPad or Android device into a smart mathematical slate.

You start by writing, using your finger, any numeral or mathematical expression, such as 2 + 2. Your imperfect-looking numerals suddenly melt into a perfect math equation, along with the answer. To get rid of a number or expression, you just scribble it out. There's also a back key, that lets you easily undo a mistake.

Supported mathematical symbols include +, -, x, ÷, +/-, 1/x, (), %, √, x!, |x| e<sup>x</sup>, xy, x<sup>2</sup> cos, sin, tan, acos, asin, atan, ln, log, π, and e. This type of app could give a child another way to practice math facts, and fine motor skills needed to write, all using a touch screen.

Details: VisionObjects, . Price: \$free. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: Mathematics, addition, multiplication, subtraction, division. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 1/23/2013. [WB]

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





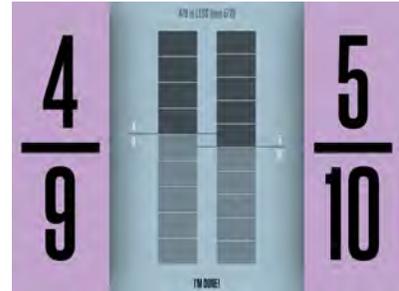
### Oh No Fractions!

In the right of passage determined by any standard elementary school curriculum, every child needs to know if 5/8 is more or less than 1/2.

Here's a free app that can help. It lets you compare two fractions, side by side, to determine which is larger or smaller. You can use a sliding set number lines to prove your answer visually -- creating an excellent teaching prop. It is possible to adjust the denominator to any size, making harder or easier comparisons. It would be ideal for any elementary teacher who deals with fractions, not only to provide drill, but as another way to show how fraction relationships work.

Details: Curious Hat, [www.curioushat.com](http://www.curioushat.com). Price: \$free. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: math, fractions. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 1/30/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	10	88%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	6	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	10	



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



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



### Opposites, The

Do you know what 'efficacious' means? Just what exactly is the opposite of 'bear'? This fast-paced word sorting game provides practice with opposing words. It starts easy, with word pairs, like 'up-down', but gets harder, with custom words drawn from biology, economics, politics, medicine, poetry and classical Greek prefixes.

A study option lets you practice the words before you play, or you can jump right in and play by trial-and-error. The levels can be a little harsh, especially when the words are drawn from a large list.

Each word is read out loud by opposing male or female characters who don't seem to like one another (a nice touch), and it is possible to pause the game at any time.

For fast-paced practice with opposites, this is a good choice.

Details: Mindshapes Limited, [www.mindshapes.com](http://www.mindshapes.com). Price: \$free. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language, opposites. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 1/10/2013. [WB]

### Rise of the Guardians

Based on DreamWorks Animation's feature film, this game lets you play as one of the classic childhood legends including: North (aka Santa Claus); Tooth (aka the Tooth Fairy); Bunnymund (aka the Easter Bunny); Sandman; and Jack Frost. Each of these Guardians has their own set of upgradeable and extraordinary abilities that will help you take on the evil spirit Pitch, and his infectious nightmares. As you play, you can unlock new powers and special moves that will increase your character's strength and skills throughout the game, for example, snowball attack or summoning a swarm of tooth fairies. You can also team up with fellow heroes to unleash team attacks. The game features drop-in/drop-out multiplayer for up to four players (console versions). Prices are \$40 for the Wii U, Xbox 360 and PS3 versions, and \$30 for the Wii, Nintendo DS, and Nintendo 3DS versions.

CTR tester (Addison) says "this game is average. The first thing you'll notice is the slightly jerky frame rate and the pixellated graphics. It's not bad considering that there are five large 3D worlds to explore, but the DS can do a little better than this. The controls are okay but there's no jump button, making for awkward gameplay. You also need to use lots of items and special abilities. It feels vaguely like a Zelda game, but nowhere near as good."

Details: D3Publisher of America, Inc., [www.d3publisher.us](http://www.d3publisher.us). Price: \$40. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Nintendo DS, Wii, Wii U, Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 11/27/2012. [ADM]



### Sofia the First

It's always nice when a good story meets a well designed activity. Why? Because children can make the ideas come to life. Case-in-point, this animated storybook app for iOS devices.

The story is narrated by ABC Modern Family's Ariel Winter, and the other characters of the TV show, as well as Sara Ramirez from Grey's Anatomy as Sofia's mother.

Interactive elements are minimal and there are no text-scaffolding features. The story is a good one: Sofia learns that looking like a princess isn't all that hard but behaving like one must come from the heart. As with many princess/king/queen scenarios, there are inherent gender and cultural bias overtones in the story. The font is a non-conventional script that might bother some teachers.

The best part is the digital story theater (like Toontastic) which lets you record and animate your own version of the story. There is a minor glitch -- the playback window is smaller than you think. All in all, this is well worth the download. See our review at [http://youtu.be/3nj\\_M9OiYSs](http://youtu.be/3nj_M9OiYSs).

Details: Disney Publishing Worldwide, [www.DisneyDigitalBooks.com](http://www.DisneyDigitalBooks.com). Price: \$3.99. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: reading, creativity, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 1/15/2013. [WB]

### Story Toys Jr. Farm 123

Featuring a solid design and playful 3D graphics, this is one of a series from Irish-based StoryToys. This particular story mixes farm animals with an all-to-common counting theme. What makes it stand out is the way the 3D graphics are synced with your screen movements, giving it a "book on a stage" effect. When you flip a page, the graphic elements pop up. We liked how there is always something to do on each page. You can herd chickens to hear them counted, or help cats hide from a dog. Each short skits helps tie the counting in the story. In addition, a set of games in the back ask children to wash the animals to earn stars. All in all, this is a good addition to any early childhood app library.

Details: StoryToys, [www.storytoys.com](http://www.storytoys.com). Price: \$free. Ages: 2-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: counting, reading, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 1/31/2013. [WB]

### StorySmith: Medieval Kingdom HD

Like a digital flannel board, this drag-and-drop creativity app lets you create your own fairy tale or fantasy adventure. It's a good idea, but the range of art is limited ("to someone else's creativity") and the interface could work better. The app is sold in theme packs -- this one contains castles, princesses, queens, knights, dragons. It is easy to add more pages, and to type in your own text. Content contains eight backgrounds, 23 props, and seven characters. The app is free for a limited time. Made with Unity.

Details: Brytag Creative, [www.brytag.com](http://www.brytag.com). Price: \$free. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, writing. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.8 stars. Entry date: 12/17/2012. [WB]

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




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




Ease of Use	8	76%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	6	
Good Value	9	





### Super Mario Bros. U

Feeling nostalgic? Super Mario Bros. U is the newest entry in Nintendo's Super Mario Bros. series that began in 1985 on the NES (Nintendo Entertainment System). The headline is that this is the first HD version, because it runs on the new Wii U system. The biggest question might be, why does this game require the advanced Wii U hardware? Maybe the Wii U needs Mario more than Mario needs the Wii U.

The startup sequence feels clunky due to the Wii U gamepad, though the gamepad does have extra functions in multiplayer modes and allows you to play the game on the in-controller screen without a TV.

Also, the instructions feel complicated - for example button instructions on the control pad screen and the TV are different. But once you hear Mario's famous "Here we go!", it's all good.

After a learning curve, however, you're ready to have some fun. The basic gameplay is unchanged compared to all the other Super Mario Bros. games, but Mario does have a new move allowing him to jump off the side of walls. This adds a new strategic element, now making dangerous jumps possible if you can time them just right. There also plenty of fun, frustrating sequences that require puzzle solving or exquisite timing to get through.

Strengths include excellent HD graphics, with a whimsical, cartoonish look that is rich and detailed by the crisp, high-definition video quality. In fact, of all the new Super Mario titles, this one looks and feels the most like the very first.

The game will appeal to all ages, and while it is intuitive enough for younger kids to figure out, nostalgic adults will enjoy this one. It's a wonderful and entertaining update to a proven old school formula.

Details: Nintendo of America, [www.nintendo.com](http://www.nintendo.com). Price: \$60. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Wii U. Teaches/Purpose: logic, social play, video game history. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 11/27/2012. [ADM]

### Victorious: Taking the Lead

Based on the Nickelodeon television show starring Victoria Justice, this game lets you play as Tori Vega as you hang out with the Hollywood Arts crew and try to win the starring role in an upcoming school play against school rival Jade. Getting around the school requires collecting items and then pulling them out of an inventory when they are needed -- a rather clunky process.

As you explore, your cell phone rings, letting you interact with Jade, Beck, Cat and others. Content includes songs from the show including "Take a Hint" from the new season, plus 20 rhythm-based mini-games that require matching the rhythm of a song. The Nintendo DS version also contains rhythm games. If you like the show, you'll probably like the game; otherwise pass.

Developed by High Voltage Software for the Nintendo Wii and by 1st Playable Productions for the Nintendo DS.

Details: D3Publisher of America, Inc., [www.d3publisher.us](http://www.d3publisher.us). Price: \$30. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Wii, Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: reading, logic, problem solving. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 11/26/2012. [WB]

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

95%



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

82%





### War Horse

This is a digital edition of Michael Morpurgo’s novel, designed to teach children about WWI and encourage them to discover the real stories behind the war’s events, places, and participants.

The app features the complete text of the novel, together with an 80 minute, unsynchronized, unabridged reading by the author and a musical performance. Other features include a timeline alongside the book that explores WWI through documents, maps, photographs and film. As with other Touch Press productions, each image is zoomable, and many of the objects can be rotated with a swipe.

The app presents the war from both the Allied and German perspectives, as it does in the novel, and features narrated first-hand quotes and 200+ original photographs. The app also features a selection of video interviews with historians, experts, and the author. Topics covered include horses in war, trench life and the Western Front today, all supported by related images, subtitles, video and rotational photography.

This is a must-download for those with an interest in history. Created in cooperation with Egmont, Illuminations Television and Touch Press.

Details: Touchpress, . Price: \$13.99. Ages: 9-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: history, reading, horses, music, Word War I, Germany, England. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 11/19/2012. [WB]

### Welcome to the Vampire's Lair...If Your Dare!

For the child who desires to be pleasantly spooked, this playful 10 page ebook would be especially good around Halloween, but the content will hold interest any time of the year. Each screen contains narrated text with highlighted words. That, combined with the topic, makes this a good early reading app for a general language experience.

Each page has a skit, including a finger-eating plant, a haunted Mona Lisa jigsaw puzzle, a bug squishing game where you try to kill furry scorpions before they multiply, a piano keyboard made of coffins that scream, and a clever face decorating activity that uses your front-facing camera, and lets you paste weird eyes or fangs onto your face. Features include the ability to record your own narration, and the ability to toggle between English, Spanish and Portuguese. There are no ads.

Details: LivoBooks, www.livobooks.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language, some creativity and music. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 1/10/2013. [WB]

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




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






# Future Releases & Updates

FEBRUARY, 2013

*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.*

## Arno Kit

The Arno board is a "beginner-kit-on-a-board", incorporating the components you would find in a beginning Arduino kit, but all on one matchbox-sized board that is powered by your Mac or Windows computer's USB port. A micro USB cable is included, and you'll also need to download and install the Arduino IDE (the programming language for Windows, Mac or Linux). The included book covers the basics of electronics and programming, and explains how the circuits on the Arno board work. There are 40 examples of sketches with explanations. You can start with things like blinking and fading an LED, then move up to programming outputs. Learn more at [www.olympiacircuits.com](http://www.olympiacircuits.com) or <http://arduino.cc/en/main/software>.

Details: Olympia Circuits, [www.olympiacircuits.com](http://www.olympiacircuits.com). Price: \$65. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: programming, Arduino, electronics, coding. Entry date: 1/29/2013.



## ESPN Sports Connection

Sports Connection is the first multi-sports title for the Wii U. It features ESPN sports, including baseball, tennis, football, soccer and kart racing, each using Nintendo-Style avatars for characters. Players can play on their own, team up in co-op, or compete in multiplayer with up to 5 players.

Corey said: The Good - Gameplay uses mostly the Wii Remote Plus and Wii U Gamepad, varying between games played. The Wii U Gamepad brings more enhanced gameplay controls. This is a good looking game. While it feels somewhat like ESPN, it's nothing for ESPN fans to get too excited over. While it does have a neat presentation of ESPN's voice narration, it doesn't resemble ESPN perfectly. The bottom line: This game takes advantage of Wii U's potential and is a really fun sports game to play.

Details: Ubisoft, Inc., [www.ubisoft.com](http://www.ubisoft.com). Price: \$50. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Wii U. Teaches/Purpose: sports, baseball, tennis, football, soccer, racing. Entry date: 6/13/2012.



## Gingham Games

Featuring retro-looking illustrations, Gingham Games is a collection of three games designed to teach children about numbers, letters, shapes and colors. The games include Ducks in a Row (numbers), Apple Toss (ABC's) and Shape Catcher (shapes & colors). Children can slide characters across the screen to catch an apple or bring a duck to a pond. The app also features voice recordings of other children.

Details: ClassicKid Productions, [www.classickidproductions.com](http://www.classickidproductions.com). Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: numbers, letters, shapes, colors. Entry date: 6/7/2012.



## Happy Wars

Can war be happy? We'll leave the philosophical questions of this title to you. This is a free, Teen-rated comical large-scale multiplayer action game (see <http://playxbla.com/ee/happy-wars>) where up to 30 players can battle in exotic locations using spells or siege equipment. There are also offline and single-player modes. Other features include the ability to dress your characters or combine items to improve their effectiveness. Developed by Toylogic Inc. for Microsoft and available as a download from Xbox Live Arcade.

Details: Microsoft Games (Xbox Division), . Price: \$free. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Xbox 360. Teaches/Purpose: logic, collaborative play. Entry date: 6/12/2012.





### iBitz by GeoPalz

GeoPalz iBitz is a small battery operated (coin cell) clip-on pedometer that syncs to a Bluetooth phone. If you download the app, a child can trade in steps for items on Amazon.com, through a special GeoPalz store.

The adult version tracks steps, distance, weight, height, overall physical activity, and BMI, while the kid's interface incorporates characters that a child must keep healthy with physical activity, healthy food, and plenty of water. The adult version is \$50 and the kid's version is \$34. Visit [www.geopalz.com](http://www.geopalz.com). See the video from CES 2013, at <http://youtu.be/KincXe5aCLw>

Details: GeoPalz, Inc., [www.geopalz.com](http://www.geopalz.com). Price: \$50. Ages: 3-12. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android, Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: physical activity, exercise. Entry date: 10/25/2012.



### Kung Fu Skeeter

Turn your iPad into a Microsoft Kinect-like system with this interesting app called Kung Fu Skeeter (that uses a technology called the "Tadami Video Playground"). The platform can be used to build games (like Kung Fu Skeeter) and activities that utilize the video camera on a mobile devices. See the demo, at [http://youtu.be/ndOqTA39e\\_w](http://youtu.be/ndOqTA39e_w)

Details: Cool School, [www.tadamiplayground.com](http://www.tadamiplayground.com). Price: \$1.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: large motor movement, coordination. Entry date: 12/4/2012.



### Marble Math Junior

This math drill game is just like Marble Math (see review), with easier levels.

Details: Artgig Studio, [www.artgigapps.com](http://www.artgigapps.com). Price: \$0.99. Ages: 5-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: math facts, counting, sets. Entry date: 8/10/2012.



### Project Shield (Working Title)

What do you get when you cross an Xbox controller with a five inch Android tablet with beefy stereo speakers? NVIDIA's (<http://shield.nvidia.com/play-android-games>) new touch screen portable gaming system, code-named "Project Shield." The handheld game system was unveiled at CES, and it could spell more bad news for the Sony Vita and Nintendo 3DS, or anyone else interested in the mobile gaming space. Why? Because it further stretches how you can purchase and experience video games.

Besides working as a stand alone Android gaming system, the chunky controller can also stream games that you've already loaded on your Windows PC, provided you're sharing the same Wi-Fi router, and your computer is equipped with a recent NVIDIA graphics processor (specifically a Kepler-based GeForce GTX 650 or better). So now you have a way to carry your game of Assassins Creed around the house with you. Other features include a set of standard game controls and 5 to 10 hour rechargeable batteries.

The stand-alone mode is based on the Android (Jellybean) operating system that the NVIDIA spokesperson I talked with promised "pure, unfiltered Android that can run anything you can download from the Google Play app store." Games that have been modified for gamepads and 5" landscape displays will work better. One can't help but notice the potential of this device for playing videos or music, thanks to the clear screen and way better than average speakers. NVIDIA promises an SD card slot, but won't say how much internal storage the device has. Also up in the air -- the final name and the price; all to be determined by late spring, which is the earliest you'll be able to buy one.

Details: NVIDIA, [www.nvidia.com](http://www.nvidia.com). Price: \$call. Ages: NA. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: An Android-based game delivery system. Entry date: 1/15/2013.





### Ranger Rick's Tree House

Ranger Rick's Tree House is a digital nature magazine for children delivered through the Apple Newsstand, featuring Ranger Rick Raccoon in his tree-house home. Issues are charged to your iTunes account as in-app sales.

Children can touch and discover ongoing features, including the Living Room, Video Room, Games Room, Mystery Closet, and an Attic, each featuring articles, photos, games, jokes and riddles. A back door leads to Ranger Rick's Backyard which contains wildlife games and activities, along with a tool for tracking how much time you spend outdoors each week.

Details: National Wildlife Federation, [www.rangerrickjr.org](http://www.rangerrickjr.org). Price: \$20/year. Ages: 7-12. Platform: IOS-Apple, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: Science, animals. Entry date: 1/31/2013.



### Rayman Legends

Rayman comes to the Wii U with a new adventure designed by Michel Ancel (creator of Rayman, Beyond Good & Evil and the Raving Rabbids).

There are now touch and motion controls and the ability to extend your playing experience when the TV is off.

Details: Ubisoft, Inc., [www.ubisoft.com](http://www.ubisoft.com). Price: \$50. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Wii U. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Entry date: 6/13/2012.



### Rocksmith – Authentic Guitar Games

Plug your real electric bass or guitar into your PS3 or Xbox game console, to play along with selections of music. It's like karaoke, with real instruments. Your instrument must have a 1/4" output jack in order to work. There are multiple levels, from single notes to complex chords and techniques, and a nice selection of music, from different genres. Rocksmith includes a 1/4-inch-to-USB cable.

Details: Ubisoft, Inc., [www.ubisoft.com](http://www.ubisoft.com). Price: \$60. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, Windows. Teaches/Purpose: music, bass, guitar. Entry date: 6/13/2012.



### Smarty Print

Smarty Print is a letter tracing/handwriting app designed to teach children to print upper and lower case letters. The app features eight sections including; Tracing sections for upper & lower case with pronunciation and vocals; Sight words with pronunciation and vocals; a Practice sections for free hand practice; an Assessment section for teachers or parents to look at a child's results, for example, how long did a letter or word take, did they fully complete the trace; a Coloring Book section for taking photos & images and converting them into cartoons and/or black/white coloring pages; an Art section for creating Jackson Pollock style splatter art with classical music; a Feedback section for teacher assessment that can be printed and emailed; and an Information section for simple instruction walkthrough. Designed for use with the SmartyShortz Gripper stylus to help facilitate proper writing posture while tracing on the iPads. Also available: Smarty Cursive

Details: SmartyShortz LLC, [www.smartyshortz.com](http://www.smartyshortz.com). Price: \$2.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: printing letters. Entry date: 12/14/2012.



### SmartyShortz Stylus & Grippers

Are multi-touch screens contributing to the development of bad habits when tracing print and cursive letters? Designed specifically for touch screen delivered handwriting drill, this stylus/pencil is available alone (\$13) or with different grippers (\$15).

It is designed to use with the Smarty Print and Smarty Cursive apps, to assist children in using the proper pencil grip when tracing letters in both print and cursive.

They'll work with any penmanship-related app, as long as the screen is capacitive (that means iPhone, iPad, iPad Mini, iPod Touch or most Android devices). They are also available in classroom kits, sold in units of 12.

Details: SmartyShortz LLC, [www.smartyshortz.com](http://www.smartyshortz.com). Price: \$15. Ages: 2-4. Platform: stylus for iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: penmanship. Entry date: 12/14/2012.





### Tagamoto Road Set

First there was the Hexbug Nano, tiny vibrating bug-like creatures powered by button cell batteries. Tagamoto takes the concept up about five notches but it uses the same propulsion system -- a pill-sized counterweight spins, making vibrations that move a vehicle forward on rubbery bristles. But this generation does much more. They also have tiny LED lights and speakers for sounds that react to special bar codes that you can stick on the track.

The Enforcer Road Set comes with two collectible vehicles with lights & sounds (one racer and one police car), more than 30 bar-codes, and more than 65 pieces to connect. Each Tagamoto motorized vehicle features three different modes of play: Off Road – no roads or codes required, just press and hold the ON button for four seconds; Roads & Codes – vehicles follow roads and react to codes, just press the ON button to power into play; and Free Roll – front wheels snap down to free wheel.

Details: Innovation First, Inc., [www.hexbug.com](http://www.hexbug.com). Price: \$30. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: programming, physical computing. Entry date: 10/24/2012.



### Tank! Tank! Tank!

This party game lets up to four players experience driving and shooting with tanks as they battle against monsters or compete in Free-for-All and Team Versus modes. There are both cooperative or competitive modes. The multiplayer mode lets you battle monsters, shoot weapons and destroy building with up to three friends.

The Campaign mode lets you play alone and battle enemies and level up your tanks, and unlock new tanks by clearing specific missions. You can also take a picture with the Wii U camera and dress up your avatar with helmets, masks, and more.

Details: Namco Bandai Games America Inc., [www.namcobandaigames.com](http://www.namcobandaigames.com). Price: \$call. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Wii U. Teaches/Purpose: social play, logic, timing. Entry date: 6/15/2012.



### Toy Story Mania!

Now available for the Xbox 360 and PS3, this party-style game lets you join Woody, Buzz and other characters from the Disney-Pixar film and play in 30 carnival-inspired shooting galleries to win prizes in mini-games. In addition, you can choose from five themed booths including Army Men Challenge, Balloon Garden, Animals & Friends, Space Frontier, and Wild West. There are also additional games and activities created exclusively for the Move and Kinect. See also the Nintendo Wii version.

Details: Disney Interactive, Inc., [www.disney.com](http://www.disney.com). Price: . Ages: 6-12. Platform: Xbox 360, Xbox Kinect, PlayStation 3, PlayStation Move. Teaches/Purpose: collaborative play. Entry date: 12/14/2012.



### Transformers Prime: The Game

Based on the television show produced by Hasbro Studios, this game lets you play as your favorite autobot characters, in order to save the earth from the evil Megatron and his new secret weapon.

In the single player mode, can fight or drive as Optimus Prime, Bumblebee, Arcee, Autobot Ratchet and Bulkhead.

You will also cultivate friendships with Jack, Miko and Raf - the human characters from the show - to eliminate the Decepticons.

Multiplayer modes let you choose from 11 characters. Developed by Now Production for the the Nintendo Wii (\$40), 3DS (\$30) and Wii U (\$50), and by Altron Corporation for Nintendo DS (\$25). Our testers found the game to live up to their expectations.

Details: Activision, Inc., [www.activision.com](http://www.activision.com). Price: \$40. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Wii, Wii U, Nintendo 3DS, Nintendo DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic, collaboration. Entry date: 11/26/2012.





## Windows Surface

Microsoft's first venture in the laptop business is solid, at least from a hardware perspective. Our testers first reaction was clearly "cool." They especially liked the "real" magnetic qwerty keyboard for typing. Note, however that there are two models of keyboard -- Touch Cover (add \$100) is a pressure-sensitive keyboard and cover that is thin and doubles as a cover. It has all the Windows shortcut keys, media controls, and a trackpad. Type Cover is a bit thicker that we preferred much more than the Touch Cover. Also cool -- the flip out kick stand for propping the unit on a table or shelf.

Once you get over the unconventional menu, Surface is very useable, and it is easy to download and install apps or customize. The biggest drawback is the lack of content (apps) compared with the Apple or Android competitors, which cost either the same or -- in the case of Android -- a lot less. We also noticed some classic Microsoft Windows clumsiness, including a Wi-Fi help menu that gives you an error, saying it requires an online connection.

There are two types of Surface: Surface with Windows RT and Surface with Windows 8 Pro (the latter starting at \$800). For more details, see <http://www.microsoft.com/Surface/en-US>

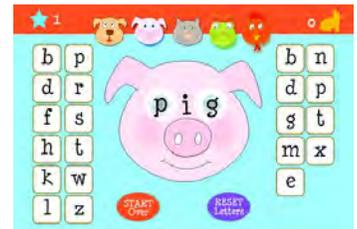
Details: Microsoft Corp., [www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com). Price: \$500. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Windows. Teaches/Purpose: A tablet. Entry date: 12/10/2012.



## Word Pig

Word Pig is an early learning spelling app featuring two levels using the vowel "i" - making three letter words, or spelling the spoken three letter words. For every five correct words, children are rewarded with animal stickers with sounds. Children can then play with their animals in a farmyard setting. Word Pig is the first of five apps in the Word Animals suite of apps. Each app will feature a different vowel.

Details: Ziggity Zoom, LLC, [www.ziggityzoom.com](http://www.ziggityzoom.com). Price: \$free. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: reading, spelling, three letter words. Entry date: 6/7/2012.



## Zimmiz

This plush toy has a velcro pocket that you can use to house and cushion your iPhone or iPod. It features posable hands and antennas and a loop of fabric on the back, in case you want to attach it to a stroller. You can download a free app (search on Zimmiz) to load animated faces, sounds and bodily noises. The pocket stretches enough to fit either iPhone 4 or iPhone 5 sizes (or associated iPods).

Games include Zimmi Says, Hide & Seek, Ask Zimmi, Musical Zimmi, and Zimmi Memory. See also HappiTaps.

Details: Big Foot Toys, [www.planetzimmi.com](http://www.planetzimmi.com). Price: \$25. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Entry date: 1/29/2013.

