



Children's TECHNOLOGY REVIEW



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LittleClickers: Interesting Facts About LEGO

We've all seen, and certainly stepped on those famous sharp cornered LEGO blocks. But where did they come from, and what can you make with them? Let's test your brain, with some LEGO trivia. See page 3 or visit <http://littleclickers.com/legos> to download the PDF.



Roblox: Where it Came From, and How it Makes Money

This month, we take a closer look at a virtual construction material, namely ROBLOX, <http://www.roblox.com>. Our coverage is divided into two parts -- first Scott Traylor interviews Roblox CEO David Baszucki (page 6) to get a publisher's view. Next, CTR Intern Matthew DiMatteo asks "How Do They Make Money" (page 7) taking us on a first person tour of the ROBLOX service from a "free" point of view. He also looks at Moshi Monsters, not as a comparison, but to see if there were similarities in how "free" accounts are handled. What he discovered in both was unsettling. Children who log in for a free account are entering the lowest layer of a caste system, best described as a sophisticated experience engineered to get them to pay. They will be tempted with virtual goodies that are fully in view, and made to feel left out of areas that they can see others visiting. Matt does a nice job describing how it all works.

Two Excellent Videos from the eBook Retreat

I was reminded of the power of small groups of smart, passionate people last month at the Highlights Foundation in Honesdale, PA when a small group of very smart designers and researchers met on the occasion of the first Dust or Magic eBook Retreat. Here's a slide show <http://bit.ly/Yzd6Ey>. Our goal was to take a close look at the best and worst practice in children's digital publishing, and based on our evaluations, the event was successful so you can count on another next year. Sadly we didn't have Scott Traylor on hand to record the presentations, but we were able to capture two of the talks.



- **Mark Schlichting: The Art of the Animated Hot Spot.** <http://youtu.be/cf4n3MJlElA>
- **Jeremy Brueck: Can eBooks of Reasonably Good Quality Help Children Learn to Read?** <http://youtu.be/hyEM0CRmwP8>

Jeremy also captured this 360 degree view of the room, so you can pretend that you were standing there, in first person <http://360.io/AvAXBP>.

On the Cover...

Little Red Riding Hood from Nosy Crow .. just one of the excellent Editor's Choice titles you'll find in this month's issue. See page 16.

May 2013

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- 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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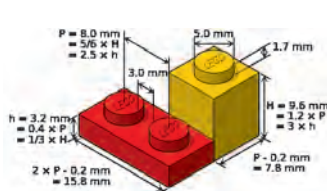
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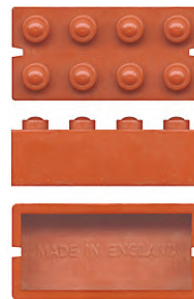
We've all seen, and certainly stepped on, those famous sharp cornered LEGO blocks. But where did they come from, and what can you make with them? Let's test your brain, with some LEGO trivia.

1. True or False: The first plastic inter-locking brick was made in Denmark. False according to <http://www.hilarypagetoys.com>, where you can learn the about an English toy inventor named Hillary Page who designed a self locking brick (right) nine years earlier than the first LEGO.

2. Are LEGOs based on the English or Metric system? According to <http://bit.ly/11VmmBP> the Danish version is based on the metric system. Hillary Page's design was English based.



2. What does the word "lego" mean? At Neatorama.com <http://bit.ly/10IsKde> you learn that "lego" is made from two Danish words leg (play) and godt (well). If you take the first two letters from each world, you have lego, a word that is nearly always spelled in capital letters. Interestingly the Latin translation means "I put together".



Hillary Page's bricks, above. Below: one of the first LEGOs, nine years later.



3. What is the biggest thing ever made with LEGOs? At www.geeknaut.com <http://bit.ly/10wEHZp> you can see a 102 foot tower made of 500,000 LEGOs. You can also see a LEGO printer, a full sized car and an iPhone.

4. LEGOs are made of plastic. But what kind of plastic? At 3D Printing for Beginners <http://bit.ly/10wUa6T> you can clear that LEGOs are made of Acrylonitrile Butadiene Styrene or ABS for short. It is a material that is strong and resilient but it is not biodegradable.

5. How many LEGOs are there? At <http://natgeotv.com.au/tv/megafactories/lego-facts.aspx> you can learn that about 400 billion LEGO blocks have been produced since 1949, about 1140 per second. If all the LEGO bricks were to be divided equally among a world population of six billion, each person would have 62.

6. How Strong are LEGOs? Said another way, if you stacked LEGOs on top of one another, how tall could you make the stack before the LEGO on the bottom crumbles? According to a study reported in the BBC <http://bbc.in/12lpWfU> the tower would have to be 375,000 bricks to cause the bottom brick to collapse, which represents a stack 11,781 ft tall. The Empire State Building is 1,250 feet tall. That's 9.4 Empire State Buildings!

7. What is the most expensive lego? At CNET <http://cnet.co/YISlso> you can see a photo of a single LEGO brick worth \$14,500 dollars, up for auction at www.brickenvy.com. It's made of solid gold, and was given to a valuable employee who obviously thought that \$14,500 would be better.



APPLICATIONS

1. Make a LEGO Maze for your car. Make sure you include turns and dead ends.
2. Make a lego photo frame. Remember to make a pyramid shaped holder using LEGO blocks on the back so your frame stands up, and use colors to compliment your photo. You can glue your LEGOs together with plastic cement (commonly called Testers model glue). According to http://howto.wired.com/wiki/Immortalize_Your_Lego_Creations Crazy, Glue works well.

Learn About LEGO

Here are omse videos about LEGOs at <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcBVHzUUEKwmlBiXlqFzK3dvWViv2Pdzn>



Editor's Choice May 2013



Disney Princess Cinderella, \$3.99, by Disney Digital Publishing
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/cinderella-storybook-deluxe/id579388492?mt=8> is a solid retelling of Disney's Cinderella with great graphics and narration, by Budge Studios for Disney Digital Books. For ages 3-up.

Little Red Riding Hood, \$4.99, by Nosy Crow
<https://itunes.apple.com/app/little-red-riding-hood-nosy/id626696483> is funny, easy to control and full of surprises. Don't worry -- the classic foreshadowing of being eaten by the wolf has been preserved when you can see the wolf's tail sticking out from under a bush. But the gory stuff, like being cut open with an ax, is not present. See http://youtu.be/emR8_vqJdIQ. For ages 3-8.

Here's a summary of the the top rated products from this months issue, clustered by topic, listed roughly from younger to older.

YOUNGER CHILDREN

Dr. Panda's Supermarket, \$1.99, by TribePlay
<https://itunes.apple.com/app/id609405853> is one of a series of now over ten solid apps (see also Dr. Panda's Daycare and Dr. Panda's Beauty Salon for example). There's a bit of a diner-dash gameplay to the way the jobs appear, which keeps children busy. Testers liked how the animal's eyes follow your finger -- a nice touch. This app is well worth the download. For ages 2-6.

FINE MOTOR COORDINATION

Dexteria Jr., \$2.99, by BinaryLabs, Inc.
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/dexteria-jr.-fine-motor-skill/id624918435?mt=8> is a set of three simple, highly structured activities could be useful for introducing someone to multi-touch screens. For ages 2-5.

Fairytales Maze 123, \$2.99, by GiggleUp Pty Ltd
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/fairytales-maze-123/id633819326?ls=1&mt=8> is a set of 20 mazes, each with a fairytale theme. This is the third in a series of maze-related apps that effectively turn your iPad into an activity center, rich with problem solving possibilities. This is a solid app that is well worth the download. See the CTR video review at <http://youtu.be/gfDRBmfgYxk>. For ages 4-up.

Preschool Maze 123, \$1.99, by GiggleUp Pty Ltd
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/preschool-maze-123/id593710986?mt=8> contains 16 generally well designed mazes, each with different themes that include pirates, aliens and penguins. For ages 3-up.

EBOOKS

Ruff's Bone, \$4.99, by Wonderful
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/ruffs-bone-interactive-storybook/id601996502?mt=8> is another modernized version of The Living Books from Wonderful, and serves as an example of when a good story meets solid interactive design. If you're in your early 20s, you might recall the CD-ROM edition of the story. For ages 2-8.

Slice of Bread Goes to the Beach, \$2.99, by Jelly Biscuits <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/slice-bread-goes-to-beach/id431477144?ls=1&mt=8> is an excellent 15 screen story with good narration and illustrations, plus some "micro" games -- such as when you move the bread to avoid the seagull. For ages 3-8.

FOR OLDER CHILDREN (MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL)

Happi & The Pirates, \$2.99, by Happi Papi
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/happi-pirates-spelling-math/id622075576?ls=1&mt=8> is like a mashup of a grid game like battleship with a crossword puzzle; and you are rewarded with a jigsaw puzzle. The design isn't flashy, but the first stages of the game are well leveled, making the entire experience hard to stop playing. There's plenty of content in this app to explore. For ages 8-up.

iPoe Collection 1, \$3.99, by Play Creatividad
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/ipoe-interactive-illustrated/id507407813?mt=8> Looking for a good scare for an older reader? Designed in Spain but available in English (or Spanish or French), this is a digital retelling of four of Edgar Allan Poe's most famous stories. The subtle presentation of the scary effects don't push themselves at you. Instead, they wait like loaded springs. The themes and graphics are intended for an older audience. See a sample, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfMKiyHc8J8> For ages 11-up.

Tale of a Snowflake by \$1.99, by AppTalia is a "scientific eBook"



Mazement, \$1.99, by Wronghut Oy
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/mazement/id605676549?mt=8> is yet another ball rolling maze game where you tilt your iPad in order to move from one level to the next. For ages 8-up

SCIENCE

Tale of a Snowflake, The, \$1.99, by AppTalia
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/tale-snowflake-water-cycle/id569337179?mt=8#> beautifully illustrates the water cycle from the point of view of a talking snowflake. For ages 3-10.

Junior Astronaut - Breaking Through the Space Barrier, \$free/\$5.99, by Crank Publishing Ltd
<https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/junior-astronaut-breaking/id568831665?mt=8> nicely explains rocket science by way of mini-games that let you "mix" your own gunpowder as you learn about early Chinese rocketry, for example. See the app at <http://youtu.be/VbB2rdM2ziY> For ages 9-15.

PARENT UTILITIES

Baby Learning Family, \$1.99, by Green Basil
<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/baby-learning/id566164852?mt=8> is a family photo album, where the pictures can talk. It could be used to create a custom language experience for a child, built around their interests. For ages 0-3.

Kindoma Storytime, \$free, by Kindoma
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/kindoma-storytime/id621742145?mt=8> combines a small eBook library with videochat features, so that books can be read together, over long distances. For ages 2-8.

Matching Puzzle Cards: Colors, \$2.99, by CJ Educations
<https://itunes.apple.com/app/matching-puzzle-cards-colors/id577752604?mt=8> turns the pedagogy of the flash card inside out, by making each card into an animated two piece jigsaw puzzle that you can snap together the parts. See <http://youtu.be/mctY-6hqcm0>. For ages 2-4.

MUSIC

Pitch Painter, \$3.99, by Morton Subotnick
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/morton-subotnicks-pitch-painter/id519738403?mt=8> is a musical finger painting app. You can make a song and then flip it upside down, or hear it backwards. For ages 3-5.

StoryBots Tap & Sing, \$free, by JibJab Media Inc.
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/tap-sing/id602903380?mt=8> is a living xylophone with keys that teach you songs. Each note on the two octave scale is represented by one of JibJab's StoryBot characters. See the video review at <http://youtu.be/yoBO6nfQDXU>. For ages 2-8.

FORIGN LANGUAGE

Turn And Learn, \$free, by Alla Tarasova
<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/turn-learn-words-ease!/id548917415?mt=8> makes it easy to practice basic vocabulary words in English, German, French, Italian and Russian. If you want a general introduction to the sound of several languages, this is an excellent app. Ages 6-up.

DON'T YOU DARE MISS THE 4TH ANNUAL

Dust or Magic AppCamp



We've been watching the dramatic surge in children's apps, and know that these products would need to be properly critiqued & debated.

WHERE: Asilomar Conference Center, Monterey CA

WHEN: May 19-21, 2013, Sunday through Tuesday

COSTS: \$1290 for one seat, or \$990 each for 2 to 5. This price does not include housing. All other costs (such as extra food and wine) are covered.

CREDIT: We are pleased to offer CEU credit with the Erikson Institute.

REGISTER: To save a seat, call 800-993-9499 (9-2 PM EST) or visit www.dustormagic.com and register online.

"An idea can turn from dust to magic, depending upon the talent that rubs against it." Matsuo Bashō (松尾 芭蕉), from the forward of the book by Bob Hughes



David Baszucki (Born 1963) is the founder and co-creator of ROBLOX (the other co-creator being the former Erik Cassel); he is currently the CEO of ROBLOX. He has 3 children, and currently resides in Redwood City, California. Before he helped found ROBLOX, he founded the now defunct company Knowledge Revolution, where he helped create a physics simulator called "Interactive Physics" from which ROBLOX was inspired from. After Knowledge Revolution was bought by MSC.Software, he became the Vice President and General Manager of MSC.Software. After a few years, David Baszucki left, along with ROBLOX co-founder Erik Cassel. Mr. Baszucki was a General Motors scholar in Electrical Engineering at Stanford University.

SOURCE: The Roblox wiki (http://roblox.wikia.com/wiki/David_Baszucki)

ROBLOX

1. Who made it? Meet David Baszucki — One of the guys behind Roblox by Scott Traylor

Last month (or perhaps a bit earlier) CTR contributor Scott Traylor (ST) had a chance to sit down with Roblox CEO David Baszucki (DB) for a conversation. Here's the outcome.

ST: When did Roblox get started?

DB: I think we've been live for five or six years now.

ST: Has the Roblox virtual world been growing?

DB: We've been growing solidly since the beginning. It's just that we started from ground zero, so all of our years have been strong growing years.

ST: Who are your customers?

DB: Mostly US, mostly boys, solidly in the 8 to 14 year-old age range, but we have players across the gamut.

ST: Do you talk about localizing Roblox for other nations?

DB: We think there's a huge opportunity there, so we're looking into that.

ST: One might argue the play patterns of boys in that age range are universal.

DB: Somewhat universal. I think so. We're a simplified blocky world which is more generic across cultures than maybe other properties.

ST: Are there different styles or ways of tapping into the creative expression of a crowd that influence what you are doing?

DB: We're big believers in the power of the crowd. We tap into our community in many ways, by way of live chats with our top builders, monitoring forum activity, and through a conference. We used to just have one annual conference; now we're planning conferences in multiple cities. I would say our management style is balanced in that on one side we want what our users want, to guide the product, but on the other side we have our own personal vision of what the product should be. You can't crowd source visionary things; so we need both of those.

ST: What were you doing before you started Roblox?

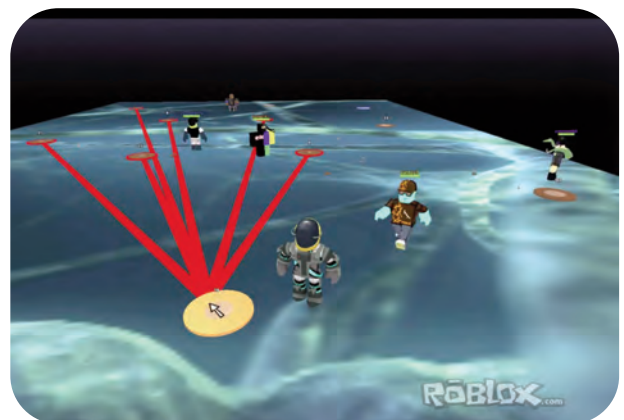
DB: If you search for the term "interactive physics" on Google you will see a product my prior company made over 20 years ago. It was an instructional physics sandbox that was used by kids to help model physics problems. That was part of the inspiration of Roblox. We would see how users were excited to building things with it, and not just build in a school setting. It was that spark, kids wanting to build things, physically as well as online, that inspired us to build Roblox.

ST: Are you versed in child development, e.g., has Piaget or Papert influence the Roblox philosophy?

DB: We're versed in the sense that we read a lot, we've read a lot of the MIT studies on all of that. We're familiar with LOGO and all those ideas. Philosophically, we're highly aligned with that thinking, in that we really want to build a fairly open sandbox and let our users decide how to use it. Roblox, if anything, is more unconstrained than what many people would expect it to be.

ST: Has Scratch influenced your work?

DB: I'm a big fan of Scratch. I built a prime number generator in Scratch with my son when he was barely able to figure out how to use Scratch. You can imagine the influence of those tools when you start thinking about how to control objects using our LUA script (the programming language provided in Roblox). It's an interesting area to look at, to empower users to write control flow (the



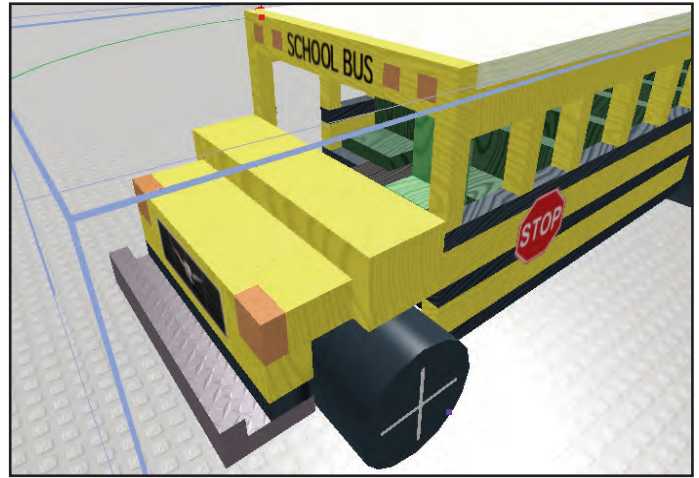
order of computer instructions) and stuff.

ST: There are thousands of user-created digital objects in ROBLOX. Have you ever thought about 3D printers?

DB: We imagine this could be huge. If you go to Maker Faire and look at Autodesk, everyone has their eyes on how quickly the 3D printing revolution is moving. There's some overlap in that Roblox is a modeling tool for creating 3D creations. We believe there's a lot of interesting things happening right now.

ST: Do you think about Roblox being used in the classroom, or maybe a derivative version for classroom use?

DB: We know it can be. In my last company we built specifically for the classroom, we built a dedicated physics instructional laboratory. We took the following approach with ROBLOX, that sometimes the best educational product is the highest quality consumer product, one that is used broadly. Microsoft Word for example is a really good educational product because it's actually a pretty good product. It's used around the world. The same is true with Microsoft Excel. In school now my kids use professional video editing software and use professional image editing tools as part of their classroom work. Our vision is the same for Roblox; we think a good educational product can potentially be higher quality if it has a sound commercial footing and if it's adopted for fun by kids and then it can flow back into the classroom. So to answer your question, yes. Our dream long-term would be to include architecture, physics, computer science, areas like these, to be part of the educational benefit of Roblox.



ST: How are you funded?

DB: We are largely self funded; although we have had some angel funding. We've had two venture capital (VC) rounds with very passionate VCs, but that's all so far.

ST: What's next for Roblox?

DB: We want to include everyone. Our focus is going to be in making everyone on Roblox feel the successful passion of creating, in some way, as part of our community. We want everyone to experience the feeling of creative success.

2. How does it make money? A side-by-side comparison of two virtual worlds: Roblox and Moshi Monsters by Matthew DiMatteo

Roblox is just one of many virtual worlds and web communities designed for children. These are places where you can play games and chat with friends while collecting shiny items, raising pets, and decorating a virtual home. The dirty little secret about these worlds is that they're easy to get into, but hard to fully enjoy, without spending money... as much as \$350 (\$349.95 to be exact) for lifetime access to the Roblox Outrageous Builders Club.

Roblox collects this money by way of a tried-and-true model pioneered long ago by Neopets and Club Penguin. There are similarities to how these services generate income that are important to understand. This isn't surprising, after all, the purpose of these services is twofold -- to engage children, and to generate revenue.

Making money is not necessarily a bad thing. As an aspiring game designer myself, I hope to make a living. But funding your child's adventures in an online world isn't quite as simple as buying a Webkinz from a shelf in a toy store, where the pricetag is in view.

The two virtual worlds I examined for this article both employ money collection strategies that can best be described as nuanced. **My objective is not to compare them (they are very different types of experiences). But I do want to figure them out, and clearly explain how they work. Let's get started.**

VELVET ROPE. The monetization methods in each world are strikingly similar. Online worlds are typically free to play to anyone, offering up a tasty sample, but saving the good stuff

for paying members. And membership has benefits. As a member, you can explore places off limits to the freebies, and accomplish the end goal faster, to a more satisfactory degree. Those with money have more fun, faster.

IN-GAME CURRENCY. All content tends to revolve around some form of in-game currency, which functions as both a reward and a resource. It helps to understand how it works. You earn virtual currency by completing tasks, such as quests, puzzles or minigames. The currency is used in order to participate in the collecting, nurturing, and customizing activities. More virtual wealth equals more options, decorations, clothing, toys or potted plants for your avatar's home. Paid members can earn curren-



The Total Cost of Ownership: Moshi Monsters vs. Roblox

	Monthly (Recurring)	6-Month Recurring for Moshi)	12-Month (must renew)	Lifetime
Moshi Monsters	\$5.95	\$39.95	\$49.95	N.A.
Roblox Builders Club	\$5.95	\$29.95	\$57.95	\$199.95
Roblox Turbo Builders Club	\$11.95	\$44.95	\$85.95	\$299.95
Roblox Outrageous Builders Club	\$19.95	\$69.95	\$129.95	\$349.95

All Monthly memberships recur automatically.
 The 6-Month membership recurs automatically for Moshi Monsters only.
 All 12-Month memberships must be manually renewed.

cy more easily, so paid membership functions as the primary gateway to the experience.

In Moshi Monsters, you visit Monstro City where you choose one of six monsters to nurture, feeding it and playing minigames, completing quests, and solving puzzles. You can collect items to customize your monster and decorate your monster's home. You can also collect pet Moshlings. The currency of the world is Rox, used to buy food and items at shops. The more games you play, the more Rox you earn.

Grand Blox Auto 5



Roblox is more of a web community, built around user generated content using a free design tool you download and install on your Mac or Windows computer. The games function in a physics-

based sandbox world that incorporates MMO behaviors similar to Minecraft or Second Life, but many genres are available, including platformers, role playing games (RPGs), first person shooters (FPSs), racing and simulations.

ARE THEY ACTUALLY PROGRAMMING? Roblox likes to imply that it is designed to let you make games. So you might be surprised to learn that your child's Roblox experience is more akin to a shooter like Medal of Honor than Scratch. Because this is a sandbox experience, you can make an automatic rifle as easily as a hammer. Some of the more popular games have violent themes, where you can roam around and shoot other avatars, sans ESRB ratings. Your parents wouldn't let you play Grand Theft Auto, but you can play "Grand Blox Auto."

Moshi Monsters and Roblox offer a variety of member-exclusive benefits that give you (1) more to do, (2) more to collect, and (3) greater status. However, instead of member benefits acting as an expansion of the free experience, free players are made to feel restricted and incomplete. This creates a need that only membership can satisfy. It's akin to going into a food store, hungry and without money -- where you can look but you can't taste.

No opportunity is lost to entice a child to become a member, such as with this loading screen.



The image shows three rows of membership options, each with four choices: Monthly, 6 Months, 12 Months, and Lifetime. Each option includes a price, an 'Upgrade' button, and an 'Avg monthly cost' (except for the Lifetime option). The Lifetime option for the Outrageous Builders Club is highlighted with a red circle.

Membership Type	Monthly	6 Months	12 Months	Lifetime
Builders Club	\$5.95	\$29.95 (Avg monthly cost: \$4.99)	\$57.95 (Avg monthly cost: \$4.83)	\$199.95
Turbo Builders Club	\$11.95	\$44.95 (Avg monthly cost: \$7.49)	\$85.95 (Avg monthly cost: \$7.16)	\$299.95
Outrageous Builders Club	\$19.95	\$69.95	\$129.95 (Most Popular)	\$349.95

In the Moshi world of Monstro City, you pick the color of your monster, and you get a starter account with 200 Rox. You can play the daily puzzle challenge and explore Monstro City, playing minigames and completing quests by socializing with some of the residents. However, the world restricts free players in several crucial ways.

- Daily limits. You can only earn so many Rox and XP (experience points) each day -- a trick made famous by Webkinz. Even though free players may complete quests or win minigames, they won't be rewarded for their efforts if they've reached the limit. This restriction not only limits a free player's ability to raise a monster; it also renders their accomplishments meaningless.

- Exclusive access. How'd you like to visit that cool looking Disco? Many areas that you can see are off-limits to non-members. If you're a paying member you get a Passport that allows access to all of the locations in the world, including an Underground Disco and a Rox Tree that feature ways for players to earn more Rox. In this way, exclusive access provides a distinct advantage for members in the world's economy.

Benefits	Free Account	Builders Club	Turbo Builders Club	Outrageous Builders Club
Active Places	1	10	25	100
Daily ROBUX	None	15 RS	35 RS	60 RS
Self Stuff	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
See Ads	Yes	No	No	No
Virtual Hat	None	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bonus Gear Item	No	No	Yes	Yes
Signing Bonus	None	100 RS for initial purchase	100 RS for initial purchase	100 RS for initial purchase
Create Groups	No	Yes (10)	Yes (20)	Yes (100)
Join Groups	Yes (5)	Yes (10)	Yes (20)	Yes (100)
Create Badges	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
BC Beta Features	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Personal Servers	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Trade System	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mega Places	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Benefits	Free Account	Builders Club	Turbo Builders Club	Outrageous Builders Club
Active Places	1	10	25	100
Daily ROBUX	None	15 RS	35 RS	60 RS

Builders Club members can design and manage more of their own virtual worlds, making it possible to earn more virtual currency, or ROBUX. If you have ROBUX, you get more tools, icons, and game gear. So you can make better games. In other words, the rich get richer.

- Missions. Members have exclusive access to two of the most heavily advertised features of the

Moshi world: Super Moshi missions and collecting Moshlings. The Super Moshi missions are an entire mode of play for members only, and Moshling collection is hyped all over Monstro City.

- Customizable features. Members get more options for customizing their monster and its home.
- Members have more friends. A better home and cool looking monster boosts your social status. You might win Monstar of the Month and showcase your artwork in a museum while buying friends gifts.

In Roblox the free experience doesn't offer many barriers to making worlds, and most of the games are freely available to anyone. However, if a player becomes invested in certain things, such as some accessories or an upgraded social status, the world is structured in such a way that creates a slippery slope. Wealth, customization, and social mobility are all interconnected through a virtual economic system that is essentially exclusive to members of the Roblox Builders Club.

The Roblox economy is built around a dual currency consisting of Tickets and Robux. Robux are the primary currency. Members get 100 Robux for signing up as well as something any child can relate to-- a daily allowance. They can also sell items and participate in the Tickets-Robux exchange. The only way for non-members to get Robux is through direct microtransactions (like in-app sales) that use real money, but they don't get as much bang for their buck as members.

Why is having a lot of Robux such a big deal? Players' virtual wealth defines their power in the world, by way of the kinds of items they get to use. Most of the items in the Catalog can only be purchased with Robux. Players can also create their own items, though some kinds can only be created by members, and only members can sell their items for profit. In addition to the status or glamour factor of being able to flaunt a rare accessory on one's avatar, there are forms of gear that actually give players advantages within certain games.

Having a leg up in the economy translates to an edge in gameplay. One of the main ways to generate income in Roblox is through something called Place visits. "Places" are the user-generated game worlds made in Roblox Studio, not that different from views in YouTube.

Creators receive tickets whenever someone plays their game. Non-members can create just one place, but "Builders" (paid subscribers) can create many. Furthermore, members have the option of making their places exclusive to other members. By doing this, each visit generates ten times the number of tickets. Because free players cannot access the currency exchange to turn tickets into Robux, the visits they receive have less meaning. In playing games and creating games, the Roblox economy makes sure that the house always wins when real dollars are the metric.



The Moshi Monsters economy also favors members. The monster nurturing system reinforces a kind of consumerism that only paid membership can support. Monsters must be fed daily to keep them from getting hungry, and if they get hungry, they can't level up as quickly. Food and other items that can boost a monster's status can be purchased in shops, but in addition to costing Rox, items have level prerequisites; if a monster is not at the proper level, the item cannot be used.

Both Rox and the experience points (XP) that contribute to level are resources that are made scarce for free players.

In order to get you to subscribe, the Moshi experience artfully guides you toward gated areas, emphasizing the gap between free and paid play and creating a sense of need. Quests may lead players on errands to members-only areas like the TV Studio, and whenever a daily Rox or XP limit is reached, players get more reminders about how purchasing membership will eliminate the annoyance. Locked content is often directly followed by a prompt to join.

EXPOSURE TO INTERNAL ADVERTISING. Free players are saturated by reminders of how membership will benefit them. On the loading screens that appear during transitions between different areas of the world, the collectible (but member-exclusive) Moshling pets present various "Moshi Tips" that often



refer to activities, areas, or other content that can only be accessed by paying members, such as Super Moshi Missions, the Colorama, and the Port. These features are also prominently displayed in the Monstro City newspaper, The Daily Growl, and as advertisements visible in a player's home space.

Roblox also uses these techniques to subtly reinforce the benefits of membership. When customizing one's avatar, free players have very few options, but are referred to the Catalog for obtaining more.

ADS are a reality in both of these worlds; much more prominent in free versions, which use the ads to encourage children to spend money on a membership. The ads in the free version of Roblox are the most aggressive, consisting of both internal ads (sign up now) and third party ads, for insurance, electronics, colleges and cars.

OK, SIGN ME UP. You say it is worth the cost to allow your child full access to the world's content where they will feel like they're in the upper caste, and they won't have to look at insurance ads. What do you need to know before entering in that credit card number? Proceed with caution. You're about to enter into an agreement that is on par with renting a car. Read through some of the site's FAQ or forum threads regarding payments and policies. You'll find that both worlds offer various price packages based on time, at one-month, six-month, and twelve-month intervals. The monthly rate for each is \$6 (rounded to the nearest dollar), which is just about what most worlds charge. Moshi's six-month rate at \$40 is steeper than the \$30 for Roblox (and a higher monthly rate than the one-month plan), but at twelve months, Moshi's \$50 price is cheaper than Roblox's \$58. Roblox also offers a Lifetime Builders Club plan for \$200. Moshi does not feature a lifetime option, nor do worlds such as Club Penguin or Webkinz.

Roblox also employs a tiered membership system in which you can upgrade your child from a Turbo Builders Club to an Outrageous Builders Club. As with the option of a lifetime membership, the use of tiers is an uncommon practice among virtual worlds, and the costs escalate significantly. Turbo Builders Club costs \$12 per month. But you can spend \$350 in one click for a lifetime Outrageous Builders Club membership. The twelve-month Outrageous Builders Club plan at \$130 is labeled "most popular."

While upgrades and downgrades for most forms of membership are possible, a lifetime membership cannot be downgraded or refunded. Some other concepts to know:

AUTOMATIC RENEWAL. To a busy parent, few words should strike more fear than "automatic renewal." But both of these services do it. Moshi's one-month and six-month plans automatically renew, but only a one-month plan in Roblox will do so, and only provided the payment method is via credit card. With both worlds, only recurring membership plans can be cancelled, and all sales are non-refundable.

REFERRALS. There is another way to earn virtual currency. By inviting your friends to become members. In

ROBUX is the currency of ROBLOXIA.

Use ROBUX to buy virtual goods for your character – shirts, pants, hats, faces, and even heads! You can also buy gear, like hammers, potions, jet boots, swords, and BLOXI Cola.

Click a link below to choose the quantity of ROBUX you wish to purchase.

NOTE: Please allow up to 5 minutes for your account to be credited.

Price	Standard Members	Builders Club Members
\$4.95 USD	400 ROBUX*	450 ROBUX
\$9.95 USD	800 ROBUX*	1,000 ROBUX
\$24.95 USD	2,000 ROBUX	2,750 ROBUX
\$49.95 USD	4,500 ROBUX	6,000 ROBUX
\$99.95 USD	10,000 ROBUX	15,000 ROBUX
\$199.95 USD	22,500 ROBUX	35,000 ROBUX

* Not purchasable with Credit Card or PayPal.

Prices for Turbo and Outrageous Builders Club are the same as for regular Builders Club.

For higher quantities, please call us at 888-858-BLOX (2569).

All Sales are final. Please see our Terms & Conditions for more information.

Notice how free members have to pay more than existing members.

both the worlds I tested for this article, you could earn additional virtual currency by getting a friend to sign up.

FEAR OF LOSING PROGRESS. If your membership expires in Roblox, you will no longer receive member benefits, but any data, such as items and currency is not lost. Your account is put into hibernation, until you renew. The motivation of "who will watch over my game" is yet other subtle motivator to keep your membership active.

THE BOTTOM LINE? Both Moshi Monsters and Roblox generate revenue through an approach built on member exclusivity. Virtual economic systems are interwoven with vital aspects of the gameplay, and virtual wealth ultimately defines how much a player can do.

Members will always have an advantage. The more time free players spend in either world, the more they come to feel a need for membership as a result of seeing attractive forbidden fruit -- fully within site, but out of touch for them, but not for others.

A key difference between the worlds is that Moshi Monsters is more of an incomplete experience for free players, whereas the free experience of Roblox contains more core content up front. Roblox places a greater deal of emphasis on its virtual currency and its connections to social status, while Moshi Monsters does more to frame its experience as one that cannot be fully enjoyed without membership.

There's no doubt that services like Roblox and Moshi Monsters can provide a great deal of entertainment and educational value for children. But children (and parents) should keep in mind that they are commercial products designed to lure new members, make money and please investors. When you enter as a "free to play" member, you can be accepting the right to be continually teased and marketed to. Hopefully by reading this article, I have helped you better understand how it all works.



Matthew DiMatteo is an Editorial Intern and Video Editor with CTR. He is a recent graduate of Carnegie Mellon's Entertainment Technology Center. This is his first article.



Feature Reviews

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.

Baby Learning Family

Imagine a family photo album, where the pictures could talk? Or perhaps turn into a short movie?

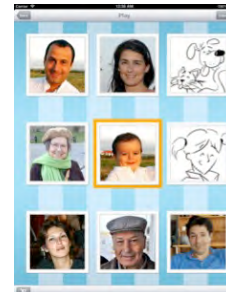
Baby Learning Family is designed to help your baby recognize, identify and interact with all your family members and friends, through a simple touch-and-hear browsing. You can toggle the background music on/off and there are two layout options. You can also adjust the size of the photos and toggle between blue or pink wallpaper.

The design is based on a photo album, where each screen presents several photos that your baby can freely explore. You could use guided exploration, e.g., "Where's Grandma?" or "Where is our house." This could be a good language experience, and you could use it for planning (e.g., take a picture of each area of the classroom, and have a child touch to get a tour of what materials they can use).

Details: Green Basil, www.greenbasilapps.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 0-3. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: parent utility, teacher utility, language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 12/13/2012. [WB]

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

85%



Dexteria Jr.

Three simple, highly structured activities could be useful for introducing someone to multi-touch screens. For example, Pinch the Pepper lets you try out your emerging pincer grasp (the muscles you use when you use your thumb and forefinger to pick something up). Trace & Erase lets you complete simple mazes to connect two points.

The better you do, the harder the challenge. Need to know: This app isn't for everyone. It was designed for Occupational Therapists, but the low price and good design make it of interest to a very young (or old) person just starting to use a multi-touch screen for the first time. See also Dexteria.

Details: BinaryLabs, Inc., www.binarylabs.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 2-5. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: fine motor skills. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 3/30/2013. [WB]

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

90%





Disney Princess Cinderella

This is a solid retelling of Disney’s Cinderella, with three modes, (read it myself, read to me, and record my voice). The graphics and narration are top-notch, and the text highlighting feature, plus the ability to record your own narration, help to make this an excellent language experience, to build word meaning. Content includes a sing-a-long to the classic song “Bibbidi Bobbidi Boo” plus six jigsaw puzzles, each with three levels. There are also six coloring activities. In the story, Cinderella shares her dreams of romance and a better life with the lovable mice Gus and Jaq. When Cinderella’s cruel stepmother prevents her from attending the Royal Ball, the Fairy Godmother appears and transforms a simple pumpkin into a magical coach and Cinderella’s rags into a gorgeous gown. At the ball, Cinderella falls in love with Prince Charming, but must flee before the stroke of midnight breaks the spell. Developed by Budge Studios for Disney Digital Books.

Details: Disney Digital Publishing, . Price: \$3.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, memory, language experience. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 4/26/2013. [WB]

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



Dr. Panda's Supermarket

One of a series of now over ten apps (see also Dr. Panda's Daycare and Dr. Panda's Beauty Salon) this app lets children manage their own supermarket, with ten mini-games that pop up at random. There's a bit of a diner-dash gameplay to the way the jobs appear, which keeps children busy.

There's plenty to do, and the games are fun, with large animated animal characters that need to be assisted and rung up. As a result, there's a lot of sorting (e.g., a recycling machine asks you to sort three types of trash). You find items on a shopping list, weigh fruits and vegetables with a digital scale, scoop up colorful candy, mop up spills, collect carts in the parking lot, run a coffee machine (for mom or dad), and help customers load their groceries into waiting cab or car.

There is no text, the only advertising is for other Dr. Panda apps on the main menu. This can be turned off in the parents section, which has a special locking mechanism ("tap the lock four times to continue"). In addition, all links to the web are only available in this parents section. Testers liked how the animal's eyes follow your finger -- a nice touch. This app is well worth the download.

Details: TribePlay, www.tribeplay.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 2-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: logic, math, shopping. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 3/19/2013. [WB]

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



Dr. Seuss's Short Story Collection

Pricey but well designed, and full of rich, whimsical language experiences, this is an eight-pack of generally lesser-known Dr. Seuss titles, all in one \$8 app. They include The Big Brag, Gertrude McFuzz, I Can Lick 30 Tigers Today!, King Looie Katz, The Glunk that got Thunk, Too Many Daves, The Zax and What Was I Scared Of?

Each contains the standard touch and hear Oceanhouse Media labeling along with narration and good page navigation features. Note that Oceanhouse Media now has it's own Dr. Seuss bookshelf app which gathers all your Dr. Seuss titles on a virtual bookshelf. It also makes it very easy to purchase additional titles.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, www.oceanhousemedia.com. Price: \$7.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 4/10/2013. [WB]

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





Fairytale Maze 123

This is a collection of 20 mazes, each designed around a popular fairytale theme. This is the third in a series of maze-related apps that effectively turn your iPad into an activity center, rich with problem solving possibilities. In one maze, you lead the prince to Rapunzel; in another you help the three little pigs visit their homes in the correct order to avoid the wrath of the wolf. The mazes vary in complexity, sometimes containing multi-stage features. Popular themes were inspired by Pinocchio, The Little Mermaid, Little Red Riding Hood and Snow White. The background music can be toggled on or off, and there are multiple language features, despite the fact that the app has no narration or printed instructions. All in all, this is a solid app that is well worth the download. See the CTR video review at <http://youtu.be/gfDRBmfgYxk>.

Details: GiggleUp Pty Ltd, www.giggleup.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: logic, memory, spatial relations, fine motor development. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 4/24/2013. [WB]

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



Green\$treets: Unleash the Loot!

Part of the Fingerprint platform, this free app attempts to let children explore "financial and ecological responsibility" (per the press materials) by way of arcade-style games.

The main character, Shmootz, is a "mischievous monster that serves as a metaphor for the idea that in life there are problems and it is our responsibility to fix them – regardless of whether or not we created those problems ourselves." This is a good goal, but our testers found the app to be confusing, and the timed arcade-style games are not well linked to the overall saving theme. For example, you earn money by planting a garden, or tossing items in the treehouse (Angry Birds style) or killing weeds by "slashing" them with swipes, in a game modeled after Fruit Ninja. So does it work? It could if you had more control over your shopping; but the items and prices are removed from reality. So this game is lacking in external validity.

The app features the "Fingerprint" platform for parents. Every Fingerprint App offers a series of free features for parents including: Play Center which acts as a mobile dashboard uniting parents & kids & providing safe access to Fingerprint Apps; Mom-Comm - lets parents send personalized in-App voice messages to encourage a child's learning progress; SnapShot - gives parents insights into what their child is playing & learning through a simple news feed delivered via mobile device or web; and Learning Moments - trigger personalized Facebook or email messages, keeping parents engaged in the play & recommending the next App for your child. Developed by Fourth Monkey Media.

Details: GreenStreet Commons, Inc., <http://greenstreetcommons.com/>. Price: \$free. Ages: 5-8. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: money, economics. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2.9 stars. Entry date: 12/31/2012. [WB]

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



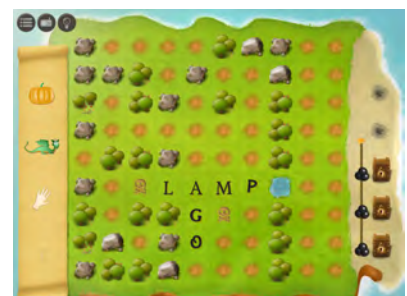
Happi & The Pirates

It's not often that you find a spelling game combined with a logic game. This is like a mashup of a grid game like battleship with a crossword puzzle; and you are rewarded with a jigsaw puzzle. The design isn't flashy, but the first stages of the game are well leveled, making the entire experience hard to stop playing.

You must use your "spell-power" to uncover treasure chest keys, and use deductive skills to unlock troves needed to search Pirate Island for clues to the final puzzle. When you solve the final puzzle and open the chest, you get a chance to win a real prize -- in this case a real iPad Mini. We didn't make it all the way to the end to see if this offer was real, or how to enter. In general, this seems to be a gimmick-free app with no external links. There are eight language options, and your progress is saved. All in all, there's plenty of content in this app to explore.

Details: Happi Papi, <http://happipapi.com/>. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: spelling, math, logic, deductive reasoning. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 4/23/2013. [WB]

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





I Can Lick 30 Tigers Today! and Other Stories

Dr. Seuss fans can keep celebrating -- Oceanhouse Media keeps churning out classic Dr. Seuss stories that are hard to find in your traditional library, but are a delight to read. The headliner -- "I Can Lick 30 Tigers" is the first of three featuring Cat in the Hat, as he explores big themes like humility, equality and teamwork. In this story, a boastful young Cat In The Hat learns the perils of bragging, and must figure out how to talk his way out of fighting 30 tigers. In King Looie Katz, King Looie of Katzen-stein proudly gloats about his royal tail and insists it be carried around so it doesn't touch the ground. Soon, all cats in the kingdom are carrying around each others tails until one small cat revolts leading to "demo-catic" results. The Glunk that got Thunk features a small cat who tells the story of his imaginative sister who "thunked a Glunk." She tries to "un-thunk" the Glunk but it takes teaming up with her brother. As with other Oceanhouse titles, there's excellent text scaffolding to help emerging readers, and the ability to record your own narration.

Details: Oceanhouse Media, www.oceanhousemedia.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android, Nook. Teaches/Purpose: reading, ethics. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 4/23/2013. [WB]

iPoe Collection 1

Looking for a good scare for an older reader? Designed in Spain but available in English (or Spanish or French), this is a digital retelling of four of Edgar Allan Poe's most famous stories: The Oval Portrait, The Tell-Tale Heart, Annabel Lee and The Masque of the Red Death. This is a typical page flipper, with no narration, and the ability to toggle between three languages (English, Spanish and French). What sets this eBook apart is the subtle presentation of the scary effects that don't push themselves at you. Instead, they wait like loaded springs, ready to spring at you. Each offers a valid graphic depiction of Poe's creepy points. Note that the themes and graphics are intended for an older audience. In other words, this book really is creepy. The best (or worst) part is the last page of the Masque of the Red Death when the mask jumps out of the screen. See the video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFMKiyHc8J8>

Includes a behind the scenes look at the art of David Garcia Forés, which includes some rather scantily clad females. The sound track was created by Teo Grimalt. Note that Collection 2 is also available, which we did not review.

Details: Play Creatividad, www.playcreatividad.com/. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 11-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 1/30/2013. [WB]

Junior Astronaut - Breaking Through the Space Barrier

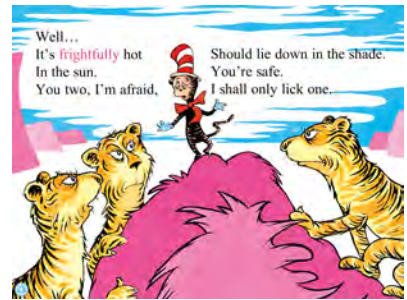
Rocket science 101 comes to your iPad, nicely explained along with hands on mini-games that make it fun to experiment

Inspired by the classic space books of the 1950s and 60s, this activity book app is designed to teach children about how rockets work, the launch process and space travel, as well as a general introduction to gravity, weight, mass and thrust.

Activities let you "mix" your own gunpowder as you learn about early Chinese rocketry, and build a rocket to test your knowledge. The app features original artwork from British illustrator, Chris Madden and science consultancy from Adam Mann, Wired's space and physics correspondent. The app contains and original music with real recordings of space communications. See the CTR video preview at <http://youtu.be/VbB2rdM2ziY>

Details: Crank Publishing Ltd, <http://crank-publishing.com>. Price: \$free/\$5.99. Ages: 9-15. Platform: iPad (430 MB). Teaches/Purpose: outer space, gravity, weight, mass. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 12/9/2012. [WB]

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



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



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





Kids Sounds

The idea of linking animated images with sounds is a good one, especially because it lets children play with layers of sound; a good way to let them discover the elements of music. It works nicely in this case, at least on one of the two free trial scenes we tested in Kids Sounds.

In the other (the underwater scene) the experience seemed pretty random. Unfortunately the app teases children with locked content that invites an in-app sale (the "press and hold" security isn't enough). Content in the \$.99 version includes six different themes with 121 interactive objects, each with a sound effect.

Details: Pyjamas Apps Team, <http://pyjamasapps.com>. Price: \$free. Ages: 2-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: music, rhythm. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.8 stars. Entry date: 4/24/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	10	76%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	6	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	7	



Kindoma Storytime

Kindoma Storytime combines simple eBooks and videochat features, so that books can be read together, over long distances. The idea is that you can share a bedtime story with Grandpa, even though there may be hundreds of miles in between. So does it work?

For the most part, yes, as long as you're using an iPad or iPad Mini that has the free app installed, and the Internet connection is solid. In addition you have to have the app running in order for this service to work. This might requires a setup phone call. Just like Skype. Currently there are 26 books.

Here's how that part works: First, you must download the app and register for an account. This unlocks more books, which are stored in the cloud. Next, you invite your family to connect, by sending them an email. Third, you browse the library and pick out a book to share. When you "invite" somebody to join your network, once you're in a call, you can synchronize to the book, an alarm will sound and the book pages are synchronized turn, either side can turn the page, either side can turn the book. nearly at the same time on both devices. In addition, you can point to things on the page to see a highlighted hand. You can use this feature to highlight words as you read, or ask questions and have the children point to things on the page. Other than the page turns and hand highlighting, there are no interactive features in the books. This service still has some minor quirks and the books seem dry. However, we were able to get it working in a cross-state test. Sure, we could've used Skype, but somehow the Peter Rabbit book made things feel more fun.

Details: Kindoma, www.kindoma.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 2-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: interpersonal development, social play. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 4/5/2013. [WB]

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



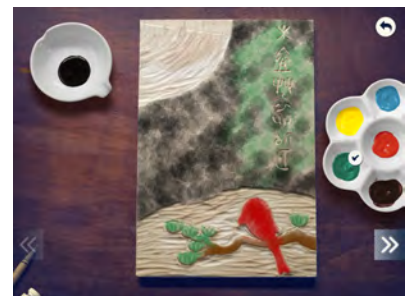
Little Oriole

Visually beautiful but limited in interactivity with a few quirky design issues, Little Oriole features excellent woodcut art and soothing background music that can be toggled on or off.

The 38 screen story is built around the questions "Who are you?" and "Where are you from?" and it features the journey of a little bird. The art is based on the artistic style called Watermark Woodcut, and scenes are inspired from a plum forest and the canyons of the Eastern Taiwan. The story and art is by Zhou Jianxin from Taipei National University of Arts. Features include the ability to view the book in Chinese or English.

Details: Kaifeng Kama Children's Bookstore & Digital Publishing, <http://bunny.kkbooks.tw>. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 4-12. Platform: iPad, Kindle, Android. Teaches/Purpose: art, reading, woodcut printing, Chinese. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.7 stars. Entry date: 1/25/2013. [WB]

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





Little Red Riding Hood

Nosy Crow has once again raised the bar for interactive folk tales, with this funny, easy to control interactive edition of Little Red Riding Hood that is full of surprises. Don't worry -- the classic foreshadowing of being eaten by the wolf has been preserved when you can see the wolf's tail sticking out from under a bush. But the gory stuff, like being cut open with an ax, is not present. This time, the wolf locks Grandma in a closet, and the wolf is chased away by a scary but friendly spider. Content includes eight routes and nine games embedded in the story, plus the voices of fifteen characters voiced by child actors. There is also text-highlighting to support emerging and early readers. There are several noteworthy interactive features. You can blow into the microphone to collect dandelions, see yourself in a magical pool of water with the front-facing camera, tilt the screen to pour honey into a jar and zoom in or out of several scenes for a closer look. All in all, this is an excellent addition to your child's digital bookshelf; and one of the most notable accomplishments from British based Nosy Crow to date. See the video at http://youtu.be/emR8_vqJdlQ

Details: Nosy Crow, www.nosycrow.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: memory, language, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 4/25/2013. [WB]

Matching Puzzle Cards: Colors

This app turns the pedagogy of the flash card inside out, by making each card into an animated two piece jigsaw puzzle that you can snap together the parts. For example, you are asked to match the pink socks with the pink shoes; you then touch the shoes and they'll do a dance for you. Color words are reinforced through verbal cues and highlighted words.

There are 12 colors and 24 related object words, a song with highlighted lyrics and a game where you race the bunny to collect his eggs. Because it is high in child control, this is a good first introduction to touch screens, with a bit of fine-motor development and language experience mixed in. Music and narration can be turned toggled on or off; a nice touch, and there's a bunny racing game where you collect the colors. All in all, this is a solid, well designed app with limited content. See the video at <http://youtu.be/mctY-6hqcM0>

Details: CJ Educations, www.cjeducations.com/. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 2-4. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: classification, language, reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 12/9/2012. [WB]

Mazement

Fast paced and fun, this is a ball rolling maze game where you tilt your iPad in order to move from one level to the next. Along the way, you avoid holes and pick up items to score points.

Each maze has a story based theme (generally related to ghosts or dungeons), and the more you play, the harder the maze. Features include the ability to blast through walls with a Fireball, a "big jump" where you can move up or down a layer, and a beginner-friendly checkpoint feature. All in all, it is a very fun game that fairly forgiving, and hard to stop playing. The game was made in Unity.

Details: Wronghut Oy, <http://mazement-game.com/>. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: spatial relations, fine motor, gross motor coordination, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 4/23/2013. [WB]

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



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



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





Meanwhile

This innovative story experience turns a storyline into a maze with a visual branching set panels. You quickly learn that there are many different paths to the end, and only one has a happy ending. The comic, based on art and a story by Jason Shiga, is about a boy who is coming home from an ice cream store when he meets a mad scientist with three inventions: a mind-reading helmet; a time machine; and a doomsday device. Which one would you like to test out first? The text can be read aloud, providing you have the VoiceOver option turned on in your settings.

Details: Zarfhome Software Consulting, <http://zarfhome.com/meanwhile/>. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: language, story structure. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 4/18/2013. [WB]

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



Mystery Math Town

Math facts (of the flashcard variety) meet a haunted house in this leveled exploration game. Your mission is to help a friendly ghost rescue the fireflies by exploring the rooms of strange houses. Your child's progress can be saved, and you can toggle between addition, subtraction or multiplication.

Need to know: The hint feature could be better, but the scavenger hunt challenge kept things interesting.

Details: Artgig Studio, www.artgigapps.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 6-12. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: math facts, addition, subtraction, multiplication. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 3/28/2013. [WB]

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



Patterns by Edninja

Here's a simple puzzle game that effectively introduces patterns. Content includes 60 level sets consisting of dozens of pattern-completion puzzles.

Here's how it works: In each level, a series of objects is arranged in a pattern, with one space left blank. There are three choices for filling in the blank, and you must slide the correct object into place to complete the pattern. For example: In a line of clouds and balloons, there is an empty space where the next object should go. Your choices are a cloud, a balloon, and a butterfly. Based on the pattern, a cloud should come next, so you select the cloud icon and slide it into the empty space.

Strengths include a child-friendly interface, clear tutorial, and supportive narration. The more you play, the more levels you unlock, and the harder the levels get. Weaknesses include a limited variety of interaction. Patterns get more complicated as levels go on, but all you ever do is slide an icon into place. Animations and sound effects can get repetitive as well.

The bottom line? The game doesn't offer a lot to do, but what it offers it does well. Younger players should find it fun and hone their pattern recognition skills, but older players may grow tired of it more quickly. For \$3.99, this is worth the download for those on the younger side.

Details: EdNinja, <http://edninja.com/>. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 4-10. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: Pattern recognition. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.5 stars. Entry date: 1/30/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	70%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	6	
Design Features	6	
Good Value	7	



Pitch Painter

Music educator Morton Subotnick has a long history of using computers to help children learn and apply musical concepts, which is why we were pleased to test his latest app. This is a musical finger painting app that lets children create music, while introducing them to a variety of musical instrumental sounds and authentic scale tunings from four regions of the world. Features include: select 3 instrumental sounds from each of 4 different regions of the world; the ability to hear what you are creating as you paint it using up to three fingers at one time.; play the "canvas" in many different ways; hear exactly how you painted it; hear it as a normal piece of 'written' music played from left to right; hear how it sounds upside down, backwards; scrub it like a DJ; erase notes you don't want; save and load your compositions; and detailed instructions for parents and educators.

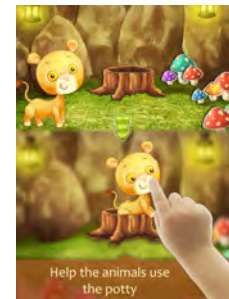
Need to know: The menu is rather cryptic, but once you figure it out, there are a lot of cool effects to try. For example, you can make a song and then flip it upside down, or hear it backwards.

Details: Morton Subotnick, <http://creatingmusic.com/2012/pitchpainter.html>. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 3-5. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: music. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 4/9/2013. [WB]

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



Ease of Use	6	48%
Educational	5	
Entertaining	6	
Design Features	4	
Good Value	3	



Potty Training: Learning with the animals

Here's a potty training app that starts with the question "do you have butterflies in your stomach?" You then help farm animals and two children use the toilet (or potty). The story theme is obviously relevant to any child, but the way it is handled here raises some questions. Because children of the intended age range think literally, the idea of suggesting there are "butterflies in their stomach" should be presented carefully. There are no bodily noises or actual showing of pee or poo. The topic is disguised so effectively that it raises as much confusion it addresses questions. The biggest drawback to this app is that there's not much to do.

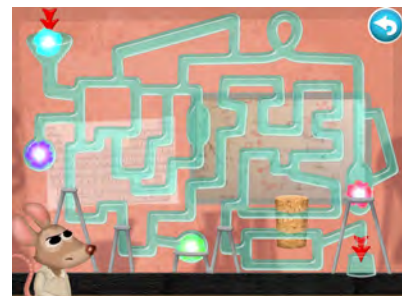
Details: 1tucan, <http://ahorrecomparando.com/>. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (iOS 5.1 or later). Teaches/Purpose: potty training. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2.4 stars. Entry date: 4/5/2013. [WB]

Preschool Maze 123

Following Toddler Maze 123, Preschool Maze offers 16 more easy to play and solve, generally well designed mazes, each with different themes that include pirates, aliens and penguins and more that you must help to navigate twists and turns on their journeys to complete their mission. Each maze features a new adventure and a character who needs your help. The mazes increase in difficulty the more you play, providing new challenges to master. Features include: 16 unique mazes with different scenes and characters; multiple levels of difficulty; printable mazes that you can send to your email to print out; interactive animations; and an original background music track that can be easily switched on or off.

Details: GigggleUp Pty Ltd, www.gigggleup.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: logic, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 2/26/2013. [WB]

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





Quigley the Caterpillar

This is not much more than a scan of a printed book set to piano music. The story is pleasant one -- written by Erin Turnley and illustrated by Pamela Goodman, it tells you about a little caterpillar's journey of "self-acceptance and belonging."

In the story, Quigley the caterpillar meets a beautiful butterfly named Bertina. Now Quigley sees himself as plain and wants to fly gracefully like Bertina and will do just about anything to be just like his new butterfly friend, until a wise old dragonfly named Eli teaches Quigley to trust that in time he will become everything he was created to be. The graphics are good. There is no text support for emerging readers, and sounds seen haphazard.

Details: Nation9, Inc , <http://nation9.com>. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 5-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: science, metamorphosis, insects. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 4/24/2013. [WB]

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




Ruff's Bone

A good book meets solid interactive design, in this updated iPad edition of the classic Living Book. If you're in your early 20s, you might recall the CD-ROM edition of the story.

Ruff loves his "Sunday bone" but he can't find it. Each of the 12 screens contains an exotic location. This includes a trip into a dark sky and a hunt on the moon to find it. His determined search leads us down a deep, dark hole, into a cave, high up into the clouds, to the bottom of the ocean and even up a ladder to another planet. The app is available in English and Spanish. The graphics, adapted from the CD-ROM, appear a bit fuzzy but our testers didn't mind. The interactive gags still hold their charm. The story is by Eli Noyes.

Details: Wanderful, www.wanderfulstorybooks.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 2-8. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language, Spanish, English. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 3/28/2013. [WB]

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




Seaworld Presents Turtle Trek

A good idea that has been poorly implemented, this app lets you steer a baby sea turtle through a five zone maze of danger, friends and treasure in order to meet some friends. As you explore, you collect coins and dodge sharks, coral and other dangers. The more bad things you run into, the faster your life runs out. On the other hand, finding food and treasures lets you swim longer, and find more facts about real sea animals. The more you swim, the more coins you earn. You can speed your progress by buying coins, as in-app purchases as follows: for the full game it is \$2.99 and a 20,000 coin pack is \$0.99. The PR materials claim that a portion of proceeds from the in-app purchases goes to the SeaWorld and Busch Gardens Conservation Fund. The actual percentage is not disclosed.

Details: Sleepy Giant Entertainment, Inc., www.SleepyGiant.com. Price: \$free / \$2.99 as in-app sale. Ages: 4-9. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: marine biology, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 1.4 stars. Entry date: 3/19/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	3	28%
Educational	3	
Entertaining	4	
Design Features	2	
Good Value	2	





Slice of Bread goes to the Beach


Featuring an excellent story with good narration and illustrations, this 15 screen/page ebook tells the story of what happens when a slice of bread visits the beach. The animated effects support the story, which is written, narrated and illustrated by Australian Glenn Melenhorst, the author of Food Fight.

Features include animated page turns, touch and hear text highlighting and a "read to me" mode, in case you want to just listen. Some pages have "micro" games -- such as when you move the bread to avoid the seagull, or brush the bread crumbs to feed some ants. In the end, the slice of bread finds a friend.


It is easy to toggle on/off sound, or jump to any of the pages. All in all, this is a nicely designed story, with good story elements effectively combined with some interactive features.

Details: Jelly Biscuits, www.jellybiscuits.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language, beach related words. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 3/15/2012. [WB]

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




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




StoryBots Tap & Sing

Video review at <http://youtu.be/yoBO6nfQDXU>.

Well designed, free and responsive, this is a living xylophone that has keys that can teach you songs. Each note on the two octave scale is represented by one of JibJab's StoryBot characters. You can toggle between four voices.

For the price of \$free, you get three songs (Mary Had a Little Lamb, This Old Man and Row Row Row Your Boat). For more interesting songs, you need to subscribe for \$4.99/month -- sold as an in-app sale, a process that is not well designed (if a child knows your password, an accidental subscription could be activated). The social media options, however, are kept behind a firewall. All in all, this is a good app to download -- just be careful.

Tap & Sing is part of the StoryBots family of apps from JibJab. Visit StoryBots.com.

Details: JibJab Media Inc., www.jibjab.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 2-8. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: music, pitch, note recognition. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 4/19/2013. [WB]


Tale of a Snowflake, The

This beautifully illustrated eBook introduces children to the concept of the water cycle. In the story, a little girl captures a talking snowflake, who explains how she started as a drop of water in the ocean that evaporated and eventually turned into a snowflake. You can participate in some of the pages, by moving the sun around to cause the water to evaporate or shaking snowflakes from clouds. In addition, fact windows are presented, providing scientifically correct definitions of each key concept.

The big idea? The circulation of water has gone on for billions of years, and it will continue once again. The content make it easy to jump between pages, and teacher options let you adjust the text, music and sound effects; or toggle between English & Persian (Farsi).

Details: AppTalia, www.apptalia.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-10. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: science, reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 4/26/2013. [WB]

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






Trip, The – Little Critter Reading Adventure

A good Mercer Meyer story with excellent narration is combined with a complicated collection play pattern and some uninterruptible stretches of dialog, in this ten screen/page ebook. The design issues are annoying but tolerable. So don't count this app out completely.

You start with a choice of the classic "just read" and "reading adventure" modes. The story is a good one ... a family of four decides to take a summer car trip to Lake Wakatookee. Along the way, they meet a horse in the road, get stuck in a traffic jam, stop at the beach, get the car fixed at a garage, get some ice cream and so on. The reading adventure mode presents hunt and find challenges in order to get to the next page. You can't fix the car without a flashlight, for example, which might require going back to a previous page, in case you didn't pick one up. During a stop at the beach, a seagull steals the car keys. The only way to get them back is to visit a roadside food stand and get some free popcorn. Hidden on each page are some rather rudimentary alphabet flashcards. When found, you are told you've found a flashcard (each time). At several points in the adventure, you must wait for dialog in order to progress. Also, you are supposed to be able to find and unlock six collectible gems in order to play a hidden arcade game. I could only find four, despite going back to each page for a more thorough search. This could frustrate some children. We also didn't like the ads for the sister app to this one, called Little Critter GamePak, found on the last page.

Other features include text highlighting, visual interactive item clues and excellent audio narration. It is worth noting that this story contains stereotypes: Dad is always fixing the car; mom rides along and provides the entertainment. This family also doesn't believe in healthy eating, stopping for hot dogs and ice cream. The flashcard for F is "fast food". Some of the gags are outstanding, and are repeated from page to page.

There are two apps in the series. See also The Trip – Little Critter GamePak. Both run on iOS, Android, Nook and Kindle. There is a free lite version with prompts to the shopping cart. The app was produced by John R. Sansevere.

Details: Sliver Dolphin Books, . Price: \$3.99. Ages: 3-7. Platform: iPad, Nook, Kindle, Android. Teaches/Purpose: reading, letter recognition. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 3/22/2013. [WB]

Turn And Learn

Featuring a clean design and multiple language options, Turn and Learn is a smart flashcard app that makes it easy to practice basic vocabulary words in English, German, French, Italian and Russian.

The screen is set up in a grid, not unlike a game of concentration. You see a picture, hear the pronunciation and read the text, and then touch the photo. The words are separated into thematic units and sets of words of 12 cards. Learning of each category involves 4 stages (5 in English). The design is gimmick free and the challenge increases with your ability. The downside is that you quickly use up all the words in one particular language.

Words are pronounced by native speakers. Content includes 12 topics such as food, clothing, art and nature. The first levels are free; the publisher hopes you'll purchase future levels with more words. Created in Russia by Ivan Oparin. If you want a general introduction to the sound of several languages, this is an excellent app.

Details: Alla Tarasova, www.turnandlearn.me. Price: \$free. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: foreign language: English, German, French, Italian and Russian Vocabulary. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 11/6/2012. [WB]

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



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





Type Defender

Nearly every typing tutorial has a game where you must stop approaching enemies by typing out the short words they carry. If you miss a word, the enemies score points, instead of you. This app brings the concept to thumb typing (or a regular keyboard if you have one). Your goal is to protect your honey and earn gold by spelling words, while defending your castle against puppies, radishes, octopuses, butterflies, and chameleons.

You will use your gold to buy spells, moats and other items in Ye Old Shoppe, or save gold to add to your loot pile to earn a place in the Type Defender Leaderboards via Game Center.

Features include the ability to switch between landscape or portrait modes. Hi scores are saved or can be shared on Apple's Game Center. Additional Type Defender features include 3 difficulty levels, an express mode for non-stop spelling, and easy words like "dog" to very difficult words like "spectrophotofluorometrically." The background music and sound effects are cool at first, but it would nice if you could adjust the volume and/or toggle them on/off. All in all, this is a non-innovative, solid typing tutorial that uses tried and true techniques to improve speed and accuracy.

Details: SparkNET, <http://sparknet.net/apps/>. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: spelling, typing. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 4/23/2013. [WB]

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

80%





Future Releases & Updates

MAY 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.

Disney Princess Ultimate Dream Castle

Huge, colorful plastic doll houses abound these days, but this one takes them up a notch, in both sheer size and sophistication. It even has its own app (called the Magic Mirror app) which is optional, but it adds a screen-based play pattern to the doll play.

Each room has a fairytale-theme for girls' favorite princesses -- including a bedroom for Rapunzel with a spiraling hair "elevator" for her and her princess friends to go up and down. The castle also comes to life with the Disney Magic Mirror App (Available on the App Store). When girls scan the castle's defined labels with an iOS device they unlock and trigger activities in each princess' room and around the outside of the castle. The three-story castle also includes a kitchen where Snow White can bake, a dining room for Belle to serve her guests, a bathroom for Ariel to lounge in the tub, a sewing room for Cinderella to make pretty dresses, and a royal vanity for Sleeping Beauty to get ready. Includes 50 different play pieces and requires 2AA batteries. Dolls and batteries not included. Available June 2013. See the preview video <http://youtu.be/-m2rxMRuLhg>.

Details: Mattel, Inc., www.mattel.com. Price: \$190. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: pretend play, doll house. Entry date: 4/8/2013.



Explain Everything

Billing itself as a whiteboard tool for iPad, Explain Everything was invented by a teacher in New Jersey and created in Poland. It lets you annotate, animate, narrate, import, and export almost anything to and from almost anywhere. You can start with a blank screen, or import from PDF, PPT, DOC, XLS, Keynote, Pages, Numbers, and RTF files from Evernote, Dropbox, Box, GDrive, WebDAV, Email, iTunes, and any app that allows you to open these file types using "Open In...".

You can export as MP4 movies, PDF documents, PNG images, or XPL project files directly from your iPad. While making slides, you can draw in any color, add shapes, add text, and use a laser pointer. You can also rotate, move, scale, copy, paste, clone, and lock any object added to the stage and add new or existing photos and videos. No account is necessary to use Explain Everything and share creations. Note: we learned about this app from tech trainer Gail Lovely.

Details: Morris Cooke, www.morriscooke.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: NA. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, teacher utility. Entry date: 4/9/2013.



Explore and Learn Shapes

This is a leveled worksheet with some drawbacks. You can't escape the activities or skip through the reinforcements. But there are excellent teacher options.

Featuring Lucky the Leprechaun and lively Irish background music, this app introduces shapes to children. The app features eight shape games. Shapes include circle, square, triangle, rectangle, pentagon, hexagon, oval, heart, star and diamond. Colors include yellow, red, blue, green, purple, pink, orange and brown. Each game is guided with voice over from Lucky, who lives in a colorful land under the rainbow and responds to children's efforts with positive encouragement and congratulations as appropriate. Correct answers make the shapes turn to golden coins that drop into Lucky's pot of gold with a jingle. Children earn prizes in the form of stickers to be chosen and collected every time the child completes a series of four games. Children can use the stickers to build their own unique scene. Parents can customize the app via the parental setting to offer only the games a child is comfortable with, and select which colors and shapes to include in the games. Games include: Identify Different Shapes - help Lucky the Leprechaun identify a requested shape; Shape Jigsaw - one of the shapes has fallen apart and your child must help Lucky put the shape back together; Matching Shapes - turn over the cards and help Lucky find pairs of matching shapes; Smallest Shape - help Lucky find the smallest shape; Largest Shape - help Lucky find the largest shape; Counting Shapes - help Lucky the Leprechaun count all the shapes on screen (1-10); Identify Different Colored Shapes - help Lucky the Leprechaun find the shapes of a particular color; and Identify Which Shape is Different - help Lucky the Leprechaun find the shape that is different from the others.



Details: Mediakitchen, www.mediakitchen.co.uk. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 2-5. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch, Android. Teaches/Purpose: shapes, colors, matching. Entry date: 3/5/2013.

EZ Pro DJ

EZ PRO DJ works with an iPad or Android device (required, and not included) and free app, to create a beat mixing station.

It can work with your existing music library. Batteries are required. See the CTR preview at <http://youtu.be/FsSMR0DrPZk>.

Details: Jakks Pacific, Inc., www.jakks.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: music, creativity, DJ-ing. Entry date: 4/7/2013.



Fisher-Price Apptivity Gym

The Fisher-Price Apptivity Gym houses your iPhone or iPod touch in a case, turning it into a motion-sensitive baby activity center.

After you download one of the free Fisher-Price Apptivity apps (available from the App Store on iTunes), you can interact with the gym toys, or play existing content from your device like music, family photo slide shows, videos, etc.

There are currently seven Apptivity apps that are free to download or play; but double as teasers for the associated toy. The apps are designed to play on their own, showing interesting animals that peek out from the sides of the screen, with large friendly faces. If you tap at the screen, they change.

When the device is removed, an old fashioned mirror is shown. Other features on the gym include toys: Lion with clackers, Roller ball penguin, Frog with colorful beads and Paddle wheel bird.

Two additional bat-at toys are attached to the two front legs, which are rubberized for stability. The gym folds flat for storage. Works with the iPhone 3G, 3GS, 4G, 4S and iPod touch 2nd, 3rd and 4th generation.

Details: Fisher-Price, Inc., www.fisher-price.com. Price: \$35. Ages: 0-1. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: cause/effect. Entry date: 4/20/2013.





Imaginext Apptivity Fortress

Here's another interesting addition to the category of toys that leverages the potential of the iPad, using a free downloadable app.

Designed for one or two players, The Imaginext Apptivity Fortress combines a playset, an iPad and an app. The App is free, and the toy includes a plastic iPad case that can be adjusted in either horizontal or vertical position. The iPad automatically recognizes the characters. When the iPad is in the vertical/upright position, you can play games or interact with animated backgrounds including the Great Hall and other rooms within the fortress. Children can touch an on-screen button to activate the iPad's camera function and watch interactive enemies as if they were in their living room.

A cannon lets you fire virtual cannon balls at the approaching enemies shown on the screen. When in the horizontal/flat position, children can play games outside the Fortress. There's a flying game, a quest, head-to-head combat, and adventure games.

All the games involve the collection of jewels. The playset has a protective screen and features two turrets with multiple levels, a drawbridge, and includes a knight and a canon; all pieces store inside and there is access to the iPad home and volume buttons. Three other Imaginext Apptivity figures that unlock additional games and activities and are sold separately. The toyset works with iPad generations 1, 2, 3 and iPad with Retina Display. See the video at <http://youtu.be/sxEJtln5ms4> (CTR art Toy Fair).

Details: Fisher-Price, Inc., www.fisher-price.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: imaginative play, logic. Entry date: 5/1/2013.



Kids Designer II Tablet

Designed to plug into a Windows (7/Vista/XP) computer by USB port, this 5" x 8" graphics tablet comes with software designed to appeal to children. It features onboard controls for volume and an ENTER key for playing one of the 15 games, providing you have a CD-ROM drive. The cordless stylus is pressure sensitive.

Details: Genius, www.geniusnetusa.com. Price: \$70. Ages: 3-8. Platform: Windows. Teaches/Purpose: colors, shapes, math, memory, drawing. Entry date: 3/7/2013.



Ladybug Number Count

This counting app is designed to help preschoolers learn to count. Children can touch the ladybugs to count them as they crawl around the photographed scenes; numbers appear above the bugs and are spoken aloud in one of three languages - English, French or Spanish. The app features a second mode of play for more confident counters where children count the ladybugs in a scene and then pick the number that matches from the three displayed above. More scenes and languages will be added via free updates.

Details: Busy Brain Media, info@busybrainmedia.com. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 2-4. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: counting, numeral recognition and sequencing. Entry date: 3/19/2013.



NERF N-Sports Cyperhoop Set

This is another app/toy combo. After you download the Cyberhoop app, you select from one of five challenges. The Cyberhoop set sends your scores to your iOS device using sonic chirp technology. The app takes video and tracks statistics. The set includes a hoop, ball, and free app download. Works with the iPhone 4, iPhone 4S, iPhone 5, iPad (2nd, 3rd, 4th generation), iPad mini, and the iPod Touch (4th and 5th Generation). Requires 3 "AAA" batteries. See the video at <http://youtu.be/28bn44NZjdc>

Details: Hasbro, . Price: \$20. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: sports, basketball. Entry date: 5/1/2013.





Polaroid Kids Tablet

The Polaroid Kids Tablet (\$150, <http://www.polaroid.com/kids-tablet>) is yet another 7 inch Android 4.0 portable option targeting kids, but unlike nearly every other variety I've reviewed, this one has the controls conveniently in front. Designed and manufactured by Southern Telecom (an authorized Polaroid licensee) the tablet makes a major advance over the others -- it puts the on/off button clearly on the front (instead of hidden on the side). I know -- this might seem like a small thing. But this feature, along with others including a padded rubber bumper, a customized suite of apps such as Kids Cam, Music Studio, and Draw, plus Kids Vids (an app that lets children stream filtered videos), brings an Android based option closer to the LeapPad/vTech option. In fact, you'll need to look twice to make sure that a child isn't playing with one of the toy-based options. Other nice features include a regular sized SD card.



We handed the tablet directly to the kids, out of the box, and found that they were playing with no setup required. A "free play" option contains games and apps from the App Shop; plus a web browser with parental controls.

Other features include a display orientation lock that locks the tablet's display in one direction, so young children can watch videos and use interactive books without interruption. The tablet comes pre-loaded with a selection of interactive children's books, including Dr. Seuss and Smithsonian books which feature Read to Me, Read Myself, and Auto-Play.

Features include: a 800x480 (16:9) screen, 8GB of internal storage plus an external SD card slot; a 1.0 GHz CORTEX-A8 CPU with 512MB DDR3 RAM, powered by Android 4.0 (Ice Cream Sandwich); a 2MP Rear Camera; rechargeable batteries; and a headphone jack. The charger is included and Wi-Fi (802.11 b/g/n). Thirty-five apps are included (all full versions).

Details: Polaroid, www.polaroid.com. Price: \$150. Ages: 4-up. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: An Android-based tablet for children. Entry date: 3/27/2013.

Scanimalz

Scanimalz are plush characters with QR codes on their bellies. You start by downloading the free iOS or Android Sancimalz App, then scan the QR code on the Scanimalz tag to activate your pet. Back in the olden days of Webkinz, you used to type in the code. This prompts kids to scan their Scanimalz' belly on daily basis and offers optional push notification alerting players to special scanning days and events. Available in 30 different characters.

Details: Scanimalz, www.scanimalz.com. Price: \$10. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: collecting, logic. Entry date: 5/6/2013.



Sifteo Cubes

The news for 2013 is that Sifteo Cubes don't require a computer. It has been replaced by a Sifteo Base. Sifteo Cubes (www.sifteo.com) aren't actually cubes. The are more like tiles, just large enough so that a single AAA battery fits diagonally, behind a snap-off plastic back. The battery powers a tiny 1 inch touch screen (about the size of an iPod Nano) that is hard to see in bright light. Each cube has a three axis accelerometer that can sense tilting or shaking, plus a color touch screen.

The games might require tilting (e.g., you can "pour" one item from one screen to another), shaking, or shuffling the order. The \$130 set, which we tested, includes three cubes and a matchbox-size controller that broadcasts signals to the three cubes, coordinating the game play. It is called the Sifteo Base. Most games are designed to work with a standard three cube set. You can download additional games and add extra cubes to unlock new games. Four pre-installed games work right out of the box or you can connect to your web-connected computer via USB to download more games. It is possible to use as many as 12 cubes at once. Our testers thought the blocks were "very cool" at first, but the games were "hard to see and figure out" compared to, say, one of the many iPad apps. Sifteo Cubes have improved a great deal since last year's generation. We're not sure if it's enough improvement, however.

Details: Sifteo, www.sifteo.com. Price: \$130. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: logic, math. Entry date: 1/15/2013.





Tallow Candle, The

Featuring amazing design but limited content, "The Tallow Candle" is a vertical scrolling rendition of one of Hans Christian Andersen's stories. In the story, a candle (made of tallow) seeks help from a tinder box to ignite. This is a Reading Level 4 story, and there are no scaffolding features. Contains prompts to download additional stories.

Details: Timbuktu, <http://timbuktu.me/>. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 4-12. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, Danish folk tales. Entry date: 2/19/2013.



YodelOh Math Mountain

Beautiful graphics meet rather dry design in this math drill that takes place in a carnival game. In order to win, you must correctly solve as many problems as possible before Hans the Hiker falls off the cliff.

If you take too long to answer, or answer incorrectly, Hans takes one step up the hill. If you score a Backward Bonus, Hans takes a step back. The effect is that you're not really sure if you are being rewarded or punished.

Content includes 1,300 problems covering addition/subtraction binomial equations for numbers 1-20; multiplication/division binomial equations for numbers 1-12; five operator-based game modes (+, -, x, ÷ and +/ - / x / ÷); and high-score charts that track the best 15 games on all five modes.

Details: Spinlight Studio, <http://spinlight.com/>. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 6-12. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: addition, subtraction, multiplication, division. Entry date: 4/23/2013.

