



Children's TECHNOLOGY REVIEW



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Web: *Ice Cream (p. 3)*
Apps: *The best (and worst) of the summer*

On the cover: Curious about Shapes and Colors, and the just announced LeapPad Ultra

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Welcome to the 160th Issue of *Children's Technology Review*. Here's what you need to know for this month:

Video Games: The Next Gen Game Consoles Have Arrived. By now you've heard about the Xbox One and the PS4, and are thinking "what do these new consoles have to do with kids?" That's what I was thinking as I wandered the annual E3 conference last month. Because video game hardware can drive innovation, here are three things you need to know.

1) Nintendo's Wii U hasn't changed since last year. But it runs more games, some of which present excellent, highly social problem solving opportunities, e.g., *Pikmin 3* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UXKskJE10SY>.

2) The Xbox One comes with a newer, better Kinect camera that is all the better to watch you with; right down to your fingers. The \$500 system is a signal that we'll start seeing more motion-based sensing integrated into your favorite TV programming. Want to vote for your favorite singing contestant? Just raise your hand. The new Xbox can see you, count you, and could, some fear, send information to outside parties.

3) Don't miss Sony's interesting Dualshock 4 controller, because it can now also track your movements using a new camera. It also has a capacitive track pad, and internal speakers. See how it works, in this demo called "The Playroom" <http://youtu.be/qSTJc9UqNk8>.

Toys: InnoTab 3 is Here; LeapFrog Unveils Two Important Devices. Last week in New York I tried the LeapReader and the LeapPad Ultra. The LeapPad Ultra <http://youtu.be/QsRGcsDKGiU> takes the children's "toy" tablet option into a new price and feature range. But can it compete with InnoTab 3, which costs 1/2 as much, or the dozen Android options, also \$150? LeapFrog thinks so.

Apps: This month has been busy with another excellent batch of apps, plus some prime examples of seedy publisher behavior. See what not to do in **Play-Doh Create ABCs**, a 2 star app (by our rating) that received 23 five star ratings in iTunes. Hmm. Don't miss the Wall Street Journal's article that shows exactly how apps turn children into "click magnets" at <http://on.wsj.com/1aTGAIL>. Finally, don't miss the 11 examples of good design on page 4, especially **Curious about Shapes and Colors** (cover) and **Toca Builders**, a \$.99 app for iPad that pushes the boundary of building in 3D, on a flat screen. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzhzLbesBD4>

LittleClickers. What's the most popular flavor of ice cream? Who holds the world record for making the largest tub of ice cream? See page 3.

Save the Date —

**The 13th Annual Dust or Magic
Institute, To Be Held Nov 3-5, 2013
in Lambertville, NJ**



Dust or Magic

The main meetings will be held in the original location, in the Riverside Room at the Inn at Lambertville Station. Seats cost \$1480 for one seat, \$990 for 2 to 5. Visit <http://dustormagic.com> to register.

July 2013

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Learn About Ice Cream

July is National Ice Cream month. What is ice cream made out of? Why do you get a headache when you eat it too fast? Let's find out!

1. What's the most popular ice cream flavor?

At the Food Channel <http://bit.ly/19KiXxW> you find the results of two surveys. The top flavor is 3 times more popular than the others! Can you say what it is? We've hidden the answer somewhere on this page.

2. What's it look like inside an ice cream factory?

At <http://bit.ly/158oMRs/> you follow one of Pardha Pothana's Pinterest boards that has photos inside ten ice cream factories that offer public tours. See if there's one close to you. Most tours include samples.

3. What does ice cream have in common with liquid nitrogen? Go to <http://bit.ly/11SVOEs> to find out how Dipping Dots are made. You have to use liquid nitrogen, which is -40 degrees Celsius. Go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJ3f03WamRA> to see a guy make his own, but know that it is very dangerous to be around liquid nitrogen.



4. Why does ice cream give me brain freeze? Is it dangerous? According to Kids Health

<http://bit.ly/18oGMkt>, the roof of your mouth, called the palate, is full of nerves. When these nerves sense something really cold, they send a rush of blood to your brain, causing your head to hurt. Don't worry, it goes away as soon as your mouth warms up. To avoid it, take smaller licks.



5. T/F Is it possible to make ice cream and play soccer at the same time?

True! There is an ice cream maker that is designed to be kicked like a soccer ball. After you fill up the center with your egg/sugar/cream mixture, you fill the outside with salt and ice, seal it up, and roll it around. You can buy one at Walmart for \$25 at <http://bit.ly/qyPYZ7>.

6. What's the tallest ice cream cone ever made? 71 scoops, according to the Guinness World Records site <http://bit.ly/1b0zQT9>. The record was achieved by Dimitri Panciera (Italy), in Forno di Zoldo, Italy, on 22 July 2012.

7. What country holds the record for the biggest tub of ice cream? Iran. The Al Arabiya Network <http://bit.ly/14Ho8bf> reports that Choopan Dairy made a five ton tub of chocolate ice-cream. The biggest ice cream cone, made of real ice cream, was created in the UK. Read more at <http://www.thebraiser.com/heston-blumenthal-ice-cream/>

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APPLICATION: Want to make some ice cream?

Here's a recipe from <http://bit.ly/17HiW> for vanilla ice cream. Make sure to ask your parents; and remember you need an ice cream freezer. Watch along, at <http://youtu.be/zOlX9QclMns>

Makes 1 ½ pints.

- 2 eggs
 - 1 ½ cups whole or 2% milk
 - ¾ cup sugar
 - 2 teaspoons pure vanilla extract
 - 2 cups of whipping cream
- Wisk, and then freeze

ANSWER TO NUMBER 1:

1. Vanilla, 29%
2. Chocolate, 8.9%
3. Butter pecan, 5.3%
4. Strawberry, 5.3%

YouTube™ Select Videos About Ice Cream

Here are some videos about ice cream at <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcBVHzUUEKwLqF2PceddLymKt2VID3hq>



Editor's Choice July 2013



Here's a summary of the top rated products from this month's issue, organized by age or topic. We assigned the ages.

For Preschoolers

Curious About Shapes and Colors, \$2.99, by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/curious-about-shapes-colors/id641420643?mt=8> is the best Curious George app we've ever reviewed. In fact, it is a case study in good interactive design for young children. What's good about this app is that children apply their shape knowledge in a variety of ways. In each puzzle, the toy is functional. For ages 2-up.

Shiny Party, \$2.99, by Shiny Things <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/shiny-party/id618658350?mt=8> consists of four easy to play matching games that introduce shapes and visual discrimination in a playful setting. For ages 2-5.

Early Elementary

Toca Builders, \$.99, by Toca Boca <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/id652077009?mt=8> lets you fool around with six playful anthropomorphic machines -- the builders -- and a 60 by 60 square grid. The clever funny machines make it fun. For ages 5-11.



Match Blitz, \$free, by Shiny Things <http://www.appstore.com/matchblitz> This fast-paced multiplayer (two to four players at once) iPad app lets you race against your friends to try to spot the matching symbols, scattered around the screen. It is a classic "huddleware" activity. This would be an excellent app for long car ride with multiple players. For ages 4-up.

Disney Kerpoof Tell A Story, \$2.99, by Kerpoof, Ltd. <https://itunes.apple.com/app/id630197048?mt=8#> is a mouse-ear free creativity app, based on Disney's Kerpoof.com building site. It makes it easy to design and save interactive, narrated, multi-page eBooks using a set of animated Dinosaurs. It would be an excellent early language/writing/creativity experience for elementary classrooms. Why read an eBook about dinosaurs, when you can design and narrate your own? For ages 6-12

Grandma's Kitchen, \$0.99, by FairLady Media, Inc. <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/grandmas-kitchen/id602808356?ls=1&mt=8> is a set of seven, playful games that reinforce school readiness skills. You combine words to make compound words, snatch healthy veggies hiding in the fridge, and use ingredients to make and decorate a cake and put things in alphabetical order. Grandma's snappy one liners and dances keep things interesting. The management features make this very customizable. You can turn on or off different activities, to focus on math or reading. For \$.99, this is an excellent investment. For ages 4-7.

For Older Children

Max's Pirate Planet - A Board Game Adventure, \$2.99, by Slant Six Games <https://itunes.apple.com/app/maxs-pirate-planet-board-game/id624896120> is also great for a long car trip, but for older children. This is a pirate-themed, turn-based, pass and play board game for up to four players. For ages 7-up.

Video Games

Animal Crossing: New Leaf, \$35, by Nintendo of America is -- in a word -- outstanding. If you have a 3DS and you've liked the Wii and/or GameCube version of Animal Crossing, get this app. According to our testers "this game does what the next edition of Animal Crossing should do," and this includes being the mayor and swimming. For ages 6-up.

LEGO Batman 2: DC Superheroes for Wii U, \$40, by Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, Inc. LEGO Batman 2: DC Superheroes returns for the Wii U, offering plenty of two player collaborative problem solving, on par with other LEGO games. Our testers loved it. For ages 6-up.

Designers, Take Note

Play Lab, \$free, \$1.99 for the full version, by CJ Educations <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/play-lab/id520743222?mt=8> comes from the makers of Play 123 (CTR April 2013). In this app, responsive, innovative interactive design meets heavy handed in-app sales. If you design children's apps, make sure you pay a visit to the Play Lab. Created in Seoul Korea by CJ Educations. For ages 3-6.

A Cautionary Tail, \$4.99, by RAWR Media is a unique (OK, strange) story that mixes rich animated illustrations with limited interactivity. It's about a little girl who is born with a snake-like tale and tries to fit in. Don't miss the narration by Davin Wenham of the Lord of the Rings. For ages 7-up.



Feature Reviews

JULY 2013

Here's an alphabetical listing of new products, along with a full review, specific ratings and tester feedback. The "Entry Date" refers to the date we first learned of the product.


A Cautionary Tail

A unique story is combined with rich animated illustrations, top quality production and excellent narration, but limited interactivity. The 26 screen story is based on the animated short of the same name, about a little girl who is born with a long, snake-like tale. The idea of a finger-like appendage growing out of a little girl could be disturbing to some children, but it certainly captures your attention. This app is not watered down in any way... Teachers, make sure you pre-read this before presenting it to a group of kindergartners. The basic theme is about a child's struggle to fit into larger culture, and it touches on themes of loss, bullying, being different, and self-acceptance.

The narration is noteworthy -- by Davin Wenham of the Lord of the Rings. Interactive features are limited -- you can touch a screen to launch a short animated routine. The text is presented in rhyming verses; limited from a reading point of view, but potentially rich from an interpersonal perspective. The app can be fully narrated in the Read to Me mode, or you can read along with the use of word highlighting in Read by Myself mode. Features include 3D animated scenes and cinematic visuals and some ability to interact with scenes in sometimes subtle ways. Our dog was particularly attracted to the shooting stars in the last screen. The app includes behind-the-scenes videos where you can better understand how the film and app were made.

Details: RAWR Media, www.acautionarytail.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: self acceptance, bullying, loss. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 6/18/2013. [WB]

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





Animal Crossing: New Leaf

This downloadable edition of Animal Crossing for the Nintendo 3DS (through the eShop) lets you become mayor for the first time. The previous mayor, Tortimer, will visit you to tell you about the tropical island he now lives on. According to our testers, who were familiar with past Animal Crossing titles, "this game does what the next edition of Animal Crossing should do." They like the new ability to swim and take control of the town.

There's plenty of searching and mini-games. You can also participate with up to three other players in mini games, rent a wetsuit and dive into the ocean to catch underwater creatures or swim around for some virtual exercise. This version also features more customizable options, allowing you to personalize your town, your character's clothes and house. Other unique features include the ability to make QR Code patterns to be shared with others who also own a copy of the game via wireless broadband Internet connection. You can also tag players using the StreetPass feature. The game is played in real time, so even when the power is off on your 3DS system the town is constantly evolving and changing. Certain items can only be found at certain times of day, and certain events can only be experienced during special in-game holidays on the calendar. Note that you'll want to have an SD card to store this game.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$35. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 5/21/2013. [WB]

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






Curious About Shapes and Colors

We've now reviewed 15 Curious George related software products (from disks, video games and apps). This is the best designed, in fact, it is a case study in good interactive design for young children. Before you sigh "oh know -- another app about shapes and colors", know that this one's different.

Children can choose five puzzles that vary in difficulty; the last is saved for when the previous four have been put together. Each features a disassembled toy. Putting it back together involves solving as many as six blueprint-like puzzles, shown in 3D so children can see how the shapes relate to the whole toy. This involves drag and drop interaction; putting various shapes into place. Sometimes this requires tracing the shapes, in another puzzle you complete patterns. At any point, you can touch a shape to get help from The Man With The Yellow Hat. While he tends to offer lots of friendly advice, his banter never gets in the way of your puzzle building.

What's good about this app is that children apply their shape knowledge in a variety of ways. In each puzzle, the toy is functional, and can be used later in an arcade-style game. If you make a train, you can drive it around a track, so you can see the circular wheels in action. The rocket ship blasts off and is used to collect bananas. Concepts in the game include: basic shapes like circles, squares and triangles; more complex shapes including pentagons, hexagons, diamonds, rectangles, and ovals; primary and secondary colors, along with varying tones; pattern recognition and sequencing; and skills like sorting, constructing, tracing, and coloring. There are no in-app purchases, and additional games/levels open up as your child completes the earlier levels. There are hundreds of shape puzzles; this one raise the bar.

Details: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, www.hmhbooks.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: logic, colors, shapes, sorting, matching, fine motor development. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.9 stars. Entry date: 5/17/2013. [WB]

Disney Kerpoof Tell A Story

Why read an eBook about dinosaurs, when you can design and narrate your own? Based on the Kerpoof web app from Disney's Kerpoof.com this powerful storytelling app makes it easy to design and save interactive, narrated, multi-page eBooks using a set of animated Dinosaurs. It would be an excellent early language/writing/creativity experience for elementary classrooms.

Important to note right up front, that despite the Disney ownership, this app is free of licensed content in the clip art library. Teachers and librarians can relax... besides the Disney brand in the splash screen, this app is 100% mouse ear free.

You start by selecting one of the subtly animated backgrounds, and then start dragging your actors and props into place using the scrolling menu strips at the top of the screen. This is an easy process, and it is just as easy to remove an item. A microphone icon lets you record any sound that you want to play when the item is touched, and a pose icon makes it possible to show your actor eating, sleeping, jumping, and so one. There are 12 poses per actor. It is also easy to add text, and record a child reading the text (although the recording dialog box blocks the text while you are recording, which is unfortunate). Content includes nine categories of onscreen items like trees or rocks (we counted 108 total), 14 categories of animated (cartoon style) dinosaurs (each with 12 poses) and 24 backgrounds.

Settings give you control over the ambient background sounds that accompany the backgrounds, the ability to toggle on/off the auto-correct and the 3D effects.

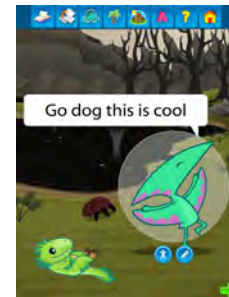
Note that this is not a puppet-show variety app such as Toontastic, and it is also not designed for making animated or stop motion productions. There are also no photography options and it is not possible to share your work outside the app. What this app is good at is for making touch-and-hear multi-page eBooks about dinosaurs, with text boxes if you like. It is easy to imagine other themed "Tell A Story" apps in the future. Learn more at <http://www.kerpoof.com>

Details: Kerpoof, Ltd., www.kerpoof.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 6-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, storytelling, oral language. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 7/3/2013. [WB]

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



Ease of Use	8	94%
Educational	10	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	10	





Disney Pixar Monsters University Storybook Deluxe

Featuring authentic Monsters University graphics, music and narration, this 34 screen story features clever 3D page narrations, creating a nice extension of the movie. Text is presented in narrated paragraphs, and it is not possible to provide your own narration, as with past Disney Digital Books. Because reading opportunities are limited, this app isn't the best choice as a reading enrichment activity.

A settings menu offers control over music, sound effects and lets you toggle between six languages. There are five games that offer the same obstacle course play pattern, where you tilt the screen to get through a maze, in order to scare a child. This is fun the first few times, but there's not much variation between the games which limits play value. Also our testers complained that the hard level is too hard.

Weakness to note: It is hard to get back to the first page, once you end the book, and while the five games are fun, there's little variation in the play pattern. While we liked how you could make your own student record, your ID isn't used in the game. While a nice touch, it's more cosmetic than functional. Also, while the graphics, music and narration are on par with the movie (excellent), interactive features are rare. Created by Budge Studios for Disney Digital Books.

Details: Disney Publishing Worldwide, www.DisneyDigitalBooks.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone 357 MB. Teaches/Purpose: Disney, reading, language, gross motor development. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 6/6/2013. [WB]

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



Factory Balls

Ready for a challenge? Best for older children or adults who already have the ability to think abstractly, this leveled challenging game by Bart Bonte gives you the opportunity to practice holding variables in your mind; a skill required to match a target item. The objective is to decorate the shape and color of a ball, using a set of tools. These might include a pair of goggles, required to make white circles for eyes, before painting the rest of the ball a non-white color. This "masking" way of thinking takes planning and mental juggling. The mask tools include belts, helmets, goggles, ear muffs, two sizes of hats, a doctor's mask and so on. Those, combined with the color combinations, create a lot of possible solutions. From an interactive game point of view, there's not much to this app, which makes this a rather dry experience. For pure cognitive challenge, however, it works.

Details: Bart Bonte, www.bontegames.com. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: logic, classification, subtractive thinking, logic. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 5/17/2013. [WB]

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





Grandma's Kitchen

The brain behind Grandma is Dr. Connie Bossert, the mother of two, and a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology -- but don't tell this to the kids. They won't want to know that Grandma is really a teacher, eager to keep some school-like homework mixed in with seven school readiness games. You combine words to make compound words, snatch healthy veggies hiding in the fridge, and use ingredients to make and decorate a cake and put things in alphabetical order. Grandma's snappy one liners and dances keep things interesting.

Games include: Spot the Difference - one of the desserts has an extra chocolate chip... can you spot the one that is different?; Word Bake - put the dough words on the pan to see which ones bake into compound words; Food Math - look at all those pickles and count by tens to find out how many there are; Pick the Clock - the cake will be done at 3:00, can you find the clock with that time?; First Letters - find the first two letters in the word "snack"; and Fridge Fun - fast-moving veggies are hiding in the fridge... put them in the bowl, but don't grab the junk food. The app also features seven videos of real kitchens in action, and interactive elements that let you wash the dishes, make and eat a cake, and lick the spatula.

The management features make this very customizable. You can turn on or off different activities, to focus on math or reading. For \$.99, this is an excellent investment.

Details: FairLady Media, Inc., <http://fairladymedia.com>. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 4-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: consonant blends, telling time, colors, math. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 6/5/2013. [WB]

InnoTab 3

This latest Learning App Tablet from VTech, InnoTab 3 (\$70) comes with a lower price and the same features as last year's InnoTab 2. These features include a mono-touch pressure sensitive screen, and a swivel camera. From a hardware perspective, the screen is the same quality, only smaller, and the frame is also smaller, nearly identical in size and weight as the LeapPad2. Like the LeapPad, VTech has added a new directional pad, obviously in an effort to make the two products more competitive. Unlike the LeapPad2, the InnoTab has expandable memory, in the form of a micro SD card.

In terms of function, there's very little difference between the InnoTab 2 and the InnoTab 3. New software includes "55 new photo features" and an ebook called "What's that Noise?", a magical beanstalk growing game. A new coloring game, called "H2O Go!" is related to science concepts.

Details: VTech Electronics North America, www.vtechkids.com. Price: \$70. Ages: 3-9. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: early learning. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 6/19/2013. [WB]

LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes Wii U

LEGO Batman 2: DC Super Heroes returns for the Wii U, offering plenty of two player collaborative problem solving, on par with other LEGO games. You play as Batman or Robin, and get help from Superman, Wonder Woman and Green Lantern. Your mission? To put villains Lex Luthor and The Joker behind bars and save Gotham City.

You can travel around Gotham City by walking or flying using the Batmobile, Batwing or Batboat. A map on the GamePad lets you jump around in the game. You can play with friends and family with drop-in/ drop-out (co-op), at times in split screen. The second player can use a regular Wii controller. Content includes up to 50 DC Comics characters, new suits and gadgets such as Batman's Power Suit and Robin's Hazard Suit, equipped with a Pressure Cannon that can absorb and dispense hazardous liquids, new super abilities including Freeze-Breath and Heat Vision; and create unique super heroes with customizable characters.

All in all, this is an excellent addition to your game library. It is a great game for an adult to play with child.

Details: Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, Inc., www.warnerbros.com. Price: \$40. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Wii U. Teaches/Purpose: logic, reading, problem solving. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 6/20/2013. [CC]

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



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



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





Match Blitz

This fast-paced multiplayer (two to four players at once) iPad app lets you race against your friends to try to spot the matching symbols, scattered around the screen. It is a classic "huddleware" activity.

After you select the number of players you start the game. Each player is given a corner of the iPad. The idea is that you sit around, each watching your corner. The first person to touch the object that appears in all the quadrants wins the point. Wrong answers are penalized.

There's a lot of fast-paced visual discrimination involved. The app detects the speed of answers and adjusts the difficulty of the game accordingly. This self-adapting features is useful. This would be an excellent app for long car ride with multiple players. There are no hidden purchase options; parent options and external links are behind a firewall that requires reading. Created by Ben Tengrove of Shiny Things.

Details: Shiny Things, www.getshinythings.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: memory, visual perception. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 2/15/2013. [MJD]

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



Max's Pirate Planet - A Board Game Adventure

Great for a long car trip, this is a pirate-themed, turn-based, pass and play board game for up to four players. The game board is shaped like the planet; a clever design that is well executed. You start by choosing a game piece and use a spinner to move. Good decisions earn more points, and things stay interesting because you run into arcade-style games, including a chance to exchange gunfire with other players. In the story, legend has it that Barnacle Bill has hidden his gold in the Sunken City. The treasure chests are protected by monsters. You start by choosing from five pirate characters including Alex, Emma, Rusty, Skully and Finn. Next you spin the wheel and sail your ships around the world in a race to find the map pieces. You can also challenge your friends to a duel with swords and cannons to get ahead in the treasure hunt. Once you discover Barnacle Bill's secret hideout, you must defeat him in a cannon shoot out to win the game and get all the gold. One game can be saved.

Details: Slant Six Games, rspink@slantsixgames.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (iOS 4.0 or later), Android, Kindle. Teaches/Purpose: fine motor skills, counting, logic, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 4/26/2013. [MJD]

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



Meet the Insects: Water & Grass Edition

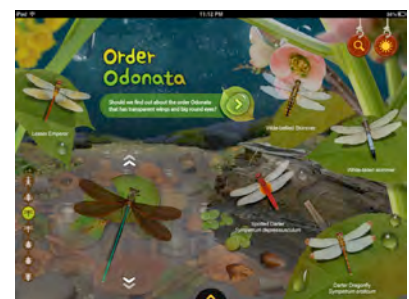
This third edition of NCsoft iactionbook's Insect Encyclopedia contains about 115 interesting insects, commonly found around ponds and long grasses. You learn a lot about dragonflies with this app. While the interface isn't as elegant as a TouchPress production -- you can't rotate the bugs in 3D -- the photos let you zoom, and there is often video content. The content comes from the National Science Museum of Korea.

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

Like the others in the series, this app is full of clear photos, videos and facts on a limited number of insects. There's clearly enough content to satisfy a curious child. See also Meet the Insects: Forest Edition and Meet the Insects: Village Edition. The app was created by NCsoft's iactionbook, and runs only on iPads running iOS 4.3 or later.

Details: NCsoft, <http://us.ncsoft.com/en/>. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: science, insects. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 6/11/2013. [WB]

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





PBS Parents Play & Learn App

Offering solid parenting advice but low quality interactive design, PBS Parents Play & Learn App is the first app designed for parents (according to the press release). It is designed to provide a set of math and reading games that parents can play along with their kids. Each is themed around a familiar place, like the grocery store, the bathroom or kitchen. There are 13 common places; and an activity in each with suggestions for how to interact with a child in this place.

These games, as any curious child will discover, are a long way from Toca Boca quality. Each starts with a menu that requires reading; which makes it hard for children to use this app on their own. But that's the point of this app -- for parents and children to play together. Unfortunately the activities we tried were overly scripted, with instructions that talk over and interrupt a child's play. In addition, reinforcements are non-embedded, consisting of a shower of confetti that has nothing to do with the concepts. Options let you toggle between two languages (English and Spanish). The app is free and runs on iOS and Android, including the Kindle Fire HD 7 and Kindle Fire HD 8.9.

Details: PBS Kids, www.pbskids.org. Price: \$free. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android, Kindle. Teaches/Purpose: A resource for parents, math, reading, counting, measuring, letter recognition, rhyming. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2 stars. Entry date: 3/8/2013. [WB]

Play Lab

See also Play 123 (CTR April 2013).

Responsive, innovative interactive design meets heavy handed in-app sales, in this free app, which is best described as a playground full of interactive toys.

The free version of the app includes six games; 12 more are shown in the menu, but are faded. This increased the chance a child might accidentally make an in-app purchase. If they did, it would be well worth it, however. These games empower a child as they gently and playfully introduce early math and logic concepts. Games include Play Robot - make a robot with rectangles, circles, and triangles; Play Shot - blast walls by tapping the numbers: Play Green - put the yellow balls into the blue water; Play Bubble Bubble - turn the wheel to create colored bubbles; Play Triangle - insert the small triangles into the big triangle; and Play Land - draw shapes by following the lines. The full version is available as an in-app purchase for \$1.99. If you design children's apps, make sure you pay a visit to the Play Lab. Created in Seoul, Korea by Korean based CJ Educations.

Details: CJ Educations, www.cjeducations.com/. Price: \$free, \$1.99 for the full version. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: logic, fine motor, shapes, colors, numbers. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 4/1/2013. [WB]

PLAY-DOH Create ABCs

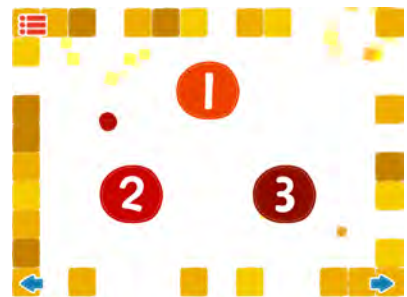
The genius of Play-Doh is that you can make anything at your own pace, and failure is not an option. That's not the case with this Play-Doh inspired app. Each letter is introduced with sugary narration that can't be skipped, and you're told to "squish your finger" if you stray outside the line when you trace the letters. There's only one way to succeed with each puzzle, which is very un-Play-Doh like, and the puzzle that uses a reward doesn't allow for any variation or experimentation. Strengths include the ability to mute the sound in the Parents Corner menu; the progress tracking feature is also noteworthy. Other features include a save to camera features that lets parents send projects by email. This is the first in a series of planned educational apps from Hasbro and PlayDate Digital. See the CTR video review <http://youtu.be/i84HQycLO8k>

Details: PlayDate Digital, www.playdatedigital.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: letters, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 1.9 stars. Entry date: 6/11/2013. [WB]

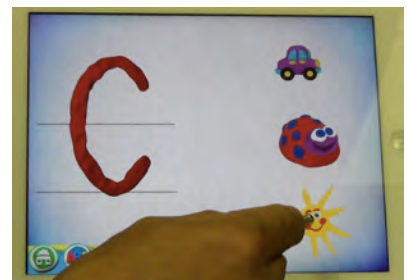
Ease of Use	3	40%
Educational	4	
Entertaining	3	
Design Features	2	
Good Value	8	



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



Ease of Use	6	38%
Educational	4	
Entertaining	3	
Design Features	3	
Good Value	3	





See Me Talk

Let's say you were laying in a hospital bed, and you couldn't talk. This app is designed to help, by presenting a set of cartoon-like icons at your fingertips. Each icon is associated with a spoken label, and you can choose between a male or female voice.

Designed for people who have difficulty communicating effectively, See Me Talk (\$60) is an "augmentative and alternative communication" (AAC) tool, much like Proloquo2Go. There are 14 categories of words presented in an ongoing scroll at the top of the screen. The onboard collection of items is limited (just five options for the "home" category) but it is possible to create your own icons, using the camera and microphone. So, for example, if you wanted to create a card for the word "iPad" you could take a picture, and record your own voice saying the word. You can also create and edit categories. Other options let you toggle between a male and female voice. Limitations include some buffer issues (if you press the same icon multiple times). The menu could be more elegant, and it would be nice if the base library of words was larger.

A "Favorites" category remembers which icons you use the most, to speed things up. This app was created in Australia. See also Proloquo2Go.

Details: See Me Talk, www.seemetalkapp.com. Price: \$60. Ages: NA. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: A utility to help people communicate. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 4/23/2013. [WB]

Shiny Party

Four easy to play matching games introduce shapes and visual discrimination in a playful setting. Made in Australia, there are two modes of play: story and game. In the story mode, children discover the games in the context of two animal friends who are getting ready for a friend's birthday party. In the game mode, children can jump right to the activities using a well designed menu. Activities include: find shapes within pictures; match shapes of differing sizes, colors and orientations; complete picture puzzles by fitting shapes of different orientations together; join basic shapes to form other shapes; and recognize parts of an object and put them together to form a whole.

Details: Shiny Things, www.getshinythings.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 2-5. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: math, geometry, shapes, colors, fine motor skills, matching. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 5/17/2013. [WB]

Spatter & Spark

Beautifully illustrated but hard to control, this is a ten-screen narrated story with pages that can be explored... sort of.

Children must wait until the narrator finishes before they can make things happen, and it's not always clear when you can touch. In addition, the in-app sales content is easy for children to accidentally find.

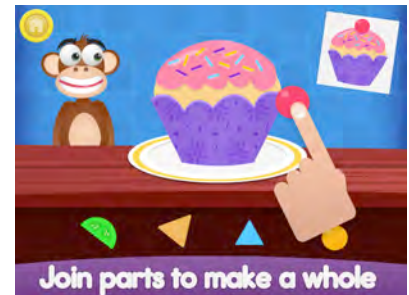
Spark is an inventor fox and her friend Spatter is an artistic porcupine. Children can build inventions with Spark and create artwork with Spatter. The story is free to download; additional games, such as collecting bugs for Hubert's dinner or helping Spark tame her out of control balloons, are sold extra as in-app sales. The story is by Deborah Underwood, with illustrations by Luciana Navarro Powell. Note that this is a big app -- nearly 500 MB in size.

Details: Polk Street Press, www.polkstreetpress.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 4-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone (499 MB). Teaches/Purpose: reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.2 stars. Entry date: 2/19/2013. [WB]

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



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



Ease of Use	6	64%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	6	
Good Value	6	





Toca Builders

Block play comes to your iPad, with the help of six playful anthropomorphic machines -- the builders -- and a 60 by 60 square grid. The entire experience makes it fun to freely experiment with 3D building on a touch screen. Building on a 3D grid has been tried unsuccessfully many times in the past, but never this easily. The clever machines manage to keep things light, and they're fun to test.

You start with a 60 by 60 grid that appears to float on corkboard. Each machine has a specific function. There's a crab-like crane that can stack blocks up to six high, a paint canon, a lifter and a block smasher. There are no rules, and the blocks never fall down unless you want them to. Each machine has its own set of controls, that comes with a gentle learning curve that presents just the right type of challenge for a young child. The crane has a toggle switch introducing the mechanics of left, right, and choosing colors from a palette and camera angles... all useful skills for general tablet use; and perhaps operating a back hoe someday. As they experiment, children learn spatial thinking -- how to turn the crane just right to put a block on top of a tree, or next to another. Projects are automatically saved, and can be edited -- there are no social features. The building area is a 60 x 60 grid, with structures up to 6 blocks tall.

Need to know: You can't adjust the background music, and the blocks don't allow for a lot of detail. In addition, it is less than easy to undo an accidental block placement -- the only way to get rid of a block is to use the smashing tool. But the tradeoff for the lack of features is the simplicity, which is why Toca Builders works so well.

Details: Toca Boca, <http://tocaboca.com/>. Price: \$99. Ages: 5-11. Platform: iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, spatial relations, fine motor skills. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 6/18/2013. [WB]

Williamspurrrrg

Like a game of twister with your fingers, this humorous, unique multi-touch puzzle game lets you attach mustaches, fedoras, bowties, and other accessories to cats of all types and sizes. The app effectively leverages the potential of a multi-touch screen to give children a fine motor challenge that grows progressively harder.

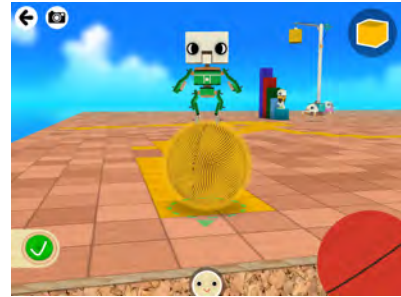
To win one of the puzzles, you have to hold all the pieces in place at the same time. This is easy at first, when there are just two or three items to move. Later levels may require a friend to help. Content includes open-source photographs of cats and kittens and 30 puzzles with up to six simultaneous touches. The publisher claims that more puzzles are coming -- these are shown as blank menu items, so it's not clear if this will be an in-app sale.

Weaknesses include an all-or-nothing sound option (you can turn off the music, but you also turn off the all-important success sounds), and the first level could be better explained. This app was designed by Carla Fischer of No Crusts Interactive. Matt, our intern, described the experience as "bizarre" and initially gave it a low rating. But he wondered why he was still playing it 30 minutes later. And after all, who wouldn't want to dress up a cat? There are no in-app purchases or third-party advertising.

Details: No Crusts Interactive LLC, <http://NoCrusts.com>. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: fine motor skills. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 6/13/2013. [WB]

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

96%



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

84%





You Are Stardust

Based on the book of the same name by Elin Kelsey and illustrated by Soyeon Kim, this app takes on a big topic: the universe. The illustrations are beautiful and can be controlled by moving your screen, giving the entire experience a an animated, 3D feel. The goal is to help children "develop a relationship with the world around them" by making connections between themselves and nature. OK... does it work?

Sort of. The story tells such things as a person sheds the most hair in early autumn, just as leaves fall from trees, and that the water we drink is the same water that filled dinosaurs' puddles. The 3D illustrations are beautiful, although interactivity is limited; and there are both read-to-me and read-on-my-own options. It is hard to figure out how to turn pages (you have to swipe across the bottom of the screen) and there's a nice build-your-own-diorama activity with animation and sound effects, read-to-me and read-on-my-own options, and an original score by Paul Aucoin. From an artistic point of view, this app is worth consideration. The theme might be a bit heavy for younger children, however. The app was created in partnership with Think Thirty Three.

Details: Owlkids Books, www.owlkidsbooks.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: science, history. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 12/13/2012. [WB]

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





Future Releases & Updates

JULY 2013

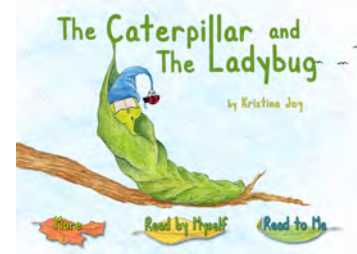
This section contains a listing of products in the process of being reviewed, but not yet rated. We also include significant updates of older products.

Caterpillar and the Ladybug, The

Featuring beautifully watercolor/pencil illustrations with limited interactivity, this is a fiction story about a curious ladybug who wonders about the life of a caterpillar. What do they come from? What do they dream about when they are asleep in their chrysalis? There's an underlying tone of science beneath the story.

In the "read to me" mode, individual words are highlighted. There is no "back" page icon, making it hard to navigate through the pages. Written, illustrated, and animated by the author, K Joy and developed by Artistic Playtime and Newmediasoup, LLC.

Details: Artistic Playtime, <http://artisticplaytime.com>. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: science, insects. Entry date: 11/19/2012.



Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze

Donkey Kong meets the crisp, clear HD graphics on the Wii U in this fun, fast multi-player side scrolling game. There are a lot of new twists. In the story, you help Donkey Kong and his friends get back their home from Vikings.

Features include Dixie Kong, who is back to join the adventure as a playable character alongside Diddy Kong. Either can buddy up with Donkey Kong, and each character offers a different game-play experience.

A new dynamic rotating camera gives you a new twist. The worlds include five islands with a variety of stages that include underwater areas and frozen environments. Designed by Retro Studios for Nintendo.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$call. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Wii U. Teaches/Purpose: logic, spacial relations. Entry date: 6/17/2013.



Hohokum

Is there such a thing as a "non-game?" If so, this might be it. Part art, part toy, this is an open-ended exploration experience where you are a floating, swimming serpent creature. There are no scores, time limits or instructions. Created by artist Richard Hogg, the game is not about making progress.

According to Wikipedia (and my experience playing the game), two buttons slow or speed the creature, called the Long Mover, and the triggers make it wiggle for a boost. The Long Mover changes in color based on the direction it faces, and the DualShock 4's light bar matches the color.

The game is split into worlds, each with specific characters, a single primary goal, and secondary activities.

Details: Honeyslug Studios, . Price: \$call. Ages: 3-up. Platform: PlayStation 4, PlayStation 3. Teaches/Purpose: . Entry date: 6/26/2013.



Hot Wheels Car Maker

Hot Wheels Car Maker lets you mold your own Hot Wheels 1:64 scale vehicles using colored wax sticks and molds. According to press materials, the body of the car is formed into a tough durable shell ready for wheels, stickers and standard-sized Hot Wheels tracks. The set includes two molds, 10 wax sticks, three chassis and sticker sheets. Additional vehicle molds and materials are sold separately. See <http://youtu.be/ExPcyBvWvP0>.

Details: Mattel, . Price: \$50. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: creativity. Entry date: 2/19/2013.





iLearn 'N' Play: Adventure Explorer

Connect your iPad, iPad mini, iPhone or iPod to this plastic console, and your child can turn on the ignition key and drive. The working on/off ignition switch, steering wheel, shifter, accelerator, and forward/reverse control integrates with free iLearn 'N' Play apps.

The Adventure Explorer comes bundled with three levels of the Letter Explorer app, downloadable from the app store, designed to teach letters and phonics. Children are asked to collect and recognize letters, and spell simple high frequency words.

You use Bluetooth to pair with the Adventure Explorer unit, place your Apple iPad, iPhone or iPod in the toy, and then your child can use the steering wheel and controls to interact with the App. Requires 3 AA batteries, not included. Other apps available include Number Explore and Words Explorer. Full versions of the apps are \$1.99 each and have 36 levels.

Note that the press materials says it come with free lite version of app containing three levels, but if you click the link on the website to download the free app, iTunes says it comes with 12 levels. Also, the box says it works with all iPad, iPhone & iPod Touch devices, but the website says "Apple is no longer supporting any Operating System below 4.3 on all iOS devices. Our products clearly state that they work with all iOS devices, but this is unfortunately not the case if the device is not able to update to iOS 4.3 or above." And on iTunes it says the app requires iOS 5.1 or later.

Details: AppStart Learning, <http://appstartllc.com/>. Price: \$40. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Smart Toy, iPad, iPhone. iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: early learning. Entry date: 6/20/2013.



Jorgits, The

This is a 160 page interactive novel that looks more like an actually book with interactive supplements. It is about a group of aliens whose planet is becoming too cold for them, but who discover a planet nearby which is rapidly heating up - ours (Earth). The app features character sheets that keeps track of who's who in the novel and includes the characters' Tweets, along with interactive maps which let you learn more about the story's setting. Other features include soundscapes where you can explore a scene from the book and make music at the same time, footnotes to add to humor, and a scavenger hunt that unlocks secret content.

The interface is mostly well designed and intuitive, although some of the navigational interactions aren't that responsive. The bottom line: this is a mostly solid app with good quality and quantity of content providing good value for the \$6. It is a little weak on the interactive side; it feels more like a novel experienced through a tablet interface with a few neat extras. Given that, it's still a pretty good value considering the price of a printed book.

Details: Tank & Bear LLC, www.tankandbear.com. Price: \$5.99. Ages: 10-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading. Entry date: 4/24/2013.



Kaplan Inspire-NG Move

Designed for classroom use, the Inspire-NG Move includes the Kinect for Windows sensor, allowing children to use their body as the game controller, combining active play and learning, and connects to your PC.

The bundle includes a Kinect for Windows sensor with all required cables, user manual with alignment to standards, and four Kaplan learning games. The games include: Word Pop - catch the correct letters falling in bubbles; Where Am I? - use your body to learn directional and spatial vocabulary; Shapes - match shapes to the corresponding place in real world images; and Patterns - complete patterns using your body.

Details: Kaplan Early Learning Company, www.kaplanco.com. Price: \$500. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Xbox 360, Xbox Kinect, Windows. Teaches/Purpose: early learning. Entry date: 6/20/2013.





LeapPad Ultra

LeapPad Ultra, as with past Leapsters and LeapPads, combines durability with security. Unlike previous generations, however, this year's LeapPad is taking a jump into the \$150 price range of the crowded children's Android tablet category with such features as locked down Wi-Fi, rechargeable batteries, double cameras and about 800 selections in the app store.

Internet access is called LeapSearch by Zui, a kid-safe web browser, and a seven-inch screen is designed to help children learn to write using a stylus while supporting interactive touch experiences. There is 8 GB of storage. The parental tools are protected by a four digit PIN, while the Wi-Fi allows you to directly sync content to your child's LeapPad Ultra. The system is backward compatible, with a port that fits Leapster 2 cartridges.

The screen also works differently, based on the same technology as the Meep. It can work when touched by a physical, non-capacitive object, such as a regular stylus; and not just your finger. If you examine the screen closely you'll see it is covered by a flexible thin plastic membrane that uses light to calculate where you are touching. We suspect that the screen is using a Swedish technology called Neocode zForce, like the Meep. While this could be multi-touch, none of the apps that were demonstrated used multi-touch, making me wonder if LeapFrog apps have multi-touch capability at all.

Other features include peer-to-peer play across devices using Wi-Fi, when two or more LeapPad Ultra tablets connect locally. In Pet Pad Party, one of the new apps with this feature, children can communicate and play with their friends and siblings using a rather rigid constructed chat format.

LeapPad Ultra will be sold at MSRP \$149.99 on July 17, and is recommended for children 4 to 9 years old. Apps cost between \$5.00 for downloads, or \$25 for game cartridges.

Details: LeapFrog, www.leapfrog.com. Price: \$150. Ages: 4-9. Platform: LeapPad. Teaches/Purpose: basic skills mostly related to math and reading. Entry date: 6/24/2013.



LeapReader

The dream of touch-and-hear reading has never been better, in the form of the LeapReader. It's as if you put a reading teacher, inside a child's pen who patiently waits to sound out a word, or -- for young children, sound out each letter. LeapReader (\$50, www.leapfrog.com) represents a mashup of previous devices. You may remember the original LeapPad from the '90s, the short-lived FLY Pentop Computer (2005 or so) and you've undoubtedly seen the still viable battery operated \$35 Tag Reading System. The new LeapReader works just like the Tag, using a tiny infrared camera to scan an array of nearly invisible dots on each page, so that the onboard computer can accurately pinpoint the location of the pen tip. You'll need a connected computer to download new content.

So what's different? Rechargeable batteries that you can charge from your computer, more memory, and improved speakers for playing music or listening to stories. The onboard 256 MB of storage represents an 8x boost over Tag, so no cartridges are required. This means the ability to hold more content, which is either onboard, or can be purchased from LeapFrog's online store. If you already own Tag content, your LeapReader will work ... in addition Tag will work with LeapReader content, except the writing books. A new set of writing activities requires specialized workbooks made of pressure sensitive paper, designed exclusively to work with the LeapReader's steel tip. So it can write, sort of; but you still can't use one to sign a check.

Details: LeapFrog, www.leapfrog.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 4-8. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: reading, writing, phonics. Entry date: 1/24/2013.





LEGO Marvel Super Heroes

We had a chance to try the PS3 version of LEGO Marvel Super Heroes <http://youtu.be/yCDq5bn0AdE> and found it to be fun and action packed, not unlike other TTales LEGO games.

Content includes an original game that lets players take control of Iron Man, Spider-Man, the Hulk, Captain America, Wolverine, and other Marvel characters as they try to stop bad guys from making a super-weapon capable of the destroying the world. Locations in the game come with titles like Stark Tower, Asteroid M, a Hydra base and the X-Mansion. Coming Fall 2013 for Xbox 360, PS3, Wii U, Nintendo DS & 3DS, PS Vita, PC and next-gen consoles Xbox One and PlayStation 4.

Details: Warner Brothers Interactive Entertainment, Inc., www.warnerbros.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 7-up. Platform: PlayStation 3, Wii U, Xbox 360, Vita, Nintendo DS, Nintendo 3DS, Windows. Teaches/Purpose: collaborative play, spatial relations, problem solving. Entry date: 6/12/2013.



Mario Kart 8

Coming next year on the Wii U, Mario Kart 8 looks great in HD, and offers new driving mechanics that let you drive upside down. You can race on walls in a haunted mansion, or upside-down over Princess Peach's Castle, as your wheels automatically rotate and shift into antigravity gear. Other features include: 2 player online competitive play; the return of elements first introduced in Mario Kart 7, such as hang gliders and underwater racing, as well as elements introduced in Mario Kart Wii, such as motorbikes and performing tricks in the air; Mario Kart TV lets you share highlight videos submitted to Miiiverse; Fan-favorites Waluigi and Toadette re-join the cast of familiar characters from the Mushroom Kingdom; and crisp HD graphics and a 60-frames-per-second frame rate. Scheduled for release Spring 2014.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$call. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Wii U. Teaches/Purpose: racing, social play, strategy, logic, spatial relations, fine motor development. Entry date: 6/17/2013.





PlayStation 4

Coming this holiday: a black trapezoidal slab called the Sony PlayStation 4, or PS4 for short. Here's a primer, in case you want to stay a step ahead of your middle schooler.

COST? \$400 for the starter set, which will include one modernized Dualshock 4 controller which is required. There are plenty of add-ons, like Sony's \$60 PlayStation Camera, which can work with the new controller to offer some Kinect-like capabilities. By comparison, you'll pay \$350 for the Wii U, and \$500 for Microsoft's Xbox One, which will include the motion sensing camera.

CAN THE PS4 RUN OLD GAMES? No to old games, yes to movies. PS4 isn't backwards compatible with PS3 games, which are headed to the cloud, according to Al De Leon, Director, PlayStation Platforms at Sony Computer Entertainment America. Said Mr. De Leon, "we are launching a cloud-based streaming service in 2014 that will offer PS3 titles on PS4, as well as PS3 and PlayStation Vita." Called PlayStation Plus, the subscription-based service will cost \$5/month, and could be compared to the Xbox Live Gold service. PS4's disk drive can play DVDs, say, for use with movies.

CAN I USE MY OLD CONTROLLERS? Sorry. Older Dualshock 3 or earlier controllers won't work. The PS Move controller will work, however.

WHAT FEATURES WILL THE NEW CONTROLLERS HAVE? They combine rumble abilities with built-in speakers, as well as a headphone/microphone jack to make it easy to trade commands with a squadron of friends in a multiplayer game. There's also a "share" button to make connecting faster and a glowing, colored light bar on the front, designed to be seen by the new PlayStation Camera. See the controller features in action at <http://youtu.be/qSTJc9UqNk8>. Additional controllers cost \$60 each.

WHAT'S UNDER THE HOOD? More power, especially for graphics. The PS4 is powered by an x86-64 AMD "Jaguar" that Mr. De Leon says has 16 times the RAM as the PS3. Storage includes an 8GB of RAM and a 500GB hard disk for storing movies and games. There are two USB ports, Ethernet and Bluetooth. □

ARE THERE GAMES FOR KIDS? I'm a children's tech reviewer so I'm on the lookout for family friendly experiences. If that's your intention, the Wii U is still the best out-of-the-box option than either the Xbox One or the PS4, which seem specifically engineered for beautiful but mature-themed experiences.

CAN IT WORK WITH MY TABLET? Here's a surprise... You'll be able to download a Sony app for your tablet of choice (iOS or Android) and turn it into your auxiliary screen, for play from any location. You're not limited to being in the same room as your console.

Details: Sony Computer Entertainment America, Inc., <http://us.playstation.com/>. Price: \$400. Ages: NA. Platform: PlayStation 4. Teaches/Purpose: a game console. Entry date: 6/17/2013.

Rayman Legends

Rayman comes to the Wii U in this adventure designed by Michel Ancel (creator of Rayman, Beyond Good & Evil and the Raving Rabbids). In the story, Rayman, Globox, and the Teensies are off wandering through an enchanted forest when they discover a mysterious tent filled with a series of paintings, each of which seems to tell the story of a mythical world. While focusing on the painting of a medieval land, they are sucked into the painting's world and their adventure begins. You run, jump, and fight your way through each world to save the day and discover the secrets of every legendary painting.

You can use the touch screen to take out enemies, manipulate platforms, and cut ropes to clear a path, and the gyroscope technology lets you move rotating platforms. In addition, you can continue playing even when your TV is off by continuing your adventure on the GamePad. Up to five players can play at once by using four Wii Remotes and the GamePad, with co-op, drop-in/drop-out gameplay. Scheduled for release September 2013.

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





Skylanders SWAP Force

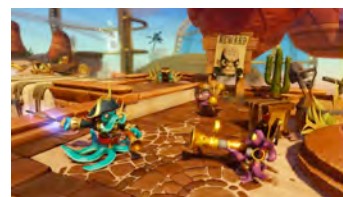
Skylander's SWAP Force continues the franchise's signature gameplay and collectible toy experience with the introduction of a new feature Activision is calling "dynamic swapability."

We had a preview at E3, but were not allowed to videotape; the game component combined ease of use with power, suggesting that Skylanders has a solid future in 2013-14. You can now swap (pull apart) the top and bottom halves of your toys to transform 16 special edition characters (called SWAP Force) into more than 250 unique combinations.

This new adventure has 32 hero characters, each with unique powers, as well as new abilities such as flying, climbing and teleporting that can be used in special areas of Skylands.

The entire collection of toys from both Skylanders Spyro's Adventure and Skylanders Giants are forward compatible. Prices are \$75 for the starter pack; individual action figures are \$9.99 for core characters and \$14.99 for SWAP Force characters. Developed by Vicarious Visions for the PlayStation 4, PlayStation 3, Xbox One, Xbox 360 and the Nintendo Wii U; the Wii version is in development by Beenox; and the Nintendo 3DS version is in development by n-Space.

Details: Activision, Inc., www.activision.com. Price: \$75. Ages: 8-up. Platform: PlayStation 3, Wii, Wii U, Xbox 360, Nintendo 3DS, PlayStation 4, Xbox One. Teaches/Purpose: collecting, logic. Entry date: 6/10/2013.



Super Mario 3D World

Billed as "the first multiplayer 3D Mario game for the Wii U console" this Super Mario 3D World game lets you play as Mario, Luigi, Princess Peach or Toad with up to four other players. As a result, the screens can get a bit busy.

Each character has unique abilities and play styles. For example, Princess Peach glides over gaps, while Luigi has his trademark extra-high jump. The new cat transformation allows players to run on all fours, pounce on enemies, attack in midair or use their claws to scamper up walls and goal poles. Content includes 3D environments filled with obstacles and contraptions like transparent pipes and vertical conveyor belts, which add new puzzle elements. You can use the Wii U GamePad controller's touch screen to search for hidden blocks and to freeze enemies in place. Coming "Late December 2013."

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$call. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Wii U. Teaches/Purpose: logic, spatial relations, problem solving. Entry date: 6/17/2013.



Turbo: Super Stunt Squad

Based on DreamWorks Animations's feature film, Turbo, and featuring the characters from the upcoming film including Turbo, Smoove Move, Whiplash, Skidmark and Burn. Each playable character has different skills, and you can compete with up to four four players on the Wii, or two players on Xbox 360, PS3, and Wii U. Players can upgrade and unlock abilities that help increase acceleration, speed and grip on the course. In the Wii U, Xbox 360 and PS3 versions, you can earn unique abilities like Turbo's Tuck-and-Roll move and Skidmark's Nitro Boost, plus unlock new shells, stickers and paint jobs.

Players can also unlock additional missions and complete objectives such as timed stunts, item collection, special trick objectives and point challenges. Note: the Wii, Nintendo DS and 3DS versions are stunt racing focused and the Wii U, Xbox 360, and PS3 versions are stunt performance focused. Developed by Monkey Bar Games for the Wii U, Xbox 360 and PS3 (\$40), and by Torus Games for the Wii, Nintend 3DS, and Nintendo DS (\$30).

Details: D3Publisher of America, Inc., www.d3publisher.us. Price: \$40. Ages: 6-up. Platform: PlayStation 3, Wii, Wii U, Xbox 360, Nintendo DS, Nintendo 3DS. Teaches/Purpose: racing, logic. Entry date: 6/17/2013.

