



Children's TECHNOLOGY REVIEW

His first app? So-so. His second? Much Improved.
Don't miss—

Daniel Tiger's Excellent App

Also:

5 Sites & 10 Videos about Leaves
12 Editor's Choice Selections
Remembering Red Burns
NYTimes Back to School Scraps

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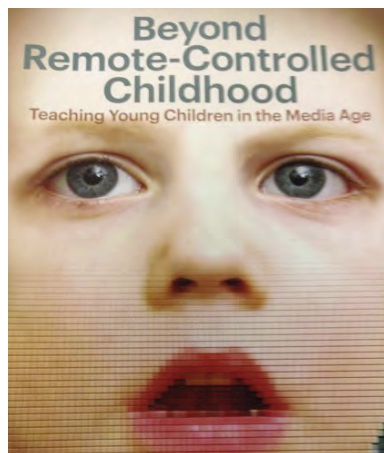
Welcome to the 162nd Issue of *Children's Technology Review* with 12 highly rated products including one of the best human anatomy apps we've ever reviewed. And we've reviewed a lot of them. See page 3 for a summary. Here's what you need to know for this month:

Book Review: Beyond Remote Controlled Childhood

They're everywhere these days — glassy-eyed children staring into glowing screens, as the real world passes by. This can be disturbing to grownups, and it really bothers Diane Levin, the author of **Beyond Remote-Controlled Childhood: Teaching Young Children in the Media Age** which was published last month by NAEYC. The book is a lengthy essay about the negative influence technology on children. It joins Levin's growing library of books with unsettling titles, including, **So Sexy So Soon**, **The War Play Dilemma**, **Teaching Young Children in Violent Times** and **Danger, Danger Everywhere: Growing Up in a Culture of Fear**. Levin's recent book contributes to the culture of fear, by listing anecdote after anecdote about what can happen when children use technology excessively, and sometimes (in the graphic sexting examples) dangerously.

A case in point. Recently I spotted two young boys about 6 years of age, sitting in the front row at a concert, glued to a single Nintendo 3DS playing **LEGO Chima**. One was operating the controls, while the other watched, and both were expertly ignoring the wonderful dixieland jazz band that was playing just 30 feet away. They both had that glassy-eyed stare, depicted on the cover of Levin's book. Now normally such intense game playing behaviors wouldn't bother me, but this time it got under my skin, perhaps because I was in the group that was performing. The more our band played, the more it bugged me. I wanted Diane Levin to swoop in and sternly lecture these boys and their caregivers. "Listen to that real-live, non-recorded music" she should say. It's real. She would help me make them understand that video games can be paused and played later; live bands can't.

This book illustrates the split personality that many parents, early childhood educators, pediatricians and book's publisher, NAEYC (the National Association for the Education of Young Children) have when it comes to technology and young children. On the other hand, NAEYC published a forward looking position statement about both the pros and cons of technology (see <http://www.naeyc.org/content/technology-and-young-children>); but on the



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Save the Date —

The 13th Annual Dust or Magic

Institute, To Be Held Nov 3-5, 2013 in Lambertville, NJ

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.

Dust or Magic

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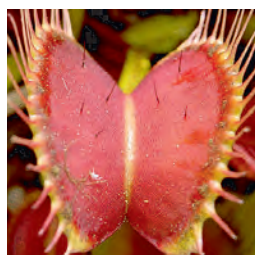
Five sites, ten videos about

Leaves

Every Fall, they grab our attention by changing from green to scarlet and yellow. Here are some sites and videos to help you learn more about something we take for granted -- leaves.

1. How long is the longest leaf in the world? At http://www.raffiaonline.com/about_raffia.html you visit a store that sells leaves that grow in Madagascar, Africa on the Raffia palm. The palms grow a thin leaf, up to 60 feet in length. It has many uses including making doll hair, ribbons and hula skirts.

2. Can a leaf kill you? At Popular Mechanics <http://bit.ly/160fqbf> you learn about ten of the most deadly leaves, some with poison. Admire them, from a distance.



3. I'm stuck in the woods. Which leaves can I eat for food? At The Art of Manliness <http://bitly.com/14mxgXo> you can find 19 plants that could save your life, by serving as food. These include the dandelion and clover.

4. Why do leaves change color? At <http://www.foliagenetwork.com> you can explore the reasons why a simple green leaf turns to red, yellow, or even purple each fall season. Or you can watch this video for a quick explanation <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljPU1nDVq-0>



5. How much weight can a leaf hold? At the Kew gardens bitly.com/17BvXmf you can read all about the giant amazon water lily, with a leaf that can grow up to 8 feet across, and support the weight of a child. **Get Busy!**



Make a leaf rubbing at bitly.com/1emhQqC. After you find some interesting leaves, get some peeled crayons and a thin sheet of paper (easel paper works well). Put the paper on top of the leaf and gently rub the side of the crayon on the paper. Presto! The leaf appears.

Preserve some leaves, by coating them in wax. At bitly.com/1e643Dz you can learn how to coat a leaf in wax. Be careful -- it requires using boiling water.



What's the leaf? We found this quiz to help you test your knowledge. Good luck! bitly.com/140IQGO



Can you spot Poison Ivy?

Here's are videos for this month <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLcBVHzUUEKwkWp5Elm0VMfX8tjEUqfRaQ>



September '13

Editor's Choice

Here are summaries of the 12 highest rated products from this month's batch of 38 reviews.



Preschool

Daniel Tiger's Day & Night, \$2.99, by PBS Kids <http://pbskids.org/mobile> is cause for celebration. Why? Because somebody at PBS Kids has finally figured out that a good app is one where the child drives the activity, and not the other way around (where the app drives the child). Read the feature review for details. Hats off to Cricket Moon, the student who made this app for PBS Kids. For ages 3-up.

Cuddle Puzzle - Learn Shapes, Numbers, Music and More, \$1.99, by Croco Studio <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/cuddle-puzzle-learn-shapes/id680512702?mt=8> is yet another excellent title from Croco Studio. This one is ideal for the very first iPad user. Unlike traditional drag and drop puzzles, these start easy, showing a child just a few parts. Once those are in place, another set is revealed. Note that this is a rather large app (942 MB). For ages 3-up.

Sago Mini Pet Cafe, \$0.99, by Sago Sago <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3umf0oJ4zs> consists of three fail-safe activities that playfully pull children to a setting where they can discover the first math and logic concepts that include counting to 10, sorting by color, matching shapes and mixing colors -- all while doing something that every child loves ... feeding animals. For ages 2-4.

Dr. Panda's Beauty Salon, \$1.99, by TribePlay <https://itunes.apple.com/app/id623193844> Ever want to put some lipstick on a pig? This app, from China-based TribePlay lets you run your own beauty spa for large animals. Also excellent, and for slightly older children, **Dr. Panda's Veggie Garden**, \$1.99, also by TribePlay <https://itunes.apple.com/app/id585512923?mt=8> lets you tend to a garden, and serve a continual stream of animal customers. As with other apps in the Dr. Panda series, all the challenges are bite sized and insure success. The result is a playful sorting, matching, fine-motor experience.

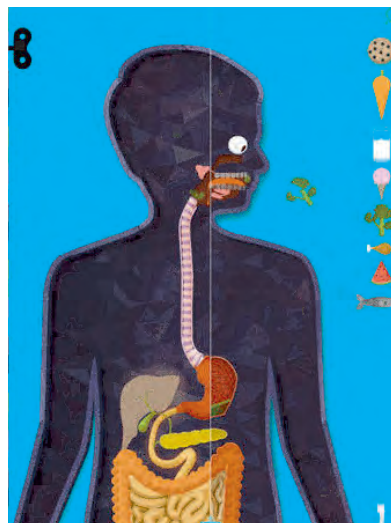
Early Elementary

Chuggington Chug Patrol Ready to Rescue, \$4.99, by StoryToys <https://itunes.apple.com/app/id691969776?mt=8> A family of talking trains comes to life, in this well designed 3D storybook that could've easily stepped out of a Thomas the Tank episode. The app contains 31 pages, 10 challenges and two language options (USA or British English). <http://www.amazon.com/gp/mas/dl/android?p=com.storytoys.Chuggington.Book1.Paid.Amazon>. For ages 3-up.

Teachley: Addimal Adventure, \$3.99, by Teachley, LLC <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/teachley-addimal-adventure/id661286973?mt=8> is designed specifically to help a young child conceptualize single digit addition (typically when aged 5 to 7 years) Wrong answers are clearly marked in a clear and nonjudgmental way, helping children see where they need practice.

Two Left Feet, \$4.99, by Resin <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/two-left-feet/id663690837?mt=8> is an interesting augmented reality experience based on the book by Adam Stower (Bloomsbury Children's Books). If you have a printed copy of the book (\$16) you can use your iOS device to bring it to life. See <http://www.twoleftfeetapp.com>. The story, narration and illustrations are all of professional quality. Ages 4-up

Human Body, The, \$2.99, by Tinybop, Inc. <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/the-human-body-by-tinybop/id682046579?mt=8> The first in a series of educational apps called The Explorer's Library, this app combines exceptional



design with a topic every child wonders about, without the embarrassment. The result is one of the best human anatomy interactive media products we've reviewed. And there have been hundreds. Content includes six interactive, animated layers of the body (skeletal, muscular, nervous, circulatory, respiratory, and digestive) with close up views of the heart, brain, eye, stomach, mouth and lower intestine. Visit <http://tinybop.com>. For ages 4-up.

Upper Elementary

Disney Infinity, \$75, by Disney Interactive, Inc. looks like Activision's Skylanders. But comparing the two isn't accurate, despite the fact that both employ a light-up stage and plastic figurines that double as collectible items. The video game part is very fun and well designed, and it's linked with a lot of expensive stuff to collect. In other words, hide this game/toy combo from any child doesn't already have a trust fund. See the demo at <http://youtu.be/NEZNS7LACU8> For ages 5-up.

Get Rocky Premium, \$4.99, by Fingerprint Digital <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/get-rocky-premium-fingerprint/id686585816?mt=8> is fun and fast paced but clunky in places. The tilt-and-slide adventure game mixes earth science with a common video game play pattern. It barely eeked out an Editor's Choice award because it is built around a game mechanic that is easy to fall into (pun fully intended). For ages 6-12.

Pikmin 3, \$60, by Nintendo of America. Thanks to the Wii U, this is one of the best versions of Pikmin we've played. The third edition is set in an alien world. You take command of three explorers and a legion of plant-like Pikmin creatures in a fight for survival. Features include the ability to split your Pikmin squads among the three explorers to maximize your strategy, and it is possible to use the Wii U GamePad controller as an in-game camera to capture the alien-safari environment from a pint-sized perspective. Your adventure can continue on when the TV is turned off using only the Wii U GamePad. See the video at <http://youtu.be/UXKskJE10SY> For ages 12-up.

other hand, it publishes and distributes a book like this one, packed with emotional language and a literature review that makes no effort to reflect the complexity of the issue. Levin's book draws battle lines, when none are necessary. Consider those two boys at the concert. Diane Levin et al might call them screen addicts who are fueling up on dopamine, but their teacher might applaud their behavior as engaged and focused.

Ms. Levin might say they are socially isolated and missing the chance to develop important social skills (I might agree with that one). But their future employer might appreciate that they can collaborative problem solve using highly abstract systems of symbols. Because LEGO Chima is one of many 3D exploration games that is thick with problem solving opportunities, couldn't the entire experience be seen as rich in critical thinking, synthesis and evaluation, which are the top areas of Bloom's taxonomy?

Now I'd be the first to agree with Levin that parents need to establish a healthy balance in a child's experiences, and that there are times, such as during a concert given by extremely good looking musicians, that a parent should set limits and say "turn it off." But this isn't the simple issue that Ms. Levin makes it out to be.

Tracking Your Child With "Find My iPhone" -- and Other Back to School Advice

Last month I wrote an article called "A Digital Back to School List" for the New York Times <http://nyti.ms/1dbngkn>. As is typical in such articles, I collected more material than I could fit into 1000 words. One of the scraps included an interview with one of my neighbors who have two children, Adam (age 8) and Emily (12); both use technology for their schoolwork. Here's what I learned.

For Emily Cook of Flemington, NJ, her father's hand-me-down iPhone 4 has become her most valued back to school item. Last year, she used it in unexpected ways, according to her mother, Kristen Cook. "It would wake her up in the morning as her alarm clock, and it helped her stay in touch with friends for homework help. It's even her mirror – she uses the front facing camera on the way to school." An iPhone can also provide peace of mind. "Last year when Emily walked to school, I was worried that she would wander through a park on the way home," said Ms. Cook. "So I used **Find My iPhone** (\$free, <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/find-my-iphone/id376101648?mt=8>) to track her trip home." For Android users, there's **Life360** (\$free for Android <http://bit.ly/1aMkqky> and iOS <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/life360-family-locator/id384830320?mt=8>. (recommended by Robin Raskin). And if Emily forgets her gym shoes on the way to school, she has a backup, by way of a text message home.

The Cooks (and others) shared some other ways iPhones have helped them with school-related work:

- **Use the phone's camera** to archive all those assignments and permission slips that come home in the backpack —before they get lost and wrinkled. When you need them, just find the photo and print it out.
- **Always keep mind-numbing games on hand** just in case you need a break, or the bus gets stuck in traffic. Adam, who has a well-used iPod Touch lists **Candy Crush**, **Mine Craft**, **Real Soccer 12**, **Dumb Ways to Die**, and **Doodle Jump** as some of his most played.
- **Stay sharp over vacation.** Last summer, Emily used **iTooCh**, a series of grade-level apps that consist of interactive worksheets

to brush up on her math facts.

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/itooch-elementary-school-math/id484570190?mt=8>

- **Text without a data plan.** For Adam, who doesn't have a smart phone or a data plan, texting is still possible thanks to his home Wi-Fi and utilities like **Snapchat** and **Kick Messenger**.
- **Facebook-free social media.** Emily isn't on facebook -- yet. But she does use Instagram, and she's OK with the fact that her mom knows exactly who is in her address book, and that her parents know her passwords.

Parent's Guide to iTunes

Apple has been beefing up the parental controls in iTunes. See <http://support.apple.com/kb/ht1904> for the latest. Here's a summary:

- **Don't share your Apple ID.** Apple wants children older than 13 to have their own Apple ID, to use with their own cluster of Apple devices. If you don't want to use a credit card to set up your child's Apple ID, you can purchase an iTunes gift card when you're asked for billing information.
- **Use gift cards** so there's a limited amount that a child can spend. It's like an allowance for apps, and it makes it possible to designate a certain amount every month that will be credited on your Apple ID. To set up iTunes Allowance, go to the main page of the iTunes Store on your computer, click "Buy iTunes Gifts" in the Quick Links box, and scroll down to the Allowances section. You can also go to a retail store and purchase a physical iTunes card. This is nothing more than a plastic card with a scratch off code on the back. Once that code is entered into the "redeem gift card" box in iTunes, your account is credited with the amount you chose to purchase. They'll learn to budget their purchases.
- **iOS has Parental Controls or Restrictions.** Use them. You can block explicit content, and restrict which movies your children have access to based on their rating. Choose Preferences from the iTunes menu, then choose the Parental tab. You'll be presented with several options, including the ability to turn on/off in-app sales, the browser, or apps with explicit content.

Red Burns Dies at 88

Red Burns, who co-founded NYU's ITP (Interactive Telecommunications Program) died last month. See NYTimes obituary at <http://nyti.ms/17HZ1dT>. I was fortunate to get to know her briefly, when I was hired to teach a class for Frank Migliorelli. The New York Times called Red Burns the Godmother of Silicon Alley for a reason. The program she built was constructivism theory applied to a graduate education. The magic of ITP was in the people, as any graduate will tell you. The elevator ride up to the 4th floor was always an adventure. The ride down always seemed slower, perhaps because you were carrying so many heavy ideas. Red had the guts to let me call my class "Dust or Magic" and she gave me the best room in ITP where she could drop in on Friday mornings. Sadly Red Burns is no longer around, but her legacy is... in the form of her ITP program, and on the many grateful students and faculty that worked under her umbrella, and retweeted the simple message "thanks Red." That includes me.





Feature Reviews

SEPTEMBER 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.

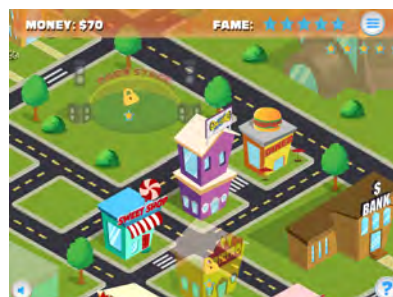
Cha-Ching Band Manager

Well intentioned but poorly designed, this free app is part of a financial literacy program of the Prudence Foundation, the charitable platform of Prudential Corporation Asia, that also includes cartoon programs and an online website with games and activities. It blends elements of music based and simulation style games to help children learn to make "smart money decisions."

You are the Cha-Ching Band Manager and it is your job to take the band to stardom by tapping in time with the music and the colored balls that travel down the screen, and by managing the band's earnings. For example, you can purchase better instruments from the Music Store or leave the money in the bank for an extra day of interest. It uses unrealistic units of money, has a lot junk food in the store, and you can't turn down the background music.

Details: Prudential Corporation Asia, <http://www.cartoonnetworkasia.com/cha-ching>. Price: \$free. Ages: 8-14. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: money, economics, balancing a budget. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3 stars. Entry date: 2/18/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	5	60%
Educational	8	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	3	



Chuggington Chug Patrol Ready to Rescue

A family of talking trains comes to life, in this well designed 3D storybook that could've easily stepped out of a Thomas the Tank episode (the content for this app comes from Ludorum (see <http://ludorum.com/properties/chuggington>). There's even a British narrator. Each train has a personality; with a different set of abilities and a challenge. The trains have names like Wilson, Brewster, Koko and Jackman, in this Chugtastic 3D interactive pop-up storybook app. Read the story, complete the challenges, and use your new skills to win badges.

Easy to use and fun to explore, this is one of the most evolved releases we've seen from Ireland-based StoryToys. Like many children's eBooks, you can change the 3D pages with either a swipe or by using the page turn icons. The StoryToys apps take the page transitions a step further, with a 3D effect that is hard wired to your tablet's accelerometer. So you can move the background, parallax style, as you move your screen. It's as if the book were on a 3D pedestal.

There are 31 pages and 10 badges, with two language options (USA or British English).

<http://www.amazon.com/gp/mas/dl/android?p=com.storytoys.Chuggington.Book1>. Paid. Amazon

Details: StoryToys, www.storytoys.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Android, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: classification, reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 9/11/2013. [WB]

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





Cuddle Puzzle - Learn Shapes, Numbers, Music and More

Great for a young preschooler, this app contains eight jigsaw puzzles arranged by difficulty. Unlike traditional drag and drop puzzles, these start easy, showing a child just three or four parts. Once those are solved, another set of pieces is revealed; a technique that is excellent at pulling children into the process. Other nice touches include a concert at the end of each puzzle, and an audio "click" that guides children toward the right spot.

The eight puzzles cover a variety of themes, including frogs, ocean creatures, baby turtles, polar bears, sheep, a circus elephant and an animal band on the beach.

Don't be fooled by the strange title that overreaches on the learning objectives. This app is good for informal exploration of shape and music concepts, and it a good co-op play experience (although it is not multi-touch). This is a rather large app (942 MB) that is well worth the cost and room.

Details: Croco Studio, www.crocostudio.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone (942 MB). Teaches/Purpose: logic, classification, shapes. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 8/23/2013. [WB]

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



Daniel Tiger's Day & Night

Second in a series (the first is Play at Home with Daniel Tiger) this app playfully introduces the concept of morning and evening routines. It consists of ten responsive activities -- five for day and five for night, and a well designed menu that makes it easy to find something that is fun. Each activity is inspired by an activity related to the routine, which any child can understand. In the daytime routine, for example, you start by waking Daniel up with a tap. You then can try on different clothing items to get him dressed. This app "hard wires" a child's finger to each activity. They can zip a sweater, moving it up and down, pump up Daniel Tiger's muscle suit using a pump, and brush Daniel's teeth to the rhythm of a song. The result is a playful idea, framed in a setting that is high in child control. The night time routine involves cleaning up toys, taking a bath, putting on pajamas, and singing a very mellow good night song, making this app a nice bedtime experience.

Of course your child's routine might be different than Daniel's; but the well designed menu lets children try out any combination of activities, in a setting that is rich in language and early logic experiences. The app doubles as a tool, too. A timer feature (found in the parent options) lets you set the amount of time the toothbrush song plays (the ADA recommends 2 minutes), or the time it will take to clean up his or her room. It's too bad the timer is hidden deep in the parent options, and not on the main menu where you can find it.

Need to know. This app is well designed but it's short of perfect. You can't control the trolley in the last day scene when Daniel goes to school, the music icon is confusing on the main menu, you can't control the background music and the instructions loop endlessly every 15 seconds. The instructions can be toggled between English or Spanish, a nice touch. Also this is a big install, weighing in at 495 MB in size. All things considered, however, it is an excellent addition to a preschooler's app library; and it is much better than the first Daniel Tiger app. Created by Cricket Moon for PBS Kids.

Details: PBS Kids, www.pbskids.org. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (iOS 5.1 or later). Teaches/Purpose: daily routines, logic, some creativity, language, dress up. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.5 stars. Entry date: 9/3/2013. [WB]

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





Disney Infinity

On first glance, Disney Infinity looks a lot like Activision's Skylanders. When you take a closer look, however, you realize that comparing the two isn't accurate, despite the fact that both employ a light-up stage that you physically plug into a game console or computer, and both use plastic figurines that double as collectible items. Yes, these toys each follow a script, but they have some interesting additional features, especially the open-ended feature called the "toy box" mode, where characters from different theme packs can mix.

So, for example, you might have Davy Jones from the Pirates of the Caribbean playing next to Syndrome from the Incredibles. Currently there are 17 collectible items, including figures, 3 play set pieces and 20 power discs from five movies: Pirates of the Caribbean, The Incredibles, Cars, Monsters University and the Lone Ranger Play Set.

The starter kit is \$75 which includes a game disk, three figurines and a one or two player base that you plug into a game console by USB. No batteries are required -- the power comes from game console's USB port.

You are now ready to "jump into" a richly animated 3D environment that incorporates a variety of play patterns to keep things interesting. This includes both single and co-op play, plus plenty of old fashioned fighting, coin collecting, flying, climbing and exploring. In the Sandbox mode, you can also build and share worlds, and program elements, say, to trick another player into stepping onto a spring-loaded stand. All things considered, this is a very fun, and potentially very expensive game.

The video game component was created by respected Avalanche Studios, who is no stranger to video game creation, having made such classics as Dragon Ball Z, Mortal Kombat and Tak. If you pay \$13 for an individual figure, you can unlock other parts of the virtual world. The more figures you have, the more access you have, and the more money you'll spend. You get the idea. See the demo at <http://youtu.be/NEZNS7LACU8>

Details: Disney Interactive, Inc., www.disney.com. Price: \$75. Ages: 5-up. Platform: Windows, PlayStation 3, Wii, Wii U, Xbox 360. Teaches/Purpose: logic, creativity, collaborative play. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 2/22/2013. [WB]

Dr. Panda's Beauty Salon

Ever want to put some lipstick on a pig? This app can make it happen.

Easy to play, and designed around a theme children understand, Dr. Panda's Beauty Salon (\$1.99, TribePlay) lets you run your own beauty spa for large animals. The start is a little confusing, because you have to wait for an animal customer to show up at the door (you hear a bell ring). The app has a Toca Boca feel to it, with no points or timed challenges. Your objective is to simply keep your customers happy, by painting nails, plucking nose hair, shaving, and so on. There are 11 mini-games in all.

Innovative features include the ability to paint the face of an animal with glow in the dark paint, then turn off the lights and see their work glow; and a vibrating chair that results in a funny effect. There are also plenty of dress up play options, with different hair styles, hats, and glasses. There are no in-app purchases or third party ads, and links to social media are only accessible from within the protected parents menu.

The parent options ("tap three times") contain a unique option -- to turn on/off the promotion screen that shows when the app is first launched (it is on by default); plus spots for social media and external links.

Details: TribePlay, www.tribeplay.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: classification (matching pairs of shoes). Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 4/5/2013. [WB]

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



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






Dr. Panda's Veggie Garden

Here's yet another fun, easy to play app from China-based TribePlay. This time, children get to tend to a garden, and serve a continual stream of animal customers. As with other apps in the Dr. Panda series, all the challenges are bite sized and insure success. The result is a playful sorting, matching, fine-motor experience.

Content includes 30 types of activities that include planting seeds, watering plants, plucking quickly growing weeds or scaring away bugs. There are five animal customers and 12 types of fruits and vegetables. A parental area, which is not protected, contains external links, plus options for sound and music control. All in all this is an excellent addition to any app library.

Details: TribePlay, www.tribeplay.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: logic, classification, sorting and matching. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 4/8/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	<div>92%</div> 
Educational	9	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	10	




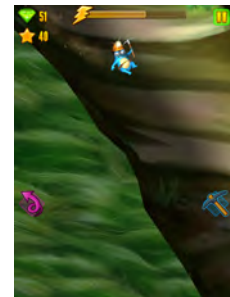
Get Rocky Premium

Fun and fast paced but clunky in places, this tilt-and-slide adventure game mixes an earth science agenda with a common video game play pattern. Content purists might be distressed by the liberal mixing of fiction and nonfiction; gaming purists may find the challenges to be confusing (you don't know when you're meeting an enemy or a friend).

You help Digger the mole travel to the center of the Earth by tilting your screen through a hole, tapping into a nice game mechanic that is easy to fall into (pun fully intended). Content includes 30 Levels in 6 Layers of the Earth; 18 Get Rocky comic book movies with real science facts about the journey; 12 rocks and minerals to collect; 20 enemies such as centipedes, goblins and magma men. As Digger's journey gets deeper, he must acquire new tools to blast through to new levels. Social features include a Leaderboard to show off high scores. As with other Fingerprint apps, the first time setup menu can be confusing, and it is easy for a child to wander into promotional materials for other Fingerprint-related products. You also get a sense that this app is collecting some sort of data about the child. In this premium version, which we reviewed, there is a lot of play value with no in-app sales or gimmicks and the app remembers your progress.

Details: Fingerprint Digital, www.fingerprintplay.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 6-12. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (iOS 4.3 or later). Teaches/Purpose: science, timing, logic, earth science. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 8/27/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	<div>86%</div> 
Educational	8	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	8	





Hexbug Nano V2 Black Hole

The Nano V2 bugs can now climb up vertically, horizontally, around corners, through tubes, and to the top of any Nano V2 habitat set. The Black Hole features an evolved Nano with a new look with three rubber spines on its back, as well as a new system of tubular tracks that highlight the Nano V2's multi-level climbing abilities. The Nano V2 has a sense of balance, capable of crawling through tubes on its feet or on its back, can pass another bug in a single tube to avoid a traffic jam, and even flip to its feet when landing on its back on an open flat surface. The Black Hole lets you customize the design and layout of the three-story set and features special accessories including a spiral tube which the Nano V2 will "pirouette through as it searches for a more expansive view atop the crow's nest, the highest point of the set, at which point it will venture back down to free fall through the black funnel, emerging out of one of three exits in order to explore new territory". Other features let you control the flow of traffic by filling the attachment points on the two HEX cell bases with accessories such as fixed pegs and rotating flags that help direct where the Nano V2 bugs go. The Black Hole set contains: two Nano V2 bugs; one spiral tube; one crow's nest; one funnel; two straight tubes; nine curved tubes; three Y tubes; 20 connectors; six stand-offs; two HEX cell bases plus removable walls and gates; four curved tracks; eight fixed pegs; four rotating flags; and one button cell battery AG13 (LR44) included with each bug. The tracks and parts are all modular and fit with one another. Scott Traylor talks with Innovation First's Lindsey Carlin about the next line of Hexbug accessories, featuring a modified Hexbug with has the ability to move up through tubes. See the video at http://youtu.be/A_xNGzPwRQE

Details: Innovation First, Inc., www.hexbug.com. Price: \$50. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: playing with robots. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 7/8/2013. [WB]

Human Body, The

The first in a series of educational apps called The Explorer's Library, for kids ages 4+, The Human Body (\$3.99, www.tinybop.com) lets children explore the wonders of the human body, without embarrassment. The result is one of the best human anatomy interactive media products we've reviewed. And there have been hundreds.

The Human Body presents a working model of the human body (boy, girl, man or woman), with each key part animated, complete with sound. The animated graphics are clear, yet free of gore. This is a case when realism is not a good idea. But they achieve their objective of scientific accuracy. Of particular note are the working models of the human eye and ear, that incorporate the features of the camera and microphone. In the case of the eye, the on-screen eye "sees" what the camera sees. Your photo and music libraries are accessed to demonstrate brain function, and device orientation shows the effect of gravity on the body.

Features include the ability to create individual profiles for each child, plus parent options that let you track children. It is possible to switch between text labels in 50 languages, including English, Arabic, Basque, Bengali, Bulgarian, Catalan, Chinese (traditional), Chinese (simplified), Croatian, Czech, Creole, Greek, Danish, Dutch, Farsi, Filipino, Finnish, French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Hungarian, Icelandic, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, Malay, Polish, Portuguese, Punjabi, Romanian, Russian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovenian, Swahili, Spanish, Swedish, Tamil, Telugu, Thai, Tibetan, Turkish, Ukrainian, Urdu, Uyghur, Uzbek, and Vietnamese.

Content includes six interactive, animated layers of the body (skeletal, muscular, nervous, circulatory, respiratory, and digestive) with close up views of the heart, brain, eye, stomach, mouth and lower intestine. We noticed no marketing or advertising. Tinybop, Inc. is located in Brooklyn NY. Visit <http://tinybop.com>.

Works with the iPhone 4, iPhone 4S, iPhone 5, iPod touch (5th generation) iPad 2 and iPad 3. This app is optimized for iPad. Requires iOS 5.0 or later. It will not work with the iPad 1 due to memory limitations.

Details: Tinybop, Inc., www.tinybop.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: science, human anatomy, biology, health. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.9 stars. Entry date: 9/5/2013. [WB]

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



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





J Is For Jag

Part of a planned letter-themed series of reading apps (one per letter), J is for Jag is nicely narrated and illustrated, and it is easy to jump around from one page to another in the story. It does a nice job "over learning" a single letter by repeating the sound in the context of different words and illustrations.

In the story, Jag Jaguar is trying to practice playing the Jingle Bells for the upcoming Jungle Jamboree, but his nighttime practicing is upsetting the tired animals. As you can see, some of the "J" words (like Jingle Bells) seem contrived, which reduces the chances the experience will have meaning for some children. In addition, the animated features have a "sprinkled" feel to them -- in other words, while they increase a child's feelings of control, they don't always support the story.

There are two modes ("Read to me" or "I'll read it"), or a child can record the narration. Each story in the series will contain 20-25 screens. The menu and the last pages of the story contain links to social media and web pages within the child's area of the app and it is not possible to control the sound.

Details: Carman Industries, www.samanthadaniel.com. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad (339 MB). Teaches/Purpose: early reading, alphabet, the letter J. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 5/21/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	9	82%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	6	
Good Value	8	





LEGO Mindstorms EV3

Mixing lots of building opportunities with some unnecessary complexity -- not to mention a hefty price tag, the LEGO Mindstorms EV3 system (\$350, www.legoeducation.us/mindstorms) is the long-awaited upgrade to LEGO Mindstorm. For those who care, it's kit number 31313. The brain of the system is the EV3 (short for evolution 3). About the size of a very fat bar of soap, the controller block comes with a one-color LCD screen and a primitive arrow-key menu system. We had hoped to find a touch screen interface and rechargeable batteries. Oh well... perhaps EV4. The battery issue is important, because those same 6 AA's power as many as eight controller ports that might include motors and sensors. The good news is that the EV3 now has bluetooth, so you can download an app called the LEGO Mindstorms Create & Command for your iOS or Android device. Once the bluetooth connection has been paired, the controls are more accessible and fun. There's also an infrared remote mode. The EV3 also has Micro SD expansion, and a USB port for connecting and programming from a Mac or Windows computer, providing you download the software.

WHAT'S IN THE BOX? The \$350 kit contains the EV3, three servo motors, a touch sensor, an IR sensor, a color sensor and 550 LEGO Technic pieces. The IR "seeker sensor" can now measure distance or detect objects, and an IR remote can control your robot from up to 6 feet away. This kit is backward compatible with LEGO Mindstorms NXT; the programming software is PC and Mac compatible, with icon-based drag and drop environment for "building" programs with new interactive content that helps debug programming. The screen I saw reminded me of Scratch.

A "mission pad" can be used in a series of obstacle courses, and an app provides 3D building instructions, through collaboration with Autodesk. The new 3D instructions app allows builders to zoom in and rotate each step in the building process, making it easier than ever to assemble even the most sophisticated robot.

HISTORY. The entire concept represents the continuation of the philosophical marriage between LEGO and the similarly named programming language, Logo (with an o) that originally started 30 years ago when LEGO's Kjeld Kirk Kristiansen contacted MIT's Seymour Papert following the publication of his book *Mindstorms*, in which he discussed the LOGO (Turtle programming) language, as a means to bring constructivist thinking into the computer age.

This conversation led to the 1988 release of an "intelligent brick" designed to "bring LEGO creations to life via computer programming" (according to a current LEGO press release). In 1998, a mainstream edition of the controller brick was released, called LEGO Mindstorms RCX; a highly regarded product by our testers. The Mindstorms concept started to become stale, however, and other DIY programming options started to come to market.

LEGO Mindstorms EV3 is an attempt to add some new power and spice to an old idea. Besides more raw computing power (a Linux-based ARM9 processor, with 16 MB of memory plus 64 MB of storage that is quite a step up from the original 512K), there are also ports for SD expansion and a USB connection to a Mac or Windows computer. There are eight ports -- four input and four output plus speakers and bluetooth which can be used to communicate with an app. From an educational/learning point of view, it is fair to raise the question -- does all this "snap together" follow the step-by-step instructions really have anything to do with robotics? LEGO purists might be critical of this point. A child using this kit might spend time following somebody else's ideas to complete one of the five very cool robots, rather than coming up with their own. And once they are built, it is important that they take the extra step to program the brick, instead of just using a drive-around toy. On the other hand, creativity and structure can be good partners.

Details: LEGO America, www.lego.com. Price: \$350. Ages: 10-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android, Windows, Mac OSX. Teaches/Purpose: math, logic, programming, creativity, STEM, robotics. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 1/6/2013. [WB]

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





Lionel Battle Train

Fun, fast, and free (with in-app sales), this Lionel Battle Train app is inspired from real (toy) Lionel branded trains, tracks and other equipment. Trains included The General, Santa Fe FT Diesel or New York Central Flyer. The app is a potent mix of problem solving, gun battles, attractive females and in-app sales. The more you play, the more coins you earn which can be used for upgrades. Note that this app is about battles and quick decisions, and not about designing tracks and arranging props.

You steer a train using with double swipes along a side-scrolling track, avoiding dead ends and programming your guns to return fire from passing gun cars. While moving the train from track to track is easy, learning how to operate the various guns is harder. In addition you quickly learn that it is easier to get ahead if you purchase more coins, sold in bundles that range up to \$20, which can also be earned by solving various challenges. In addition, the assignments are given by a rather busty female dispatcher.

There are 19 missions in all, that get increasingly more challenging, although you can buy your way in, if you have the coins. Other features include a set of Game Center Leaderboards and Achievements to compete with your friends and the ability to adjust sounds. It is also easy to jump back to an easier challenge, if you get frustrated. Created by Schell Games for Lionel Trains.

Details: Lionel L.L.C. , www.lionel.com. Price: \$free with In-App Sales. Ages: 8-12. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: logic, strategy. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 8/8/2013. [WB]

Lucy Ladybird

Featuring beautiful illustrations and a good story but limited interactivity, this enhanced eBook contains 27 illustrations, available on a swipe-by-swipe basis. The art is clear and noteworthy, in a style the author says was inspired by Eric Carle. The story -- about wanting to fit in with your peers -- features a lady bug (called ladybird in the UK) who wants to have spots like her friends. So she visits various forest creatures who each make a donation.

Content includes an original song by Kristy Almeida, a sing-along Karaoke mode, a coloring activity and a integrated "find the hidden spider" matching game. There's limited interactivity, an external link to a website on the last page, and an unnecessary set of instructions at the beginning, which slows down the experience. The best part is in the promotional materials, which is not part of the app -- a stop-motion animation by AndersenM studio: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3nnpVDIw8Xw> Learn more at www.lucyladybird.com.

Details: Sharon King-Chai, www.eyeflyhigh.com. Price: \$5.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language, social-emotional development. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 9/3/2013. [WB]

Magic Stickers!

This nicely illustrated digital flannel board lets you mix your own homemade stickers with a collection of eight backgrounds. The result is a busy, playful experience with limited creativity potential.

After a set of nicely designed tutorials, you are presented with a story starter background, upon which you can place one of the 48 or so animated stickers. It is also possible to import one of your photos as your background, or take your own picture. One of the best parts of this app is that you can make your own sticker using a well designed set of creativity tools.

When you touch the "play" icon, everything starts moving at once. For example, you can draw an orange and watch it swing and drop from a tree, or watch as bees buzz around flowers. You can place stickers wherever you want and make as many original stickers as you want. The protected Parents section contains links to promotional materials, plus options for toggling between English and Japanese. Note that while there are small screen versions for iPhone and iPod Touch, this app works much better on the larger iPad screen.

Details: Lazoo Worldwide Inc., <http://www.lazoo.com>. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-8. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, English and Japanese. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 6/11/2013. [WB]

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



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



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





Matryoshka! Deluxe for Kids

Inspired by the classic Russian nesting dolls, this app features ten sets of 65 dolls. Children must open all the dolls, find the smallest one, and then identify the order of doll sizes to be able to stack them all together again. At the end, children are rewarded with a scene of exploding balloons, bubbles, fireworks, volcano rocks, and other surprises.

The app succeeds in providing a playful seriation/classification experience, specifically with size discrimination and sequencing. However, comparisons with the real types of nested blocks are not really accurate. Besides all the important tactile clues that an app can never replace, many of the puzzles don't let you experiment by skipping a size. As it is, the app does provide a playful size classification experience, with a variety of themes that include farm animals, sea animals, dinosaurs, monsters, bugs and Halloween. The music can't be muted. Links to other apps and social media are protected behind a parent section that requires reading instructions and holding down a button for three seconds.

Details: Kidoteca, www.kidoteca.com. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 2-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: spatial relations, classification by size. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 4/23/2013. [WB]

Music Learning Lab Pro

Music Learning Lab pro attempts to teach fundamental music skills in a step-by-step fashion, starting with recognizing pitch and ending with making chords. The app can remember progress for individual children. There are four parts to the app. This app is more about ear training. It does not get into notation or traditional music.

In the Learn Area, musical skills are presented in tutorial form. As children play they can unlock new lessons; including ear training where you attempt to match tones.

The Create Area lets you apply your knowledge by dragging and dropping notes onto a non-conventional grid. You can change pitches or change instruments.

More instruments can be earned in the Play Area. In this area, you practice skills learned in the lessons with three rather dry mini-games. Completing the games unlocks more instruments and backing bands.

You can then see what a learner has accomplished in the Trophies Area. Our testers wondered why they couldn't advance faster in the app; finding the instructions to be repetitive, finding it boring. Note that ideally we'd like to test this app more extensively with more children. For very beginning students, it is a possibility.

Details: Generategy, www.musiclearninglabapp.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (iOS 5.0 or later). Teaches/Purpose: music, ear training, pitch. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 8/8/2013. [WB]

OutlinesOutloud

Imagine if flashcards could talk. This is a text to speech study aid that works with your iOS device and dropbox account (both required) that is less than straightforward to figure out. But once you get it setup, it could be useful.

Here's how it works. First, you use your Macintosh or Windows computer to make an outline that has to be saved in "OPML" format; a format that is not in Microsoft Word. The app then syncs to your Dropbox account, and pulls the outline into the app, where it can be played back as spoken audio.

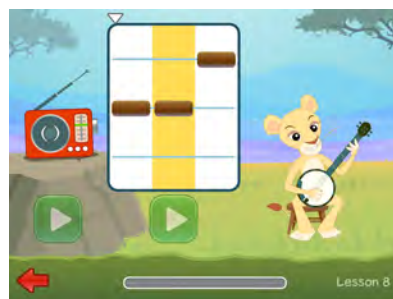
You can adjust the speech rate and jump forward and backward, skipping rows or whole sections, and loop. Why not allow you to enter your outlines directly into the app?

Details: StudyOutloud, www.outlinesoutloud.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 12-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: A study aid. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.3 stars. Entry date: 8/22/2013. [WB]

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



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



Ease of Use	4	67%
Educational	N	
Entertaining	N	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	8	

OUTLINES
OUTLOUD



Pikmin 3

Thanks to the Wii U, this is one of the best versions of Pikmin we've played. The third edition is set in an alien world. You take command of three explorers and a legion of plant-like Pikmin creatures in a fight for survival.

Using the Pikmin's unique abilities, players fight dangerous predators, and recover food needed to save the explorer's depleted home planet. Different Pikmin types, such as Rock Pikmin and Winged Pikmin, have different abilities. For example, Rock Pikmin are sturdy creatures who can be tossed at solid objects to break them down, and Winged Pikmin have the ability to fly and can carry objects in the air.

Other features include the ability to split your Pikmin squads among the three explorers to maximize your strategy, and it is possible to use the Wii U GamePad controller as an in-game camera to capture the alien-safari environment from a pint-sized perspective, to share in the Miiverse. The Wii Remote and Nunchuk controllers allow you to lead your explorers and pinpoint the location where you want to throw Pikmin. In addition, the game can also be played when the TV is turned off using only the Wii U GamePad. If you have a Wii U (and \$60) this is an excellent game. See the video at <http://youtu.be/UXKskJE10SY>

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$60. Ages: 12-up. Platform: Wii U. Teaches/Purpose: logic, fine motor skills, spatial relations, problem solving, maps. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 6/12/2013. [WB]

Sago Mini Pet Cafe

Looking for a great first-app for a toddler or preschooler? Three fail-safe activities playfully pull children to a setting where they can discover the first math and logic concepts that include counting to 10, sorting by color, matching shapes and mixing colors -- all while doing something that every child loves ... feeding animals.

A counting activity introduces sets up to ten and color matching. There's a shape matching activity, and a malt machine lets you try out different color combinations. There's no way to fail, and the different animals have quirky eating behaviors, such as using a napkin or burping, to keep things interesting. We all love to eat, which is why the theme of this app works so well with young children. Need to know: content might seem limited at first with just three activities, but there are many ways to play with this app to keep things interesting.

Details: Sago Sago, www.sagosago.com. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 2-4. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (iOS 5.0 or later). Teaches/Purpose: counting, sorting, fine motor skills, shapes. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.9 stars. Entry date: 8/10/2013. [WB]

Secret Agent Jack Stalwart: Passport to Adventure

Imagine a very simplified "Where in the World is Carmen San Diego" type of adventure on your iPad, and you have the idea of this geography app. It presents plenty of logic-related challenges, along with some reading practice.

After you create one of the two available player profiles, you touch a world map to visit a country where you are presented with a challenge. Content includes eight adventures which are unlocked. Each takes 10 to 20 minutes. The puzzles consists of coded messages, riddles, tile puzzles and search and finds.

When you find a treasure, you earn a passport stamp; when you collect all eight passport stamps you receive a free Jack Stalwart prize download at the end. The ultimate prize is a GPF Gadget Trading Card highlighting one of the gadgets featured in the Jack Stalwart chapter books. Content comes from the Secret Agent Jack Stalwart chapter book series for younger readers, by Elizabeth Singer Hunt. The app lets you become a secret agent and travel the world in search of stolen treasures.

NEED TO KNOW: While the design isn't flashy (by any stretch) the puzzles follow tried-and-true play patterns, and are fun to solve. The hint features and leveling aren't perfect, either. But this is still a solid, playable app.

Details: Elizabeth Singer Hunt, www.elizabethsingerhunt.com. Price: \$.99. Ages: 7-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: geography, history, language, reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 6/14/2013. [WB]

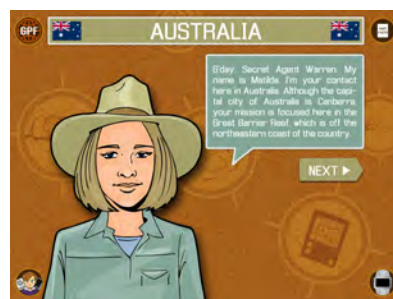
Ease of Use	8	92%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	10	
Design Features	10	
Good Value	9	



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



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





SoundMatch

In this sound matching (audio-memory) game of concentration, your goal is to match the sounds with their corresponding image.

You are presented with a set of cards that when flipped will reveal a sound or an image. Features include: training mode to practice your memory skills; ability to track child's progress through the number of attempts to complete an exercise; three difficulty settings to challenge children's skills; five different themes; bilingual game (English-Spanish); and user-friendly tutorials to help kids understand the game. Features a clean, classroom friendly design.

Details: EdNinja, <http://edninja.com/>. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 4-10. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: auditory discrimination, listening, memory. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 2/26/2013. [WB]

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



Spanish Colors

Designed to offer multiple-choice style Spanish language practice on color-related words, this language app features clear but sugary narration and multiple-choice problems that don't always make sense. For example, you are asked to "find the red balloon" from a set that has no balloons. There is very little content (just four screens), to the point that we thought we were looking at a free-trial. The content that is provided is extremely didactic (over scripted) and there's no real narrative glue to tie the problems into a meaningful context. Despite being sold as an ebook, the storyline can be summarized as "a panda was looking for colors."

The Little Pim apps were created by Kiwi apps using QBook technology, based on the work of Paul Pimsleur, the creator of the Pimsleur Method -- a language learning programs for adults. It is one of a series. Hopefully the others have a better design and offer more content.

Details: Little Pim, www.littlepim.com. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 4-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: language, Spanish. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.3 stars. Entry date: 6/11/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	8	66%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	6	
Design Features	6	
Good Value	6	



Strawberry Shortcake Berry Best Friends

Starting with a noisy, cluttered first menu that requires reading, this playful ebook lives up to its title, serving up vintage Strawberry Shortcake content in the form of an ebook, three games, and a coloring activity. Two screens at the end of the book discuss how the story relates to Common Core standards, in the unlikely event a teacher plans on incorporating the Strawberry Shortcake brand into his or her lesson plans.

In the 20 screen story, Strawberry Shortcake and her friends are practicing to impress a scout from Berry Big City for an upcoming talent show. The only problem is that you never get to hear their performance at the end. In addition, the looping guitar vamp is nice -- the first few dozen times. The bottom line? While there's nothing original in the design, Strawberry Shortcake fans will enjoy exploring the pages to find the hidden animations, and the games offer harmless fun, with some informal learning opportunities.

There are three three reading options - Read & Play, Read to Me, and Just a Book. Created by Cupcake Digital based on content from American Greetings.

Details: Cupcake Digital, Inc., www.cupcakedigital.com. Price: \$2.99. Ages: 4-7. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch. Teaches/Purpose: some reading, memory. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.9 stars. Entry date: 7/11/2013. [WB]

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





Teachley: Addimal Adventure

Designed specifically to help a young child conceptualize single digit addition (typically when aged 5 to 7 years), this app manages to pull off the nearly impossible -- making addition meaningful, by keeping things challenging (and interesting) while providing enough support so that children feel successful. For frosting, there's a zany group of pun-spouting cartoon characters, called "addimals."

Teachers of early elementary children should especially take note of this app. The app joins the ranks of Motion Math, started by Stanford graduates, by tapping into the the stream of pedagogical expertise coming out of Teachers College, Columbia University; the home of professor Herb Ginsberg. Innovative features include a real-time number line, where you choose answers by swiping left or right and lifting to enter; and an innovative reporting system that shows children how many problems they've solved, in the context of a base-ten grid. The better you do, the more gold cubes you see filled in. Wrong answers are clearly marked in a clear and nonjudgmental way, helping children see where they need practice.

Children will practice addition facts using visual models of addition strategies during the "tool around". The "speed round" is designed to encourage memorization and provides hints as needed. There is a progress monitoring chart that allows children and parents or teachers to keep track of performance over time.

There are some weaknesses. Our testers noted that children sometimes accidentally enter answers, and they wanted the ability to directly answer some of the problems they've memorized using an old fashioned number line, (the app forces you to first pick a strategy and then use the number line). Also, you don't always know how long a "speed" round is. It would be nice if there was some sort of countdown visualization aid.

All things considered, this is a welcome addition to any early math app library and it demonstrates how the iPad can be leveraged to help children conceptualize abstract concepts related to number.

Details: Teachley, LLC, www.teachley.com. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 5-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: beginning addition. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 6/26/2013. [WB]

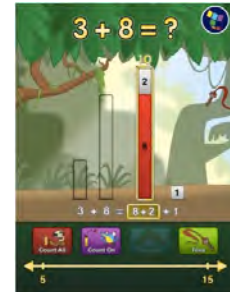
Toon Hero

A good idea and noble cause meets a complex interface and too many in-app sales, in this creativity experience designed to turn your iPad into an animated story maker. After you select a character and background, you place it on the screen and press "record." You can then move items on the screen to make a "toon" which can be rendered and shared on Facebook or in your photo gallery.

The free app gives you a starter set of characters and backgrounds, and it is possible to create multiple scenes. Additional content is available as an in-app purchase. Content has been licensed from Jim Henson's Doodles; National Geographic; Hero:108 and Mukpuddy.

Details: Trigger Happy, www.iamtriggerhappy.com. Price: \$free. Ages: 8-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, animation. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 2.8 stars. Entry date: 8/30/2013. [WB]

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



Ease of Use	5	56%
Educational	7	
Entertaining	5	
Design Features	5	
Good Value	6	



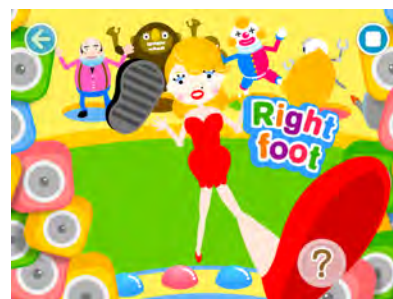


Touch 'n Sing - Touch and Sing Along Picture Book

One of the stranger apps we've reviewed, this musical experience mixes digital versions of songs like Hokey Pokey with a squad of animated dancers. As the music plays, you touch the dancers to see their moves. Our testers were not impressed -- not because of the music, but because it's hard to control the dancers. The first few songs are free, additional songs are available as in-app purchases for \$0.99 each, or you can purchase a "Super Value Pack" for \$4.99. Songs include: 10 Little Indians, The Muffin Man, Old MacDonald, Parade of the Wooden Soldiers, I've Been Working on the Railroad, Wheels on the Bus, Itsy Bitsy Spider, Farmer in the Dell, London Bridge, Turkey in the Straw and Under the Spreading Chestnut Tree.

Details: SumahoMAMA, <http://sumahomama.com/en/>. Price: \$free. Ages: 2-6. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (iOS 4.3 or later). Teaches/Purpose: music, singing. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 1.5 stars. Entry date: 7/16/2013. [WB]

Ease of Use	4	30%
Educational	2	
Entertaining	3	
Design Features	3	
Good Value	3	



Two Left Feet

Based on the book by Adam Stower (Bloomsbury Children's Books), this is an app/physical book/ebook combo. If you have a printed copy of the book (\$16) you can use your iOS device to bring it to life. The design resembles the Morris Lessmore book/app combo from last year.

There are three modes to the app; two of which use the augmented reality features. But if you don't have anything on traditional paper, you can choose the "ebook" mode, and flip through the narrated pages. There are no text scaffolding features.

The story is about Rufus, a young a monster who loves to dance even though he has two left feet. It deals with embracing and celebrating differences and finding friends. After you start the app (the same title as the book) you point your iPad or iPhone's device's camera at the cover or the pages of the physical book, and the characters and scenes jump to life. You can move you camera around to explore the animation from any angle.

The app will work with any existing edition of the book. In addition, users of the app without the book can print out a special canvas to create the same effect. The app also includes a 2D mode featuring the book's original illustrations combined with narration. Developed by Resin, an animation and visual effects company based in Australia. See <http://www.twoleftfeetapp.com>. The story, narration and illustrations are all of professional quality.

Need to know: the story is good and the visual effects have a very high novelty effect, but there's no actual interactivity. Other than taking a screen shot, this is a watch and listen type of experience with lots of frosting and not much cake.

Details: Resin, <http://www.resin.com.au/>. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 4-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (240 MB). Teaches/Purpose: reading. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 8/27/2013. [WB]

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





Write to Read - WriteReader

Designed especially to teach children to read by helping them to create their own books, this app is based on "scientific research that substantiates children benefit by learning to write whilst they learn to read."

After our review, we'd agree that this type of writing tool can be extremely helpful in helping a child learn to read, by simply giving them the basic tools to mix meaningful photos with words they write. For classroom use, this app could be useful. One innovative feature includes double text entry areas for each page -- one for the child and one for the adult, the latter with a smaller font. But there is no text-to-speech, and many of the features are already built into a standard iPad. The app's QWERTY keyboard incorporates the sounds of the letters, although there is no text-to-speech feature. The keyboard can show vowels and upper/lower case letters. A record-and-play function lets children play back an audio version of their story. Testers noted that it was not easy to find the "stop" button when they finished recording. They also wanted more visual tools, such as clip art or the ability to draw over a photo. The text boxes are useful. Children can print, email and post their books to social media directly from the app -- each of these features can be both good and bad. All in all, if used by an adult, this app could be a nice contribution to any classroom app collection. It was funded by the Agency for Research and Innovation in cooperation with The Danish School of Education.

Details: WriteReader, <http://writereader.com>. Price: \$6.99. Ages: 4-6. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: language, reading, writing, qwerty keyboard. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 5/6/2013. [MJD]

XO Learning Tablet

Featuring a distinctive green rubber bumper with a handy hanging ring, the long-awaited XO Learning Tablet (\$150, www.xo-learning.org) is a 7" Android tablet that comes pre-loaded with 173 apps and hundreds of open-source books (numbers as of September 2013) that vary in quality and content. The tablet has excellent content management options, for up to three children. Separate English and Spanish content is available, too.

The apps are organized both alphabetically or into 16 career categories (doctor, artist, scientist), each with a Wikipedia link to a famous person that represents the career. For teaching there's Maria Montessori, and for writing, for example, there are six apps and a link to William Shakespeare's bio. The apps are listed by age under the categories beginner, intermediate and advanced.

Like many lower cost Android tablets, there are limitations. The speakers are weak and the sound level is way too low even with headphones. In addition, the 7 inch screen is too small for some of the apps, which were designed for 10 inch screens. Battery life is good, but could be better, and the on/off and volume buttons are buried by a thick layer of silicone.

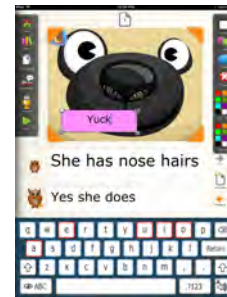
Some of the apps are nothing more than free teasers for the full version, or they are poorly designed. Genetics, for example, mixes educational content with advertising links to social media. Because there are a lot of apps, however, the chances a child will end up on something that is both fun and educational is increased. Who knows, they just might stumble into a book (over 100 open-source books are included). Given the cost (\$150) and compared to last year's batch of Android tablets, this one is competitive, especially given the number of pre-installed apps. The parent management features are easy to figure out, and it is possible to make profiles for individual children. In 2005, MIT Media Lab's Nicholas Negroponte attempted to bridge the divide between the digital haves and have-nots with a low-cost, child-centric computer, famously called the \$100 laptop. Eight year's later, this XO branded tablet is proof that Moore's law trumps idealism. You can see some of the people behind the tablet at <http://youtu.be/llvEyLBgT50> and <http://youtu.be/DdxPnJuYL1A>.

PROS: Excellent customization features for individual children and parent options. Good out of the box app selection, handy loop hanger on the bumper.

CONS: Weak volume and speakers, hard to find the buttons, and pre-installed Android apps are hit and miss, some with links to social settings or websites.

Details: Sakar International Inc., www.sakar.com. Price: \$150. Ages: 3-12. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: An Android tablet. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 2/10/2013. [WB]

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



Ease of Use	9	84%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	9	
Battery Life	7	





Future Releases & Updates

SEPTEMBER 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.

FIFA Soccer 14

Now you can play FIFA Soccer on just about any type of screen, including your iOS or Android phone. Features and prices vary greatly by platform, so make sure you read the specifics carefully. For example, if you have the Xbox One, the game will "feel alive" with players who think, move and behave like real players. EA makes a lot of promises with this new edition, including "human-like reactions, anticipation, and instincts." The Xbox One trailer can be viewed here: http://youtu.be/_AL1ZkIJ2zQ.

Content includes 22 players. FIFA 14 was developed at EA Canada. It will release on the same day as the Xbox One and the PlayStation 4.

Details: EA Sports - Electronic Arts Canada, www.eagames.com. Price: \$call. Ages: 8-up. Platform: PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Wii U, Wii, Xbox 360, Xbox One, Nintendo DS, Vita, iPad, iPhone, Android. Teaches/Purpose: sports, soccer. Entry date: 6/18/2013.



Flying RC Extreme Hero: Iron Man

RC (radio controlled) gliders come in many forms, so why not a super hero? The 19 inch Iron Man RC Extreme Hero is made from reinforced foam, and uses two tiny rear-facing propellers that have variable speeds, to allow for steering. The controller is 2.4 GHz, and it houses the six AA batteries (not included), which charge the tiny lithium polymer battery. EB Brands says "45 minutes of charge equal seven minutes of flight," which we did not test.

Details: EB Brands, www.ebbrands.com. Price: \$80. Ages: 8-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: a flying toy. Entry date: 6/20/2013.

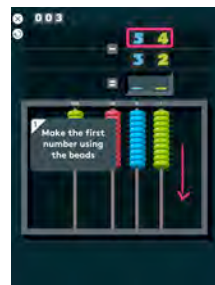


Montessori Math: Add & Subtract Large Numbers

This Montessori inspired app is designed to present a step-by-step approach to the operations of addition and subtraction.

Features include a "Dynamic Progression Algorithm" to follow each child's progress. There are four challenge levels that use color-coded place values to allow children to identify thousands, hundreds, tens and ones. Content includes three activities: the stamp game, the bead frame and the magic slate; three games to practice - Missing Digits, Wiz Quiz and Bubble Game; a number range from 0 to 9,999; a "Monster lab" for added fun and motivation; and 12 languages - English, French, German, Italian, Dutch, Spanish, Swedish, Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese, Russian and Korean. There are no in-app purchases, advertising, links to social networks or personal data requests.

Details: Les Trois Elles Interactive, <http://lestroiselles.com/en>. Price: \$4.99. Ages: 6-9. Platform: iPad, iPhone, iPod Touch (iOS 4.3 or later). Teaches/Purpose: math, addition, subtract, multiplication. Entry date: 7/23/2013.



NCAA Football 14

EA Sports has become famous for creating realistic sport simulations -- right down to the sportscasters; and with them, interesting names for their programming tools. In this 2014 edition of NCAA Football, for example, you can use the "Infinity Engine 2" with "real-time physics and the new force impact system."

As a result, this year's edition promises to have "more realistic and dynamic reactions" and easier faking, running and throwing. This edition was created in Orlando, Florida by EA Tiburon. Updates at <http://www.easports.com/ncaa-football>.

Details: EA Sports - Electronic Arts Canada, www.eagames.com. Price: \$call. Ages: 11-up. Platform: iPad, iPhone, Android, Nintendo DS, Vita, PlayStation 3, PlayStation 4, Wii, Wii U, Xbox 360, Xbox One. Teaches/Purpose: sports, NCAA football. Entry date: 6/18/2013.





Read With Me Scout

Mixing plush toys with electronics, Read With Me Scout and Read With Me Violet are plush toys that can tell stories, sing songs and read along with books. To start, you press a color-coded button on the puppy's collar to choose one of the books. To turn a page, you pat the puppies head. A "Sleepy Time Mode" activates relaxing stories and eight minutes of lullabies, read in reduced volume.

This mode also deactivates the sensors, in case the child rolls over on the toy. Each of the five books includes vocabulary terms from colors to animal names.

Scout reads the story along with you, and then asks you a comprehension question. You answer using one of Scout's sensors. Content includes 75 questions.

Details: Leapfrog, www.leapfrog.com. Price: \$35. Ages: 2-5. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: reading, comprehension. Entry date: 7/3/2013.



Sparkup Reader

The Sparkup Reader (\$60, www.sparkupreader.com) is an audio book recorder/reader that has the ability to match each page with an audio recording by way of a special camera. Powered by 3 AA batteries, the device clips onto the back cover of a picture book.

As you read, a tiny camera scans each page of the book, pressing a button when you want to start and stop. The device manages this process fairly well; we were able to successfully record a book the first time, with little trouble. When your child wants to hear your voice, he or she can simply clip Sparkup to any book you've recorded. The camera identifies the book and plays any sounds or narration associated with that page. The device can store up to 250 minutes of audio, or approximately 50 books.

Simply press the center button and Sparkup automatically syncs to the selected book and begins reading it aloud as the child follows along. A camera scans every page and pastes the voice clip to that page. When the child turns the pages, even out of order, the Sparkup "knows" what page it's on and plays back the voice. Sparkup comes complete with a hardcover preloaded demo book, instruction manual, one USB cable, and three AA batteries.

Details: Sparkup Ltd., www.sparkupreader.com. Price: \$60. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Smart Toy. Teaches/Purpose: reading, language experience. Entry date: 4/7/2013.





tabeo e2

Coming in October 2013 to your Toys R Us store, the second edition of the tabeo e2 (spelled all lower case, as "tabeo e2," \$150, www.tabeo.com) with a faster processor, twice the internal memory, HDMI out, and a larger clearer 8 inch screen. Last year's tabeo did not compare well to the other Android tablets, when comparing such things as screen quality and app selection. Toys R Us clearly wants (and needs) to be a player in the digital content business, using this better tablet as the Trojan Horse -- a way to get an app/music/book/movie store into your child's playroom. There is no mention of compatibility to Google Play or other mainstream app stores. In addition to the Android-based tablet, TRU is releasing a line of new tabeo-branded peripherals (a karaoke machine, headphones and bluetooth speakers). Features include:

- Bluetooth and Wi-Fi plus a dual-core 1.0 GHz processor, based around Android Jelly Bean 4.2

- Two cameras, front and back
- Microphone and stereo speakers
- Accelerometers for motion sensing
- Rechargeable batteries ("5 hours")
- Three colors (blue, pink or silver)
- Larger screen (8 inches vs. 7 inches)
- High-impact screen protection.
- Available exclusively at Toys"R"Us stores nationwide and online at tabeo.com

beginning in October for \$149.99.

- Micro USB cable and one specially designed charging pin to charge from a computer or wall outlet.
- 8GB of onboard storage (2x more than last year), expandable to 64GB through a micro SDHC slot.
- Mini HDMI port, for watching movies on a TV. This requires a special HDMI cable.
- "Improved parental controls" to manage apps, set time and date limits for specific app use and filter up to 27 content categories.
- Installed apps include Need for Speed Most Wanted, Bejeweled 2, The Game of Life, Temple Run 2 and Fruit Ninja, Little Pim and interactive books from iStoryBooks, Operation Math and Crayola DigiTools Effects, Cartoon Network, WWE, Paper Camera, My Little Pony and Kidobi. In addition, A Toys"R"Us App Guide for Differently-Abled Kids includes 25 free apps have been selected with the help of Wynsum Arts (www.wynsumarts.com). These include Swapsies – Occupations, PicSay – Photo Editor, Learning Letters for Kids and Cookie Dunk Jump.

Accessories include headphones, an iHome docking station, various cases, a car adapter, an adjustable headset and The Singing Machine, an app that provides access to parent-approved songs and lyrics that comes bundled with a wired microphone, two microphone jacks and speakers, echo and balance control and Bluetooth streaming.

Details: Toys R Us, www.toysrus.com. Price: \$150. Ages: 3-up. Platform: Android. Teaches/Purpose: an Android tablet. Entry date: 9/9/2013.



Writing Wizard

Designed to help children learn how to trace, this app is fully customizable to your child's needs and lets you check their progress through a system of reports and profiles. Children can trace using 26 animated stickers and sound effects, and once tracing is complete they can interact with them on four games that animate letters. They can also trace any word, such as their name, as the app is customizable. Children can also collect stars in 5-Stars play mode. Other features include: detailed reports to provide information on what kids have done, including the ability to replay and export tracings; ability to create your own word lists (and record audio for each word); multiple parameters to customize the app according to the child's current education level (e.g. letter size, difficulty, show/hide model, ...); three most popular fonts (ZB, DN, HWT); and unlimited profiles. There are no in-app purchases, and the app does not collect any user information.

Details: L'Escapadou, <http://lescapadou.com>. Price: \$0.99. Ages: 3-up. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: tracing, writing, fine motor skills. Entry date: 8/8/2013.

